

Inspection of Wishmore Cross Academy

Alpha Road, Chobham, Woking, Surrey GU24 8NE

Inspection dates: 4 and 5 May 2022

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
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The quality of education	Requires improvement
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Requires improvement
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Leadership and management	Good
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Previous inspection grade	Requires improvement
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What is it like to attend this school?

Wishmore Cross Academy offers a haven to boys with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Consistent routines exist for each part of the school day and pupils appreciate the resulting calm, safe atmosphere. The physical environment is inviting. Classrooms and corridors are clean, tidy and well presented. Outside there is extensive space in which many pupils enjoy playing football, basketball or relaxing with peers.

Expectation and ambition for pupils' future success is shared by all members of the school community. Pupils know and trust that adults are expert in supporting them to manage and regulate their own emotions. As a result, serious transgressions of behaviour are rare, and learning is not interrupted. 'First attention to best behaviour' translates into consistent use of merits, lesson by lesson as pupils demonstrate that they are 'ready, respectful and safe'.

In some subjects, pupils participate with interest and accumulate new knowledge well. However, in others, including reading, lessons do not provide the pupils with the best help or chance to learn. Discussions in tutor time and activities such as fundraising and taking part in football tournaments provide some opportunities to develop confidence and character. However, overall, there are too few planned opportunities for pupils to broaden their experiences and to be prepared well for their futures.

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

Following significant changes, leadership and staffing at Wishmore Cross Academy has stabilised. The executive principal and head of school are providing compassionate, energetic and effective leadership. Aply supported by the senior leadership team, they have set about improving the school.

Leaders have considered the order of improvement activity, starting with behaviour and attendance. As the head of school can be heard to say: 'Sweat the small stuff, because the small stuff becomes the big stuff.' This means that pupils are expected to attend school and wear the sporty style uniform that they helped to design. It means that, without question, mobile phones are handed in at the beginning of each day and that pupils comply with other security checks, understanding that this is for everyone's safety. Leaders know that improved behaviour and attendance will lead to improved learning. Reduced numbers of serious behaviour incidents, reduced use of alternative provision places and successful participation in community events are indicators of the success of this work. Attendance has improved, but there are still too many pupils who do not attend well enough.

Leaders are continuing to develop the curriculum. A number of subjects have been carefully thought about, with important knowledge and skills identified and planned for. These subjects, such as science, citizenship and mathematics, are taught by staff with good subject knowledge and the capacity to enable pupils to learn securely.

Some subjects, including religious education, computing and the vocational offer are either missing from the curriculum or are insufficiently planned and inconsistently implemented. Arrangements for teaching reading to those who are behind are not good enough. Although teachers have undergone training, not enough time or thought has been given to teaching reading across the school. For example, younger pupils are not given the necessary opportunities to read books matched to the sounds they know. More work is required to develop and promote a culture of reading.

All pupils have gaps in their learning due to disrupted patterns of education. Teachers are adept at assessing pupils' knowledge and adjusting learning activities in response. The four-part lesson: connect, demonstrate, activate, consolidate ensures that links are made to previous learning and that time is given to practising and recalling knowledge and skill.

Arrangements for spiritual, moral, social and cultural education and opportunities for pupils' wider personal development and careers are not sufficiently defined or planned. Weekly 'enrichment' opportunities go some way to mitigating against the lack of wider experiences. A recently established working party is considering the experiences that all pupils should have during their time at Wishmore Cross. This is planned to include trips that align with the curriculum, and other events, such as a boat ride along the Thames, to broaden and enrich pupils' life experiences.

Teachers and support staff work in harmony to ensure that lessons focus on the subject and intended learning. Support staff guide pupils back on track when they become distracted or dysregulated, or support them, without fuss, if they need to exit the classroom. The work of support staff, in classrooms and beyond, is impressive and heart-warming. Extensive help is given to individuals and families to ensure needs are identified and met and that pupils can engage with education.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A deep culture for safeguarding permeates the school. Extensive support is provided to families, as well as to pupils. Leaders and staff work proactively with external agencies to secure effective, timely help where required.

