

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Sherrardswood School

February 2023

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School	Sherrardswo	od School		
DfE number	919/6047			
Address	Sherrardswo	od School		
	3 Lockleys Dr	ive		
	Welwyn			
	AL6 OBJ			
Telephone number	01438 71428	32		
Email address	office@sherr	ardswood.co	o.uk	
Headmistress	Mrs Anna Wi	right		
Chair of governors	Mr Ali Khan			
Proprietor	Alpha School	s Limited		
Age range	2 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	506			
	EYFS	47	Prep	125
	Seniors	262	Sixth Form	72
Inspection dates	21 to 23 Feb	21 to 23 February 2023		

School's Details

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Sherrardswood School is a co-educational independent day school situated in Hertfordshire. It was founded in 1928 and is now owned by Alpha Schools Limited, whose directors provide governance of the school. The school consists of a pre-school, prep school, senior school and sixth form, all of which are located on the same site.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, new sixth-form facilities have been developed and the pre-prep has been relocated to a more central part of the school. The current head of prep was appointed in September 2019, when a new senior leadership team was established.

What the school seeks to do

1.3 The school aims to provide an education which enables pupils to enjoy learning and fulfil their potential. It seeks to develop the talents, personality and self-worth of each pupil so that they emerge as caring and self-disciplined young adults ready to take their place in the world.

About the pupils

1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, mostly from Hertfordshire and surrounding counties. The school's own assessment data and nationally standardised tests indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average for those taking similar tests nationally. The school has identified 100 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional specialist help. Pupils' needs and disabilities include dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, autism spectrum disorder and social, emotional and mental health needs. There are 34 pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for seven pupils, five of whom receive additional support for their English. The school identifies more able pupils in a number of areas and aims to provide a programme of educational and enrichment opportunities to meet their needs.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> <u>Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework</u>.

Key findings

2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2020 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the prep school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.

2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils do not always pay due regard to current statutory guidance in all areas. Suitable references have not always been obtained for staff before they took up appointment, and checks on prohibition from management had not been carried out for relevant staff before they started work. The latter omission was rectified by the end of the inspection.
- 2.11 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety in paragraphs 9–16, the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 (accessibility plan), and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met, but that in paragraph 7 [safeguarding] is not met.

Action point 1

The school must ensure that at least two references are obtained for all staff before they begin work [paragraph 7(a) and (b); EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

Action point 2

The school must ensure prohibition from management checks are carried out for all those in management positions before they commence employment [paragraph 7(a) and (b); EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.12 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.14 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.15 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.16 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.17 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.18 Parental complaints, if any, are handled through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales; at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.19 Parental complaints are not always handled effectively. Action is not always undertaken, and the outcome communicated to parents, within the school's published timescales.

2.20 The standard relating to the handling of complaints in paragraph 33 is not met.

Action point 3

The school must ensure that where parents make a complaint, action is taken and the outcome is communicated to parents within the school's published timescales [paragraph 33(c)].

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.21 The proprietor does not ensure that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

2.22 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 is not met.

Action point 4

The school must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their roles effectively so that independent school standards are met consistently, and the school actively promotes the wellbeing of pupils [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c)].

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and abilities.
- Pupils engage actively in collaborative tasks and take leadership in their learning when they are given the opportunity to do so.
- Pupils have strong creative skills.
- Pupils demonstrate positive attitudes to their learning.
- Pupils are competent users of information and communication technology (ICT), though opportunities for pupils to enhance their learning through its application are limited.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils of all ages, including children in the EYFS, make rapid progress in developing their selfconfidence, resilience and ability to make their own decisions.
 - Pupils are inclusive, showing respect for and appreciation of each other's differences.
 - Pupils have a markedly strong sense of community and are highly supportive of each other.
 - Pupils are reflective and show a strong aesthetic awareness and appreciation of their natural surroundings.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
 - Strengthen pupils' ability to apply ICT skills to all areas of their learning.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.5 Pupils, including those with SEND, make rapid progress from their varied starting points, as evidenced by comprehensive assessment data. Their progress in lessons is facilitated by focused teaching, individualised feedback and the opportunity to attend booster classes in a range of subjects. In the prep school, this progress is confirmed by the standard of mathematics and reading in lessons, the scrutiny of pupils' work and assessment data provided by the school. EYFS profiles show that, over time, a large majority of children reach the expected level of development. Results at GCSE and A level show that most pupils attain grades higher than expected for those of similar ability. In 2022 a very

