

The GFC School

Mems Prestfield Stadium, Redfern Avenue, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4DD

Inspection dates

16–18 January 2018

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not improved the overall quality of education since the last inspection. The school has seen significant turbulence with staffing and governance in recent months.
- Teaching is inconsistent. Planned learning does not build well enough on what pupils know and can already do. As a result, work can sometimes be too easy, and at other times too difficult.
- Staff do not have all the knowledge and skills they need to teach English effectively. As a result, key stage 3 pupils who are working significantly below age-related expectations do not make good progress in their reading and writing.
- Pupils' progress is variable across a wide range of subjects. Older pupils do not make enough progress in mathematics.
- Staff do not record their use of restraint clearly enough. They do not follow the school's agreed procedure.
- New leaders have worked quickly to identify what is not working well. However, they have not yet had the time to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- Staff are not consistent in their approach to pupils who use inappropriate language.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have a clear understanding of what their school does well and which aspects need to improve.
- Pupils' behaviour and attitudes to learning are good. The school has a significant positive impact on pupils' personal and social skills.
- Staff, including those who are very new, are well trained to safeguard pupils. They listen carefully to what pupils tell them and pass this information on swiftly to the appropriate authority.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school. This includes those who have been unhappy or excluded in the past. Parents and carers recognise the difference the school makes to their children's behaviour.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare by ensuring that staff are consistent in:
 - their challenge to pupils who use inappropriate language
 - how they follow the school's policy for recording their restraint of pupils.
- Improve pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - staff have sufficient knowledge to teach phonics, reading and writing to pupils who are working significantly below age-related expectations
 - staff provide greater opportunities for pupils to develop their mathematical problem-solving and reasoning skills
 - staff think more carefully about pupils' levels of literacy in subjects other than English, to ensure that work is not too simple for them or too challenging
 - subject leaders have a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not improved either the quality of teaching or pupils' academic progress since the last inspection. Consequently, the overall quality of education has not improved. The vast majority of the staff joined the school in September 2017, with several starting this month.
- Staff are not well trained to support pupils who are working significantly below age-related expectations in reading and writing. Staff do not have sufficient subject knowledge to teach phonics.
- New subject leaders have wasted no time in understanding what is not working well enough. For example, the new curriculum leader knows that staff do not take sufficient account of pupils' levels of literacy when planning activities in subjects other than English. However, they have not yet had the time to influence and improve teaching and learning across the school.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. New leaders have made swift changes to schemes of work to ensure that the planned learning is related to the examination boards that the school uses. Significant turbulence in staffing has had an impact on the teaching of some subjects in the autumn term. As a result, pupils have not made the progress they could have made in subjects such as art, religious education and geography.
- Senior leaders know what is working well in the school and what is not. Weaknesses identified during this inspection were already the focus of leaders' improvement planning. Over time, underperforming staff have been identified through leaders' rigorous quality assurance processes.
- Staff enjoy working at the school. New staff are well inducted. Staff feel well supported by the senior leadership team.
- Parents value the work of the school. They see significant differences in their children's attitudes towards education. Parents are delighted that pupils now want to come to school, arrive on time and talk about their learning when they get home.
- Pupils are provided with a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They talk positively about the trips that have developed their social skills, such as teamwork. The school has a clear and lasting impact on pupils' personal and social development.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.

Governance

- The chairman of Gillingham Football Club is now the sole proprietor. Governance arrangements have only been in place a few weeks. He is passionate about what the school could aspire to be, but is also clear about its current strengths and weaknesses. The proprietor uses his time in the school to ask leaders appropriately challenging questions about the quality of education that is provided.
- Relationships between school leaders and those historically responsible for governance became acrimonious in the past and have been a significant barrier to school

improvement.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has a safeguarding policy that takes account of the latest government requirements. The school does not have a website. Leaders ensure that all policies, including those relating to safeguarding, are available.
- The GFC School provides education to highly vulnerable pupils. Leaders have created a culture where all staff listen very carefully to what pupils tell them. Staff, including those who are very new, make swift and detailed referrals to leaders, who work effectively with other agencies, including the police and social care. Referrals to designated officers who work for the local authority, the disclosure and barring service, and those made in accordance with the 'Prevent' duty are timely and thorough.
- Staff and parents feel that pupils are safe. Pupils told the inspector they feel safe. They value the input of visitors who come into school to give them important messages about how to keep themselves safe beyond the school gates.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching has been inconsistent over time. Leaders' information about pupils' progress is not as helpful as it should be. Staff historically have not always followed agreed assessment procedures.
- Mathematics teaching and learning is too variable. Older pupils do not get enough opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills or to articulate their reasoning.
- The quality of English teaching and learning is inconsistent. Key stage 4 pupils make good progress. Planned learning builds on what pupils know and can do. Staff use questioning effectively to check that pupils understand key concepts and vocabulary. Staff also challenge pupils to expand on their answers and deepen their thinking.
- Younger pupils, including those who are working significantly below age-related expectations in English, are not well taught. Staff do not have sufficient subject knowledge to teach pupils the basic reading and writing knowledge and skills they need. The school does not have a systematic way to teach phonics, and reading books are not well matched to pupils' phonetic understanding.
- Planned learning in subjects other than English does not take account of pupils' wide-ranging levels of literacy. As a result, pupils can be given tasks that are either too easy or too difficult for them. Staff do not recognise when the concepts that are being taught are too complex and not readily accessible to pupils.
- Staff over time have been inconsistent in their expectations of what pupils can achieve. For example, last year key stage 4 pupils were not working at an appropriate standard in science. New leaders are systematically raising the level of challenge. The new science leader has already made significant changes to assessment systems and schemes of work. It is too early to see the impact of these improvements.
- Over time, teaching assistants have not been used as effectively as they could be. The new curriculum leader has already identified that adults have not always got the balance

