



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Report for a Progress Monitoring Visit

Beechwood School

June 2022

School's details

School	Beechwood School			
DfE number	886/6011			
Address	Beechwood School 12 Pembury Road Royal Tunbridge Wells Kent TN2 3QD			
Telephone number	01892 532747			
Email address	info@beechwood.org.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Justin Foster-Gandey			
Proprietor	Alpha Schools Holdings Ltd			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	324			
	Day pupils	282	Boarders	42
	EYFS	33	Prep	106
	Seniors	150	Sixth Form	35
Date of visit	20 June 2022			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Beechwood School is a co-educational boarding and day school situated in Royal Tunbridge Wells. The school has been owned and governed by Alpha Schools Holdings Ltd since January 2021. The school comprises: the pre-prep, for pupils aged 3 to 7 years, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); the prep for those aged 7 to 11 years; the senior section for pupils aged 11 to 16 years; and a sixth form. Pupils can board from the age of 11 and all who do so are full boarders. The school has identified 45 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorder; all receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 35 pupils whose needs are supported. The school's previous inspection was an educational quality and focused compliance inspection in November 2021.
- 1.2 This was an unannounced progress monitoring visit at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the inspection in November 2021. The visit focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2015 and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

Regulations which were the focus of the visit	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 11 and 14; EYFS 3.4, 3.7 and 3.9.	Not met
Part 3, paragraph 11 (health and safety); NMS 6; EYFS 3.55.	Met
Part 3, paragraph 12 (fire safety); NMS 7; EYFS 3.56.	Remain unmet
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 6; EYFS 3.65	Remain unmet
Part 4, paragraph 18 (suitability of staff); NMS 14; EYFS 3.9 and 3.11.	Not met
Part 4, paragraph 21 (single central register); NMS 14; EYFS 3.12	Met
Part 5, paragraphs 25 (maintenance of premises and accommodation), 28 (water supply) and 30 (boarding accommodation); NMS 3 and 5	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 13	Remain unmet

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11 and 14; EYFS 3.4, 3.7 and 3.9]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.1 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.2 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.3 The school does not meet the standards and the requirements.
- 2.4 Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively in most areas to safeguard children at risk and those in need. Staff show effective understanding of their responsibilities, including with regard to child-on-child abuse, including any such abuse linked to respect for those with protected characteristics. Staff show appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policy and safeguarding procedures. They have a suitable knowledge of the thresholds for reporting potential issues including allegations of sexual harassment. Staff are aware of who to go to if they have a concern or receive a disclosure and also that they can make a direct referral to children's services if necessary. They take appropriate action when necessary.
- 2.5 The safeguarding policy includes suitable definitions of abuse and has been reviewed in line with updated statutory guidance. It provides appropriate guidance regarding possible child-on-child abuse including linking such abuse to bullying. Since the previous inspection the head has become the DSL. The DSL acts on and refers the early signs of risk or need, monitors any potential for radicalisation, and ensures the school listens to the views of individual pupils. Pupils, including boarders, confirm that the school takes prompt action when they express concerns. In discussions they said they feel safe and well looked after. The physical and mental health of all pupils involved in any incident are given a high priority.
- 2.6 Effective and timely communication is maintained with parents. Pupils receive guidance on staying safe and show understanding of what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety. Monitoring and filtering of technology is effective.
- 2.7 The safeguarding policy gives contact details for required local agencies. The training for those with specific safeguarding responsibilities is in line with local requirements and statutory advice and up to date. Training in safeguarding for teaching and non-teaching staff is of sufficient quality and frequency.
- 2.8 Suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff, senior leaders or the proprietor, and potential misconduct, are included in safeguarding procedures; they include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies if circumstances require it.
- 2.9 Those with safeguarding responsibilities report that the system for recording child protection issues has been changed since the previous inspection. Record keeping no longer follows statutory guidance. Information is not kept confidential to the safeguarding team or those with a need to be aware. Good practice described in Keeping Children Safe in Education (KCSIE) to keep concerns and referrals in a separate child protection file for each child is not followed. Records do not include: a clear and comprehensive summary of the concern; details of how the concern was followed up and resolved; a note of any action taken, nor decisions reached and the outcome.

- 2.10 Suitable recruitment procedures for staff are outlined within the safeguarding policy and detailed in a separate recruitment policy. However, not all appropriate checks on the suitability of staff, proprietors and other adults have been recorded as being completed before they have taken up the role. There is no record of statutory guidance being followed with respect to the obtaining of references. At the time of the visit the school had no process for requesting safer recruitment information from contractors or self-employed staff, and no clarity on the assessment of what checks might be required.
- 2.11 The policy describes the procedures for proprietorial oversight of the effective implementation of the safeguarding arrangements. However, the absence of appropriate child protection records and continued anomalies and inconsistencies in the staff files relating to recruitment procedures show that these procedures have not been competently carried out.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – health and safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11; NMS 6; EYFS 3.55.]