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large majority of GCSE results were achieved at grades 4 to 9, with over a quarter of results graded 7 to 9. In 2020 and 2021, centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grades showed a similar level of attainment. In 2022, over two-thirds of A-level results were graded A* to B. In centre-assessed and teacher-assessed results in 2020 and 2021 most results were of a similar standard. As a result, most pupils are successful in gaining places at universities of their choice. In discussion, pupils were keen to point to the individualised support and encouragement they receive both from teachers and tutors as key contributory factors to their excellent academic progress.

- 3.6 Pupils make good progress in developing knowledge, skills and understanding as a result of the care teachers take in addressing their individual needs, and of their own determination. In mathematics, the most able Year 6 pupils made strong progress as they investigated the area and perimeter of a rectangle having the same numerical value. In a Year 13 history lesson, pupils demonstrated a good understanding of the tensions arising from Gorbachev's institution of Perestroika and Glasnost. In art, Year 9 pupils displayed excellent artistic appreciation as they described the use of vibrant saturation and symbolism in the work of Frida Kahlo. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a few pupils did not agree that lessons are interesting. Inspectors found that pupils engaged positively in response to the teaching they receive. For example, Year 4 pupils responded with interest as they discussed whether the Loch Ness monster is fact or opinion. Pupils make particularly strong progress when they are involved actively in lessons. In design and technology, Year 9 pupils responded with enthusiasm as they felt and compared the finish of each other's wooden crates.
- 3.7 Children acquire and develop good numeracy skills in the EYFS and throughout the prep school. This is due to well-pitched learning activities and the focus on number skills to support pupils' learning. In the EYFS, children showed an excellent sense of order as they chanted the days of the week and months of the year. Year 6 pupils displayed good mathematical skills as they plotted line graphs to show the effect of exercise on heart rate. As pupils progress through the school, they apply their numerical and mathematical skills to a range of problems with varying degrees of confidence. In economics, Year 12 pupils' strong mathematical skills enabled them to rationalise the relationship and correlation between income and demand elasticity. In computing, higher ability Year 13 pupils displayed an excellent numerical understanding as they compared the time taken for different sorting methods.
- 3.8 Some pupils demonstrate a high level of competency in ICT, as seen in the use of complex software in music, design and technology (DT) and art. In music technology, pupils made good use of recording software to replicate works required for their coursework. In the EYFS, children are highly competent at using tablet computers to practise reading words using phonics. Pupils with SEND make good use of devices to support their learning. This enables them to make progress in line with their peers. During periods of remote learning pupils throughout the school used online video learning platforms effectively to access lessons and resources. In discussions with inspectors, however, pupils said that in the majority of lessons they do not have the opportunity to use or apply ICT to enhance their learning. Lessons observed during the inspection confirm this view.
- 3.9 Pupils develop strong oral communication skills during their time at the school. They are articulate, expressing themselves clearly when given the opportunity to debate in the classroom and beyond. Children in the EYFS displayed excellent speaking and listening skills as they learnt to sing *Baby Shark* in German. In English, Year 2 pupils spoke with confidence as they described their favourite parts of a story and predicted what would happen next. In dance, Year 13 pupils verbalised with confidence how to transfer the topic theme of toxicity in relationships to dance, making the most of the opportunity to improvise and collaborate as they developed themes. Pupils demonstrate strong listening skills and respond readily, especially when encouraged to do so by teachers. In music, Year 10 pupils displayed excellent listening skills as they identified the features of the melodic line to portray leitmotif within *Star Wars* music. Some pupils have excellent reading and writing skills, as seen in high-quality extended project work. Pupils with SEND who experience challenges with reading and written communication make excellent progress as a result of mentoring and a scaffolded approach in lessons.