right between helping pupils and simply doing the work for them. The new staff teams work well together. Tutors are clear about the role they would like teaching assistants to play in supporting pupils' learning.

- Relationships in the classrooms are exceptional. Staff are calm, respectful and warm towards pupils. Pupils recognise this and talk of 'mutual' respect.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are proud of their achievements. They recognise the impact the school has had on their behaviour and their desire to learn. Pupils value the new uniform and the heightened sense of identity they now feel with Gillingham FC.
- Some pupils are currently receiving outreach tutoring at home, rather than on the school site. The school communicates effectively with the local authorities who place pupils, and parents or carers. Admissions and attendance registers are well managed. Leaders assess risk well, including the risk posed to staff and other pupils by those pupils who are not yet able to fully integrate into school life. The school's outreach work is highly effective. As a result, over time, pupils return to school and their behaviour improves.
- Pupils, including those who have not thrived in their previous schools, feel happy and safe in school.
- Significant incidents of unwanted or unsafe behaviour are recorded well. The school has a clear and appropriate restraint policy. Only staff who are trained use restraint. However, staff do not follow the school's agreed procedure for recording their use of restraint.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in lessons. They are mostly ready and willing to listen and learn. When pupils become unsettled, staff manage their recovery well.
- GFC School is a largely purposeful place to learn. Pupils make great progress in their ability to manage their own behaviours. Pupils move around this small school with minimum fuss. No time is lost between lessons.
- Break and lunchtimes are calm. Staff and pupils relax in each other's company. Pupils are largely polite and engaging.
- The new staff team is not yet consistent in the way it challenges unwanted and poor language. Some staff instantly respond to inappropriate language and are clear that it is not acceptable at breaktimes or in lessons. Other staff are less clear about what is and is not okay for pupils to say.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Pupils make inconsistent progress, both across the school and across all subjects.
- Key stage 4 pupils make good progress in English. Key stage 3 pupils, including those who are working significantly below age-related expectations, do not. Pupils who do not have the required phonics knowledge to read or write with accuracy and confidence make limited progress.
- Conversely, key stage 3 pupils make good progress in mathematics, while key stage 4 pupils do not. Pupils who left the school in July 2017 did not make the progress they should have done. Leaders recognise that pupils were not well equipped to answer mathematical problems or exemplify their reasoning.
- Over time, pupils have not made good progress in science, particularly key stage 4 pupils.
- Pupils do not make the progress they could in religious education, art and geography. Staff absence has meant that pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding have not been developed well enough over time.
- Pupils make exceptional progress in their personal and social development. Consequently, they are ready to make better academic progress than they do currently.

School details

Unique reference number	142568
DfE registration number	887/6010
Inspection number	10044261

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	28
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Paul Scally
Chair	None
Headteacher	Lisa Scott
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,000–£26,910
Telephone number	01634 623420
Website	The school does not have a website.
Email address	gfcctschoo@priestfield.com
Date of previous inspection	9–11 November 2016

Information about this school

- GFC School was previously known as the Gillingham FC Community Trust School.
- The school has had a turbulent six months. Previous governance arrangements through the Gillingham Football Club Community Trust led to the future of the school being in question. Almost all staff left the school in the summer due to uncertainty about their jobs. As a result, most staff joined the school at the beginning of this academic year, and several started in January 2018. All subject leaders are new to the school or new to their roles.
- The school is currently registered for 30 pupils. Most join the school after a disrupted

education. Pupils have either been excluded or were at risk of exclusion. The vast majority of pupils have an education, health and care plan related to social, emotional or mental health difficulties. All pupils are placed and funded by local authorities.

- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school offers outreach tutor support for other schools.
- The school was previously inspected in November 2016 when the overall effectiveness of the school was judged to require improvement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school, often accompanied by a school leader.
- The inspector evaluated work in pupils' books with leaders and examined leaders' assessment information.
- Meetings were held with leaders and the proprietor.
- Staff views were considered during a meeting with staff.
- Pupils' views were gathered from a wide range of conversations over the course of three days.
- Parents' views were considered through two responses to the Parent View online survey, parents' free-text comments and two meetings with parents.
- A range of documents was evaluated, including improvement plans, curriculum documents, information regarding pupils' progress, and complaints logs.
- Documents and processes relating to safeguarding were checked, including the single central record, case study files and risk assessments.
- All the independent school standards were checked during this inspection.

Inspection team

Mark Cole, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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