- 2.12 The school meets the standards and the requirements.
- 2.13 The proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy. Records show that testing and servicing of electrical, gas, water and other utilities is regular; the safety of doors and windows is ensured; and access to unsafe areas is controlled. Staff are now effectively trained in health and safety and deal promptly and appropriately with accidents if they occur, including through the reporting of serious accidents. In all areas other than fire safety, systematic records ensure trends are identified and steps taken to mitigate recurrence of any health and safety issues.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12; NMS 7; EYFS 3.56]

- 2.14 The school does not meet the standards and the requirements.
- 2.15 An appropriate fire safety policy is in place. The previous inspection in November 2021 required implementation of fire risk assessments by a competent person. The fire risk assessments were dated May 2022. Those with direct responsibility have a detailed understanding of the actions needed, and have assessed and mitigated the risk to pupils, including boarders. However, there has not been sufficient time as yet to implement the recommendations fully and effectively. The actions needed have been comprehensively analysed. Many are concerned with certification but include strategic work which is still needed on the alarm system. The system is checked weekly, but these checks have not been recorded.
- 2.16 Fire evacuation procedures are practised at least termly, including in boarding time, and suitable records are kept of these. Pupils, including boarders, show good understanding of these procedures. Staff have received suitable fire safety training. Most fire safety equipment is maintained appropriately, although some extinguishers have not been checked in line with the school's policy. Clear fire signage is in place, including in the newly refurbished buildings. Those with direct responsibility for implementation of the school's fire policy believe that the outstanding work cannot be addressed until the new building works planned in the school have been completed.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 6; EYFS 3.65]

- 2.17 The school does not meet the standards and the requirements.
- 2.18 The risk assessment policy clearly describes the lines of responsibility and the approaches to be taken to identify and mitigate risk. There are appropriate assessments of risk for in-school activities, school

visits, and for the needs of individual pupils both while in school and in the surrounding area. Appropriate action is taken to mitigate risks identified. However there has been an unaccountable delay in the fire risk assessment required by the action plan initiated following the previous inspection.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18 and 21; NMS 14; EYFS 3.9, 3.11 and 3.12]

- 2.19 The school does not meet the standards and the requirements.
- 2.20 Almost all the required checks on staff and governors are carried out but the school was unable to show that checks against the barred list and the list of those prohibited from teaching had been carried out on all peripatetic staff. The school does not employ supply staff.
- 2.21 The school maintains correctly an accurate single central register of appointments which includes the dates on which the checks undertaken have been completed.

Premises and accommodation – maintenance, water and boarding accommodation [ISSR Part 5, paragraphs 25, 28 and 30; NMS 3 and 5; EYFS 3.55]

- 2.22 The school meets the standards and the requirements.
- 2.23 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. Separate accommodation is provided for the short-term care of sick boarders which is suitably separated from accommodation for other boarders. Boarders have a sufficient supply of hot water to wash and shower. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.24 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 13]

- 2.25 The school does not meet the standards.
- 2.26 Appropriate procedures are not implemented to allow the senior leaders and governors to manage safeguarding and welfare arrangements and monitor compliance with standards and other statutory advice. The inappropriateness of the child protection records, the absence of some recruitment information in staff files, and the need to tighten recruitment checks for contractors and self-employed staff signifies a lack of informed oversight in these areas. The long period between the creation of the action plan and the formulation of a fire risk assessment has not promoted the well-being of pupils. In this way the leadership and management do not fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently.

3. Regulatory action points

3.1 The school does not meet all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety – safeguarding, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11; EYFS 3.4 and 3.7

- Ensure that child protection records are kept in a separate child protection file for each child and that the content follows statutory guidance [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8 (a) and (b); NMS 11.1; EYFS 3.4 and 3.7].
- Ensure that checks against the barred list and those prohibited from teaching and at least two references are obtained for each member of staff, including peripatetic and self-employed teachers, before they start work; and that records of recruitment checks in staff files are kept consistently and comprehensively, including with regard to checks on contractor staff [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 11.1 and 14.1; EYFS 3.9].
- Ensure that review of safeguarding arrangements by the proprietor has sufficient rigour to identify areas where statutory guidance has not been followed [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8 (a) and (b); NMS 11.1; EYFS 3.4 and 3.7].

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils – fire safety, paragraphs 8 and 12; NMS 7; EYFS 3.55 and 3.56

- Ensure that it is compliant with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 with regard to: the effective implementation of the fire risk assessment in place, with action taken to mitigate any identified risk; the checking of all fire extinguishers; and the recording of all checks of fire alarms [paragraphs 8(b) and 12; NMS 7.1; EYFS 3.55 and 3.56].

ISSR Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment, paragraphs 8 and 16; NMS 6; EYFS 3.65

- The school must effectively implement its risk assessment policy with regards to fire safety [paragraphs 8(b) and 16(a) and (b); NMS 6.3; EYFS 3.65].

ISSR Part 4, Suitability of staff, paragraphs 8 and 18; NMS 8 and 14; EYFS 3.9

- Ensure that checks are undertaken to ascertain that all newly appointed staff, including peripatetic and self-employed teachers, have been checked against the barred list and those prohibited from teaching [paragraphs 8(b) and 18(2)(a), (b) and (f); NMS 14.1; EYFS 3.9].

ISSR Part 8, Quality of leadership and management, paragraph 34

- Ensure that arrangements are implemented for the effective oversight for the recording of recruitment and child protection procedures, fire precaution tests and action taken in response to all risk assessments, as required by the NMS [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 13.1, 13.3 to 13.5, 13.8 and 13.9].

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the headmaster, senior leaders and other members of staff. They visited different areas of the school, including boarding accommodation and talked with groups of pupils. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.