- 3.10 Pupils display well-developed thinking skills. From the earliest years, pupils use these skills with confidence because they are encouraged to extend their understanding through open questions and appropriate tasks. In history, Year 5 pupils displayed an excellent ability to hypothesise as they considered how one thousand dead sheep could help William I to raise an army. In discussions, Year 6 pupils described how, in the woodland learning environment, they had risen to the challenge of making objects that could float using knowledge acquired in their science lesson. Strong analytical and evaluative skills were evident in essays and extended project work on topics ranging from misogyny to the power of different leaders in politics.
- 3.11 Pupils display positive attitudes to their learning, demonstrating a strong desire to do well. In lessons and activities where pupils are given the opportunity to collaborate with their peers, they benefit by sharing ideas to enhance their understanding. In English, Year 11 pupils worked well together as they discussed quotes from *An Inspector Calls*. In food technology, Year 10 pupils collaborated extremely effectively as they shared ideas, compared progress and helped each other when preparing a pastabased meal. During the inspection it was observed that, although much of the learning was led by teachers, pupils were very good at taking responsibility for their own progress and success. For example, pupils actively seek help at subject booster sessions and use the library for independent work. In the EYFS, children display excellent independence as they actively seek out and engage in a range of different tasks. GCSE and A-level pupils take strong leadership in their learning. This is evident in art portfolios which show much originality, and in extended projects on a range of topics.
- 3.12 Throughout the school, pupils achieve strongly in an array of co-curricular activities and pursuits. They gain success in local sporting competitions. Some pupils excel in regional, national and international competitions in athletics, netball, fencing and football. Pupils achieve bronze and silver awards in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and gain success in the UK Maths Challenge and general knowledge, art and music competitions. Pupils of all ages achieve strong success in external speech, drama and music examinations. Outstanding achievement is evident in the quality of school drama productions and the artwork on display throughout the school. Pupils achieve highly in these areas partly because they are encouraged by governors, leaders and staff to pursue their individual interests. This amply meets the aim of the school to develop the talents of each pupil.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 From the moment they join the school, pupils make rapid progress in developing their self-confidence, resilience, self-knowledge, and other personal skills. They learn to be comfortable in themselves and try to be the best that they can be, rather than compare themselves to others. This is as a result of the determination of leadership and governance to encourage pupils to develop their self-worth with the support of an accepting community. In discussions many pupils described how, having struggled to succeed in other schools, they have developed a new sense of self-confidence. In German, Year 8 pupils who had previously been too reserved to contribute to lessons were confidently reading aloud in the target language. Pupils show excellent self-confidence as they give presentations in assemblies and decidedly strong resilience is evident in activities in the woodland learning environment and on DofE expeditions. Clear feedback and opportunities to discuss their work with teachers mean that pupils are self-reflective and have an objective awareness of their strengths and weaknesses. Pupils with SEND are extremely positive about the help they receive, saying that it supports their selfconfidence and self-esteem. Children in the EYFS display excellent self-knowledge when they choose to display a piece of their work of which they are proud. In their questionnaire responses, a very large majority of parents said that the school helps their children to be confident and independent. Inspection evidence confirms this view.
- 3.15 Pupils demonstrate an outstanding sense of community. In discussions with inspectors, they spoke warmly of a culture of mutual support where pupils and staff will go out of their way to help each

other. Pupils work together completely naturally in activities, and the supportive environment enables pupils with SEND to gain social skills and form successful relationships with their peers. Pupils show concern for each other and readily welcome new pupils to the school, ensuring that they feel part of the community. In the social club, senior school pupils who previously experienced difficulties socialising lead activities to help others to develop friendships. Pupils in Year 6 are extremely caring play leaders who support younger children during break times, and younger pupils in the senior school appreciate the excellent guidance they receive from sixth-form mentors. Pupils relish the opportunity to put forward their views through activities such as the school council. They understand that they can make a real difference to everyone, such as when prep school pupils campaigned for pasta to be served separately from sauce.

