

Inspection of Wemms Education Centre

W Block Therfield School, Dilston Road, Leatherhead, Surrey KT22 7NZ

Inspection dates: 25–27 February 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
------------------------------	-------------

The quality of education	Good
--------------------------	-------------

Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
-------------------------	--------------------

Personal development	Outstanding
----------------------	--------------------

Leadership and management	Good
---------------------------	-------------

Sixth-form provision	Good
----------------------	-------------

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
----------------------------------------------	------

Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
--------------------------------------------------------	------------

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school that believes in its pupils and encourages them to believe in themselves. Developing pupils personally, emotionally and socially is a priority. Pupils' mental health is highly valued. This aspirational school sees this vital work as all part of ensuring that pupils thrive and succeed academically.

Many pupils arrive with negative prior experiences of school. They benefit from a school that truly understands and supports them but, as one parent put it, does 'not wrap them in cotton wool'. Instead, as part of their learning, pupils can enjoy regular educational visits abroad, for example, as well as activities including horse riding, hiking, theatre and museum trips.

Pupils' focus and commitment to their work is remarkable. The studious but friendly atmosphere, and patient, personalised teaching support their learning well.

Pupils that have often been bullied in their previous schools usually experience a much happier time here, where any intolerance is successfully challenged. Bullying is rare and tackled firmly should it happen. Pupils select their own trusted adults as their mentors but know that there is always somebody available to help, guide and support them.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The principal has a strong, deeply held vision which she inspires others to follow. The school's aim is to get pupils who have usually experienced significant disruption to their schooling 'back in the frame'.

Securing academic qualifications is a priority, but not exclusively. Leaders know that often pupils' social, emotional and mental health needs hold them back the most. Helping pupils overcome or manage and cope with these difficulties is therefore critical to helping them excel academically.

The focus is firmly on preparing pupils for their futures, giving them both the skills and sense of purpose to lead a fulfilling adult life. As the principal says, she wants pupils to leave as 'contributors to society, not passengers'. This school is highly effective at re-engaging pupils that have previously given up, often transforming their attitudes to learning and school.

The development of pupils' character, particularly those who have previously had little or no self-esteem, is exemplary. The school does much to develop pupils' social skills, resilience and sense of self-worth. Pupils are supported extremely well, not only to tolerate or respect difference, but to embrace it too. This is a central part of the ethos set by the school.

Leaders and staff have high aspirations but sensitively managed expectations. Pupils gain a wide range of GCSEs, with strong passes, that for many at points in their

school careers would have seemed completely unobtainable. Others progress to study A levels, again achieving high grades. As the school expands and the needs of some pupils change, leaders are taking steps to extend the range of qualifications they can offer post-16.

Strong leadership of provision for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) has understandably earned the confidence of the vast majority of parents. There is a close partnership between the special educational needs coordinator (SENCo) team, and subject leaders and teachers (faculties). This partnership helps to ensure that provision for pupils takes account of both their education, health and care (EHC) plans and pupils' progress against the curriculum.

Teachers take time to revisit and repeat important learning, checking carefully that pupils understand and retain important material. The flexibility of the school's chosen 'faculty' rather than 'key-stage' approach ensures that pupils have longer time, if needed, to complete their courses successfully.

Teachers have strong subject knowledge and a good grasp of the subjects they teach. They use this to ask effective questions to help pupils interpret and deepen their understanding. Teaching and learning time is focused, calm and purposeful. Relationships and interactions between adults and pupils are highly respectful.

The value of reading has a high profile. Leaders and teachers choose carefully a rich range of texts to introduce to and enjoy with pupils. They are successful in encouraging fluency and confidence, but also enjoyment in reading. Staff are not consistently as adept as they should be in using phonics to support the very few pupils who are still learning to read.

The school's promotion of pupils' personal development is exceptional. Many pupils who would previously have been directly or indirectly excluded from many activities have some exceptional possibilities opened up to them. Careful planning means that numerous international visits, already incredibly valuable in their own right, are an integral part of learning, for example, in history or modern foreign languages.

Leaders at all levels rightly kept reminding us that due to the recent premises move and significant expansion, this is 'like a new school'. As the faculties and teams have expanded, some aspects of the curriculum have been refined over a longer period than others. In a very few subjects that do not lead to an examination, the content is enriching but less coherently sequenced and precise in terms of building pupils' knowledge and skills.