All staff have received a package of training including awareness of self-harm, and some staff are trained in suicide awareness. Staff are acutely aware that all pupils on roll are highly vulnerable and that many have experienced trauma. Staff are alert to changes in pupils' behaviour or patterns of attendance that might signal concern.

Staff use the school's online safeguarding system to record any concerns. Written records capture a full picture of each pupil. Records of meetings are detailed, helpful and stored safely.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The school's reading curriculum is not sufficiently rigorous or coherent. Pupils who do not know the alphabetic code, or who are not reading fluently, do not get the support they need to catch up and learn to read. This hinders their ability to learn across the curriculum and their life chances. Leaders need to ensure that every pupil who struggles to read gets precisely the right support from a well-trained adult. This must include having sufficient opportunities to practise reading well-matched phonetically decodable books. More widely, leaders need to continue their work to develop the culture of reading in the school. They must ensure that pupils of all ages have access to a broad range of enriching texts and that adults read frequently to pupils and talk to them about books, so that pupils can develop their own reading preferences.
- In some subjects, the intended curriculum is not being implemented consistently well or as leaders intend. In these subjects, pupils do not make good progress from their starting points. Other subjects, including religious education and computing, are not yet a part of the school's curriculum offer. Leaders need to continue their work to develop the school's curriculum, ensuring that the curriculum offer is broadened and that the intended curriculum is implemented effectively in all lessons.
- The school's personal development programme has not been cohesively developed. Pupils do not currently experience a broad enough curriculum, or careers guidance to prepare them well for their future lives. Leaders need to build on their early work to ensure that the personal development programme is clearly defined, so that pupils have opportunities to build confidence, resilience, and skills beyond the school's subject curriculum.
- Too many pupils do not attend school well enough. Leaders know that the pandemic has exacerbated rates of absence in a range of ways. For example, the pandemic has reduced place sufficiency in the local area. Leaders have worked hard to address persistent absence, and in number of cases have brought about real improvement in pupils' attendance. Leaders have not analysed carefully enough why some pupils' attendance is not improving. Leaders need to ensure that they maintain clear focus on those pupils whose attendance is not improving, working with external agencies, where appropriate, to address this.

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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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 school and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	138766
Local authority	Surrey
Inspection number	10227468
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	84
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	David Hall
Head of school	Ricardo Hylton (Executive Principal: Gareth Howells)
Website	www.wishmorecrossacademy.org
Date of previous inspection	26 – 27 September 2018, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Wishmore Cross Academy caters for 84 pupils aged from nine to 16 who have social, emotional and mental health difficulties. All have education, health and care plans.
- The school is part of the Academies Enterprise Trust (AET). A board of trustees is responsible for governance. A local governing board is in place, comprising a chair of governors, appointed but not employed by AET, peer principals from other AET academies and the specialist director of special educational needs and/or disabilities for the trust.
- The executive principal took up his post in September 2020.
- The head of school took up his post in January 2022.
- The school does not meet the requirements of the Baker Clause, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school uses the following alternative providers: Change of Scene, Road2Success, Therapy Garden, Merrist Wood College, Fiona’s Therapy Farm, Classroom Teachers, Brooklands and Haybrook College.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held a wide range of meetings with the executive headteacher, the head of school, other senior and curriculum leaders, the special educational needs coordinator and teaching and support staff. The lead inspector met with the director of learning for the trust as well as the trust's director for special schools and the chair of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, science, citizenship, and personal, social and health education. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking to leaders, teachers and pupils. The team inspector heard pupils read to a known adult.
- Inspectors checked a range of policies and documents, including the school's single central record. They also reviewed the school's website and other records, particularly regarding the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff.
- Inspectors gathered evidence to explore the school's wider curriculum offer, the impact of pupils' behaviour and attendance on learning, and how leaders are driving improvement and supporting staff with their workload.
- Pupils were talked to throughout the inspection to gain their views about the school. A meeting was held with a representative group of pupils. Inspectors also talked to staff individually and in a group.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents submitted through Ofsted's parent survey. The views of staff were also considered through Ofsted's staff surveys.

Inspection team

Hilary Macdonald, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Alice Roberts

Her Majesty's Inspector

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