- 3.16 Throughout their time at the school, pupils develop an acute awareness of the non-material aspects of life. This is apparent in the obvious pleasure they derive from friendships, creativity and their natural surroundings. For example, Year 6 pupils listened to a shakuhachi being played and described the sound as beautiful and mysterious. A small group of sixth-form pupils were so inspired by inflating and dissecting a pair of lungs that they have chosen to pursue careers in science. Pupils possess a strong spiritual awareness and an ability to reflect upon ideas with maturity. For example, pupils demonstrate a deep awareness of the spiritual element of meditation through their regular attendance at a club which promotes positive mental health. Artwork displayed throughout the school shows highly evocative responses to personal situations, such as imagining scenes through the eyes of relatives with cataracts. In discussions, Year 7 pupils spoke of the real meaning or purpose to life as being yourself and being happy in what you do.
- 3.17 Pupils display an excellent ability to make well-considered moral decisions and take responsibility for their choices. They have an excellent understanding of rules and laws and can discuss issues of morality with confidence. In personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), Year 8 pupils showed a clear understanding of the function of the police when discussing the impact of the Stephen Lawrence case on the UK population. In discussions, pupils displayed a very clear understanding of what is right and what is wrong, shown in their expression of no tolerance of any bullying. During the inspection it was clear that pupils are kind to each other, show respect to visitors and are extremely well-mannered.
- 3.18 Pupils make a markedly positive contribution to the local community and to wider society through charity and outreach work. They demonstrate considerable sensitivity towards those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils are instrumental in choosing the charities they want to support and think of ways in which to really help others. For example, pupils in the literary and art club created a story book entitled *Badger On The Run* to raise funds to help refugees. There is a strong understanding amongst pupils that community service is important, for example by visiting a local care home to sing to residents. An extremely strong commitment is shown by those pupils who continue to volunteer after they have completed the service element of their DofE programme. The pupils' strong social awareness is enhanced by a comprehensive PSHE curriculum, supported by excellent pastoral care.
- 3.19 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of staying safe, both in terms of their digital lives as well as with regards to their physical and mental health and wellbeing. In physical education, Year 7 pupils showed an excellent awareness of the need to stretch muscles to prevent injury. Children in the EYFS are willing to try different foods and they have an excellent understanding of a healthy diet. Pupils benefit from the strong promotion of their wellbeing through the curriculum. In PSHE, Year 10 pupils displayed a strong awareness of issues surrounding peer pressure and expectations arising from social media. In discussions, pupils described how walking in the fresh air in the school grounds is beneficial to their mental health. During the inspection, pupils in the dance club displayed an excellent awareness of the benefits of physical exercise as they danced and sang with great enthusiasm to songs from *Mama Mia*.
- 3.20 Pupils have a very clear understanding of how the decisions that they make now will influence their own future success and wellbeing. They make positive decisions to join clubs and activities which

develop their personality and interests. Pupils of all ages think very carefully when selecting which subjects they will study. Older pupils recognise the importance of their decisions when selecting pathways to their future careers. In discussions pupils spoke of good decisions they had made with the help of their teachers to change an academic pathway for a course where they would be more successful.

3.21 Pupils demonstrate an outstanding sense of community and identity. In discussions they spoke with fondness of being a part of one large family. Pupils display an excellent level of respect for one another, regardless of any perceived differences. For example, pupils with SEND speak comfortably, including in group situations, about their individual difficulties. In discussions, pupils who had recently joined the school spoke very highly of the atmosphere of inclusivity they encountered amongst the pupils. In questionnaire responses, an overwhelming majority of parents said that the school actively promotes the values of democracy, respect, and tolerance of other people. Inspection evidence shows that pupils are extremely accepting and value the right of everyone to be themselves. Pupils relish the opportunity to gain a better understanding of different cultures. Younger pupils take pleasure in sharing their cultural traditions and celebrations with each other. In sociology, Year 13 pupils engaged in highly thoughtful discussions about feminism as they distinguished between female roles in different religions. The pupils' commitment to inclusivity is a product of belonging to a harmonious school and the dedication of the leadership to ensuring that everyone is treated equally and fairly.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Sue Clarke	Reporting inspector
Mr Luke Ramsden	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mrs Christine Cunniffe	Team inspector (Principal, SofH, ISA and BSA school)
Mrs Di Durrant	Team inspector (Former deputy head, SofH school)
Mr Simon Horbury	Team inspector (Teacher, IAPS school)