The principal, who is also the school's sole proprietor, has further intensified steps to strengthen the leadership capacity in the school. She has assembled a passionate and determined group of senior leaders. There is a strong sense of mutual respect, professional debate and challenge.

Leaders know there is more to do to fully establish and embed recently introduced systems to support the successful and safe running of the school. At the point of this

inspection, all independent school standards were met, but this has not continuously been the case since the previous inspection.

The advisory board is at an early stage. However, advisory board members have undertaken a range of meaningful and supportive activities.

The school's accessibility plan has very recently been updated and is being used to take action to make a positive difference.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is no doubting the importance this school attaches to safeguarding its pupils. Since the emergency inspection, leaders have taken effective steps to strengthen systems that support this vital aspect of the school's work.

Extensive training has helped staff, leaders and advisory board members be vigilant, confident and knowledgeable in identifying and responding to concerns. A new online system for keeping records is already being put to good use. The principal is rightly keen to ensure that it is used to its maximum potential. Leaders are putting extensive staff training in risk assessment to good use in sharpening processes and records.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Although it does now, since the previous inspection the school has not continuously met the independent school standards. As the school has expanded, the principal has wisely taken steps to build leadership capacity. Leaders are taking effective action to introduce and develop systems across different aspects of the school's work. They should continue these endeavours to support the school's ongoing improvement and ensure no future lapses in satisfying statutory requirements.
- Staff expertise in phonics is not sufficiently secure. Leaders should ensure that all relevant staff are well trained in this aspect of reading so that pupils who join the school having fallen behind learning to read are given every chance to catch up as quickly as possible.
- Within a positive overall picture, linked with the rapid expansion since the previous inspection, the development of some aspects of the school's curriculum are more advanced than others. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum content in subjects that do not culminate in an exam is coherently sequenced to further develop pupils' knowledge and skills.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	142416
DfE registration number	936/6006
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10103885
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 20
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	11
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	Joy Wemms
Headteacher	Joy Wemms
Annual fees (day pupils)	£38,000 to £42,000
Telephone number	01372 276499
Website	None
Email address	joy@wemms.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–10 May 2017

Information about this school

- The last full standard inspection of this school was carried out 9–11 May 2017.
- Since that time, the school has expanded and moved premises. A material change inspection, required to change the details of the school's registration, took place on 11 September 2018. That inspection found unmet standards. The material change had already been implemented.
- A subsequent progress monitoring inspection, 9 May 2019, found that the previously unmet standards were all met at that time.
- Following that inspection, the Department for Education (DfE) commissioned an emergency inspection because of concerns about safeguarding and the quality of leadership and management at the school. That inspection took place on 23 October 2019. It found that some of the independent school standards were unmet.
- The Secretary of State issued the school with a statutory notice on 18 November 2019, requiring an action plan detailing the steps that would be taken to meet all of the standards. The action plan was evaluated by Ofsted on 21 January 2020 and subsequently accepted by the DfE.
- Wemms Education Centre offers education to pupils who have been unable to cope in mainstream education. Pupils typically have social, emotional and mental health needs. Almost all have an EHC plan.
- The school has expanded considerably since the previous standard inspection.
- The previous governing body disbanded in 2018. The proprietor is in the process of establishing an advisory board. This already has three active members, and more are set to join.
- As the school has expanded, the school has established and expanded a faculty structure and a large senior management team.

Information about this inspection

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

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- We met with the principal, who is also the school's proprietor, other leaders and staff. During our visit, we spoke informally with staff and pupils. We also met groups of pupils and listened to some read to a familiar adult. We met with a member of the advisory board.

- To understand the quality of education provided by the school, we looked in detail at certain subjects (deep dives). We did deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, PSHE and art. To explore each subject, we spoke with leaders, teachers and pupils, and examined curriculum plans for the subject. We also looked at pupils' work and other available evidence of their learning and progress. We visited lessons in or related to the subjects being taught during the inspection.
- We took account of the views expressed in 24 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey, and 30 confidential questionnaires returned by staff. We also read numerous emails and letters sent to the inspection team from parents, a former pupil and others associated with or connected to the school.
- We scrutinised the school's arrangements for safeguarding, including documentation and electronic records. We checked the single central record which summarises checks of the suitability of adults.
- Throughout the inspection, we gathered evidence regarding the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Clive Dunn, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Sue Bzikot

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020