

Inspection of Pierview Academy

42–44 Harmer Street, Gravesend, Kent DA12 2AX

Inspection dates: 12 to 14 July 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

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

What is it like to attend this school?

The school provides high-quality education and care for its pupils, who thrive as a result. Adults establish strong relationships with pupils and get to know them well. This means that pupils feel comfortable talking to a member of staff if they have any worries. They understand that adults want the best for them and they enjoy experiencing increasing success.

The school's broad curriculum enables pupils to discover and develop interests. Subjects such as English, mathematics and science are supplemented by courses in textiles, art and other subjects. Examination and vocational courses help to prepare pupils for future education or employment. The post-16 curriculum is designed to support each pupil's particular needs and circumstances.

Pupils talked to inspectors maturely about the difference Pierview has made to their learning and well-being. They feel that staff understand them, listen to them and help them when they are finding school hard. One said, 'When I first started in this school, I couldn't read or write. This school has helped with everything and, for that, I'm very thankful.' Pupils make friends quickly when they join the school. They get on well with each other most of the time. Leaders investigate any concerns about bullying thoroughly.

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

The headteacher has secured important improvements in the school's work since the previous inspection. She has raised expectations of staff and pupils, established a good-quality curriculum, and has made sure that staff are suitably trained. The headteacher is supported by a committed team of leaders. They are clear about strengths in the school and areas for development in different subjects, although these are not always reflected in the school's development plan.

Leaders have extended the breadth and depth of the curriculum since the previous inspection. Pupils learn a wide range of subjects. The older pupils study for national qualifications, including Functional Skills and GCSEs. The school uses alternative providers to supplement the post-16 curriculum with courses in subjects such as animal management and construction.

The school aims to bring learning to life by teaching through practical, real-life scenarios wherever possible. During the inspection, for example, one pupil used his knowledge of data, statistics and averages to prepare a budget for a theme park design. The school's carefully sequenced science curriculum builds pupils' scientific knowledge well. However, there are fewer opportunities for pupils to work practically in this subject.

Leaders prioritise the teaching of reading. Assessments are used to check pupils' reading skills when they join the school. Pupils often have weaknesses in reading which make it difficult for them to access the curriculum. All pupils are given a

reading target to support their progress. A well-sequenced reading programme, with phonics teaching at its core, ensures that pupils learn to read with increasing success. Some have made significant progress. This helps to build their confidence and personal development, as well as contributing to their academic progress. Leaders are keen to encourage pupils' enjoyment of books. For instance, books have been carefully selected for the school library to appeal to pupils' interests and abilities, and pupils are able to select books. However, leaders rightly recognise that the school could do more to promote reading for pleasure.

The school provides skilful support for pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders complete thorough reviews of pupils' needs and experience on entry to the school. They use these to create detailed individual education plans for each pupil. Key workers speak with parents regularly to discuss their child's ongoing progress in school and at home. One parent described communication with the school as 'second to none'. Leaders have extended support for pupils with SEND during the past few years. They have used training to improve staff understanding of pupils' special needs and have increased access to specialist help, such as occupational therapy. Parents are very happy with the quality of support for their children. One said, 'The school continues to show my child the guidance, support and kindness he needs.'

The school's curriculum prioritises pupils' personal development. Pupils learn a range of topics, such as personal safety, money management and the dangers of substance abuse. The school uses its static caravan to provide opportunities for the older pupils to develop life skills, such as how to make a shopping list, prepare a meal, or change bed linen. All pupils take turns to work in the school's kitchen, helping to prepare lunch for everyone. Leaders ensure a strong focus on preparing pupils for future life in British society. Regular careers events, including visits and presentations from prospective employees, such as the ambulance service, help pupils to develop ambitions and aspirations.

Pupils usually behave well. Clear expectations and well-established routines ensure a calm, well-organised and hard-working atmosphere. Staff greet pupils warmly in the mornings, providing quiet encouragement and reassurance where needed. Staff training in the past few years has strengthened behaviour management. Adults have a better understanding of the underlying causes of misbehaviour as a result. A sharper focus on spotting and addressing problems at an early stage has led to a marked decrease in challenging behaviour.

The proprietor, managing director, head of schools and governors work constructively with school leaders. They have provided valuable support, guidance and expertise for the school since the previous inspection and continue to do so. The proprietor ensures that independent school standards are met consistently. Leaders ensure that the school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that the school provides a safe and secure environment for pupils and staff. Well-established procedures ensure that the school runs smoothly. For instance, efficient systems at the start of the school day ensure that pupils settle into school quickly. Leaders use regular training, staff meetings and a range of activities to ensure that staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding. Staff are alert to pupils' welfare. They report concerns promptly, logging information carefully on the school's record system. Leaders give pupils' safety a high priority. They act swiftly to investigate any concerns.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's effective reading programme supports pupils' progress well. Pupils read with an adult regularly and develop increasingly reliable reading skills. Some pupils enjoy reading, but others are less enthusiastic. Leaders have taken steps to encourage pupils' interest in books, including through the establishment of an inviting library. However, they recognise that more can be done to encourage pupils to read for pleasure. For instance, staff do not act as role models by reading to pupils as often as they might. Leaders have suitable plans to develop this aspect of the school's work.
- The science curriculum equips pupils with increasingly secure scientific knowledge. The use of practical activities and experiments to develop scientific concepts and investigative skills, such as hypothesising, predicting and drawing conclusions, are less well developed. Leaders have rightly identified this aspect of the science curriculum for further development.
- Subject leaders have developed carefully considered action plans for improvements in their subjects of responsibility. However, these priorities are not reflected in the school development plan and are not shared as widely with staff as they could be. Leaders should sharpen school development plans to ensure shared understanding of development priorities and stronger rates of progress in the school's development.

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

School details

Unique reference number	138408
DfE registration number	886/6139
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10232318
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	9
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Gemma Gosden
Chair	Gemma Gosden
Headteacher	Debbie Pardey
Annual fees (day pupils)	£43,290 to £54,990
Telephone number	020 3137 3629
Website	www.pierviewacademy.co.uk
Email address	thomas.furnell@alpschools.org
Dates of previous inspection	11 to 13 June 2019

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection took place in June 2019.
- A range of local authorities place pupils at the school who have been previously permanently excluded or at risk of permanent exclusion. All pupils have an EHC plan for autism spectrum disorder or social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school makes use of five alternative providers. Two are registered with Ofsted and three are unregistered. The school also owns a caravan, located in a holiday park, which is used to teach life skills.
- A newly appointed headteacher will take up his post in the school from the start of September 2022.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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.

- 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 spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection. They met with the headteacher, managing director, head of schools and other school leaders. Inspectors also met with three members of the executive board, including the proprietor, and one member of the local management board. They also spoke with a range of staff at different times during the inspection.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics and humanities. They also discussed other aspects of the curriculum, including science and art, and viewed a range of pupils' work in these subjects. Deep dives included visiting lessons, looking at pupils' work, and talking with teachers and pupils about how teaching in these subjects builds pupils' knowledge over time.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils during lessons, breaktimes and around the school. The lead inspector also met with a group of pupils to gather their views of the school.
- Inspectors assessed the school's safeguarding culture throughout the inspection. The lead inspector reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records. She also checked the single central record.
- The views of staff and parents were gathered through Ofsted's surveys and discussions with inspectors.

Inspection team

Julie Sackett, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Andrew Hogarth

Ofsted Inspector

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