

Wemms Education Centre

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

Inspection dates

17 September 2024

Overall outcome

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

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraphs 7 to 7(b), 32(1) and 32(1)(c)

- Safeguarding was judged as not effective at the last standard inspection in May 2023. 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.
- At the previous progress monitoring inspection conducted on 1 February 2024, it was clear that the school had rapidly addressed the weaknesses in safeguarding arrangements and practices.
- During this inspection the inspectors examined the school's safeguarding policies and procedures, and examples of current and ongoing practice as requested by the Department for Education (DfE). There is a suitable 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.
- There is now a vigilant and transparent safeguarding culture. Leaders provide suitable safeguarding training for staff, supplemented by regular staff briefings about pupils' welfare and safety. This means that staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding matters and clear about their roles and responsibilities.
- Leaders and staff know pupils well. Consequently, pupils feel safe and they can name a trusted adult they could talk to about any worries they may have.
- Leaders monitor pupils' safety and welfare closely. An electronic record-keeping system is used to log any concerns about pupils. 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. The previous monitoring inspection found there were some minor weaknesses in record-keeping. This was because not all relevant information was held in one central place. Since then, leaders have been

working methodically to ensure all historical records held are transferred to the centralised electronic system. This work is continuing at pace.

- Leaders have continued to ensure that all staff recruitment checks are completed. The single central record is well maintained and up to date. Key staff have attended safer recruitment training.
- The relevant requirements that were checked in this part of the independent school standards (the standards) continue to be met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33

- Arrangements for addressing complaints were fit for purpose at the previous monitoring inspection. Inspectors were asked to review them at this inspection, in light of concerns raised with the DfE.
- The school's complaints policy meets statutory requirements. It is published on the website. This policy is comprehensive and suitable. It provides clear timescales for the management and consideration of any complaint.
- Leaders demonstrate a commitment to listening to parents and working through any concerns in the first instance. Despite this, leaders, including trustees, do not have a sharp enough oversight of the school's complaints procedures. This means that some aspects of the complaints policy are not implemented as intended. While records relating to a complaint are kept confidential, they are not fit for purpose. For instance, complainants are not routinely provided with a copy of findings, recommendations and any arising actions taken by the school because of the complaint. Furthermore, the written records do not state whether complaints were resolved by a formal procedure or proceeded to a panel hearing.
- The relevant standards from this part are unmet.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraphs 34(1) to 34(1)(b)

- Leadership and management were judged to be inadequate at the last standard 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.
- At the time of the previous progress monitoring inspection, tensions remained within the proprietor body. Trustees were divided about what needed to happen to improve the school. Some decision-making had resulted in a negative impact on the school's leadership team. This created a somewhat unsettled period for staff and pupils. Despite this, there had been some positive changes in addressing most of the previously unmet standards.
- At the time of the last progress monitoring inspection, there remained an overreliance on using external consultants to support leadership and management. This is no longer the case. The school is working with the local authority to develop aspects of its work, including safeguarding. Leaders are now receptive to further developing links such as this so that pupils get a better deal.

- The school's executive leadership team has high expectations for all staff and pupils and is bringing about much needed stability to the school community. The team is skilled and knowledgeable and is ensuring that the well-being and safety of pupils is at the forefront of their work.
- Leaders' determination in bringing about the much-needed improvements are reflected by staff and pupils, who are now much more positive about the changes and feel valued.
- Governance is still in its infancy. Trustees know that they need to appoint additional members to bring a more knowledgeable skill set and greater transparency. They are actively working to recruit new trustees and have made two further appointments in the past few days. However, there is still more work to be done around expanding the board and ensuring they understand their role as trustees. This means that, at present, the board of trustees does not demonstrate the knowledge and expertise to fulfil its responsibilities effectively to that the standards are met consistently.
- Leaders, including trustees, have made progress in implementing the objectives in the action plan but there is still more work to do. For instance, lots of the new processes and procedures are in the very early stages of implementation. While leaders' intent is plain to see, it is not yet possible to evaluate the difference these actions will have to pupils' experiences at the school.
- The standards found to be unmet in part 8 at the last standard and subsequent progress monitoring inspections 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

Unique reference number	142416
DfE registration number	936/6006
Inspection number	10352115

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	Special school
School status	Independent special 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	86
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	29
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Wemms Education Unlimited Limited
Chair	Fiona Bulmer
Headteacher	Neil Bain
Annual fees (day pupils)	£50,000 to £75,791
Telephone number	01372 276499
Website	www.wemms.co.uk
Email address	info@wemms.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	10 to 15 May 2023

Information about this school

- 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 those associated with 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 operates from a single site, and it has sole occupancy.
- The school's most recent standard inspection was in May 2023. It was judged to be inadequate and unmet standards were found. The school was subject to a progress monitoring inspection on 1 February 2024. At this inspection there were still unmet standards.
- The school is currently using one registered and three unregistered alternative providers.
- Since the previous monitoring inspection, an additional two trustees have recently been appointed.

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. At the same time, paragraphs 7 and 33 of the standards were considered in relation to complaints received by the DfE which related to pupils' welfare, health and safety and the school's complaints procedures.
- This was the second progress monitoring inspection since the last standard inspection. It was carried out with no notice.
- The DfE required the school to prepare an action plan because of non-compliance with the independent school standards identified at the time of the last standard inspection. Ofsted evaluated this action plan in October 2023. The DfE rejected this action plan. A further action plan was assessed and found to be acceptable in May 2024.
- The inspection team met with senior leaders and staff. They also held a video call with the chair of the proprietor body. The lead inspector also had telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors also spoke to pupils about their experiences at the school. They visited lessons and spoke to pupils at breaktime.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors 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.
- A range of other documents and policies, including the school's website, were reviewed by inspectors. These included trustees' minutes.

Inspection team

Louise Walker, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kate Fripp

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.

Standards that were met at the previous inspection, but are now judged to not be met at this inspection

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 and which-
 - 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is-
 - 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
 - 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher;
 - 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and-
 - 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
 - 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld).

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