

Wemms Education Centre

Woodstock House, Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton, Surbiton, Surrey KT6 5HN

Inspection date

1 February 2024

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

Paragraph 2(1) to 2(1)(a)

- The quality of education was judged good at the school's last standard inspection in May 2023. The school had high academic ambition and pupils achieved well across a range of subjects, including GCSE and A-level qualifications.
- Despite the strengths in the quality of education, there was an unmet standard regarding the school's overarching curriculum policy. The school's submitted action plan to Ofsted in October 2023 was rejected by the Department for Education (DfE). The plan did not outline clearly enough the timescales for how it would update the key stage 4 curriculum.
- The school has since reviewed and established a new curriculum policy. It now reflects the ambitious curriculum in place at Wemms and what pupils need to know and do. Within subjects, there are detailed schemes of work which support staff's teaching of the curriculum.
- The independent school standards (the standards) in part 1 are now met.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7 to 7(b)

- Safeguarding was judged as not effective at the last inspection. The school was not a safe environment for pupils. Referrals to other agencies had been too slow, which placed pupils at risk of harm. Furthermore, pupils only trusted some adults in the school to help them. A highly negative culture flowed throughout the school. This resulted in unmet standards for the welfare, health and safety of pupils.
- The DfE rejected the school's action plan because it was unclear how trustees would assure themselves that these standards would be met. During this progress monitoring inspection, it was clear that the school had rapidly addressed the weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements and practices. There is now a vigilant and transparent safeguarding culture. A new designated safeguarding lead joined the school in

September 2023, along with a vice-principal. The safeguarding team has been expanded to include the school's newly formed senior leadership team. This team is proactive and meets each week to discuss pupils' welfare and necessary actions. All staff have had ongoing safeguarding training so everyone is clear what to do.

- Leaders know pupils well. Consequently, pupils feel safe and they can name a trusted adult they could talk to about any worries they may have.
- An electronic record-keeping system is used to log any concerns about a pupil. The safeguarding team demonstrates that they act promptly on this information. They know how to refer to other agencies and evidence shows this is done in a timely fashion.
- Although there have been swift and widespread changes for the better, there remain some minor weaknesses in record-keeping. This is because not all relevant information is held in one central place.
- There is a published safeguarding policy on the school's website. The proprietor body has ensured that this policy is updated at least annually to reflect the current statutory guidance.

Paragraphs 9, 9(b), 9(c), 10

- Behaviour and attitudes were judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. Although pupils generally behaved well in lessons, they were fearful of bullying, racial and homophobic slurs, and inappropriate sexualised language and behaviours. School records of behaviour incidents were limited and staff did not apply consequences consistently. Leaders lacked awareness of the serious concerns and did not analyse patterns and trends in instances of poor behaviour.
- The school is now a place where pupils are happier and behave well in lessons and around the school site. Any concerning behaviours are addressed by staff. The school has set up a system that records all behaviour incidents. Leaders can then use this to identify any particular themes. Pupils' conduct and attitudes are analysed closely.
- The behaviour policy is now implemented with greater consistency, with staff visible around the school at all times. Consequences are used appropriately where a pupil may breach the school's rules. However, there are occasions when staff do not challenge some pupils' use of inappropriate language. Nevertheless, records are indicating that serious behaviour incidents are decreasing.
- The organisation of the school day is working well. Pupils have ample space to play and develop physical fitness. Teachers understand pupils' needs better, recognising when pupils may need a short break in curriculum time if their memory becomes overloaded. Staff deploy a range of strategies to help pupils self-regulate. These actions are contributing to a calmer environment around the school.
- The curriculum teaches pupils how to treat each other kindly and with respect. Pupils demonstrate their understanding of the Equality Act 2010.

Paragraph 13

- At the last inspection, staff, pupils, and parents and carers expressed concern about the school's response to pupils' medical needs. Records of administration of medicine and first aid were sparse. The school nurse shared her concerns about this during the inspection.

- There is now a clear oversight of managing pupils' medical needs and first-aid procedures. There is an appropriate first-aid policy in place. Relevant staff are trained and the school has agreed procedures for recording medical information. First-aid kits are fully stocked. Staff know their responsibilities and duty of care to pupils.
- These standards in part 3 are now met.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

Paragraph 18(2), 18(2)(d)

- The systems for recruiting, checking on and inducting staff were not robust at the last inspection. This included an unmet standard within part 4 of the standards regarding enhanced criminal checks.
- A new school business manager was appointed last term and manages the school's recruitment processes and checks. New leaders are knowledgeable about the statutory requirements for checking the suitability of adults.
- Recruitment processes for new staff have been appropriate, with the proprietor body following the DfE's statutory guidance. Relevant leaders have completed safer recruitment training. The school has assured itself of impartiality when recruiting new staff.
- The single central record contains all required checks. The school has also ensured that the relevant management checks have been carried out on members of the proprietor body. The school has its own quality assurance processes to ensure that the single central record is accurate and compliant with legislation.
- The standards in part 4 are now met.

Part 6. Provision of information

Paragraph 32(1), 32(1)(b), 32(1)(c), 32(3), 32(3)(f)

- At the last inspection, the school's website and information provided to parents did not fully comply with the requirements of the standards. This centred around information about the school's complaints procedure. Furthermore, there were no mechanisms to include and update staff on key changes to the school's policies.
- The school's website now contains all relevant policies and information that parents would need. These policies are up to date and reflect the latest government guidance. School leaders are ensuring that these policies are understood by staff.
- These standards in part 6 are now met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- Many parents complained about poor communication from the school at the last inspection. There were open complaints that had not been responded to within the school's agreed timescales. Furthermore, there was no published information from the school about the number of complaints received.

- There is now a sharper oversight of the school's complaints procedures. The number of complaints the school has received is also published.
- These standards in part 7 are now met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(c)

- Leadership and management were judged to be inadequate at the last inspection. The school was described as a deeply fractured community. There was a widespread lack of trust and confidence in the school's leadership. Leaders did not demonstrate capacity to lead and improve the school. Furthermore, staff and parents were concerned about impartiality. This is because external consultants who were commissioned to carry out independent reviews of the school were in fact connected to the principal.
- Tensions remain within the proprietor body. Trustees are divided in what needs to happen to improve the school. Some decision-making has had a negative impact on the school's leadership team. This has resulted in a somewhat unsettled period for staff and pupils. There have been ongoing leadership changes. The principal at the time of the inspection stepped down last summer and is now one of the trustees. A chief executive started in September 2023 but left his post at the end of December 2023. An existing teacher became substantive principal in January 2024. He and his newly formed leadership team are united and are bringing much-needed stability.
- There have been some positive changes in addressing most of the previously unmet standards. The school's leadership team is committed to providing pupils with a high-quality education and putting pupils' welfare first. This is reflected in the much-improved safeguarding culture. Although the school's action plan was initially rejected by the DfE, strategic planning is now clearer with precise milestones to achieve. However, it is very early days to be assured that the school would consistently meet all of the standards.
- Trustees can see that they need to appoint additional members to bring a more knowledgeable skill set and greater transparency. However, a recruitment drive has slowed. The chair of the proprietor body is on a leave of absence due to ill health. As a result, an acting chair of trustees took up their post only a few days before this progress monitoring inspection. This acting chair is new to the board and is helping bring greater rigour to the proprietor body.
- There remains an overreliance on using external consultants to support leadership and management. Some of these consultants remain connected to some trustees. The local authority is keen to help the proprietor body so that pupils get a better deal. However, the proprietor body declined an independent review of some its processes.
- The acting proprietor body chair and principal are engaging well together. Staff have greater confidence that leaders can steer this school back on a firmer path to improvement.
- The standards relating to leadership and management remain unmet.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. This included the standards and requirements that the school was judged to not comply with at the previous inspection. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

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|-------------------------|----------|
| Unique reference number | 142416 |
| DfE registration number | 936/6006 |
| Inspection number | 10321124 |

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.

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| Type of school | Special school |
| School status | Independent day 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 | 93 |
| Of which, number on roll in sixth form | 13 |
| Number of part-time pupils | 0 |
| Proprietor | Wemms Education Unlimited Limited |
| Chair | Fiona Bulmer |
| Headteacher | Neil Bain |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £50,000 |
| Telephone number | 01372 276 499 |
| Website | www.wemms.co.uk |
| Email address | info@wemms.co.uk |
| Dates of previous standard inspection | 10 to 15 May 2023 |

Information about this school

- There have been a number of leadership changes since the previous inspection. A new principal was promoted internally in January 2024.
- Wemms Education Centre offers education to pupils who have been unable to cope in mainstream education. Almost all have an education, health and care plan. Pupils typically have social, emotional and mental health needs. Pupils' individual needs vary widely and

include neurodiversity, social communication challenges, post-traumatic attachment disorders, and other conditions that affect pupils' learning and development. Many pupils have previously experienced extensive absences from school.

- The school is currently using one unregistered alternative provider.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at the request of the registration authority for independent schools. The purpose of the inspection was to monitor the progress the school has made in meeting the independent school standards and other requirements that it was judged to not comply with at its previous inspection.
- This was the school's first progress monitoring inspection since the standard inspection in May 2023, when the school was judged inadequate and not complying with the standards.
- The DfE required the school to prepare an action plan. This plan was statutory. Ofsted evaluated the plan in October 2023. The DfE rejected this action plan.
- This progress monitoring inspection was conducted without notice.
- The inspector considered any continued impact of the pandemic and has taken that into account in his evaluation of the school.
- The inspector met with senior leaders and staff. He held a video call with two trustees, including the acting chair. He also had a telephone conversation with a local authority designated officer to discuss the school's safeguarding processes, including managing allegations against adults.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and children; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts children's interests first.
- The inspector spoke to pupils about their learning and experiences at school. He visited lessons, breaktimes and lunchtime.
- A range of other documents and policies, including on the school's website, were reviewed by the inspector. These included trustees' minutes.

Inspection team

James Broadbridge, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Standards that were not met at the previous inspection and remain un-met at this inspection

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;
 - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

The school now meets the following independent school standards

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- 2(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 2(1)(a) the proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, which provides for the matters specified in sub-paragraph (2) is drawn up and implemented effectively.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.
- 13 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if–
 - 18(2)(d) the proprietor ensures that, where relevant to any such person, an enhanced criminal record check is made in respect of that person and an enhanced criminal record certificate is obtained before or as soon as practicable after that person's appointment and in the light of the information from the checks referred to in paragraphs (c) to (f) the proprietor considers that the person is suitable for the position to which the person is appointed.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that information specified in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available to parents and prospective parents of pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is–
 - 32(3)(f) details of the complaints procedure referred to in paragraph 33, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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