



Progress Monitoring Inspection Report

Beechwood School

October 2023

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			
Chair of governors	Mr Ali Khan			
Proprietor	Alpha Schools			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	356			
	Day pupils	322	Boarders	34
	EYFS	20	Juniors	93
	Seniors	183	Sixth Form	60
Date of inspection	5 October 2023			

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: pre-prep, for pupils aged 3 to 7 years, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS); 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 those who do so are full boarders. The school has identified 96 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); 50 of these receive additional specialist help. There are four pupils in the school who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 23 pupils. The school's previous full inspection was a focused compliance and educational quality inspection in June 2021 followed by progress monitoring inspections in June 2022 and in March 2023.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an unannounced progress monitoring inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the progress monitoring inspection in March 2023. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2022 and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8 (safeguarding) and (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 8; EYFS 3.6, 3.7 and 3.9	Not met
Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 (accessibility plan)	Met
Part 4, paragraphs 18–20 (safe recruitment of staff, supply staff and proprietor); NMS 19; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9	Not met
Part 4, paragraph 21 (single central register of appointments); NMS 19; EYFS 3.12	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 7, paragraph 33 (complaints)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 2	Not met

2. Inspection findings

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 8; EYFS 3.6, 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 Arrangements to safeguard pupils, including those in the EYFS, are implemented effectively in most areas in order to promote their welfare. This includes those relating to the Prevent duty. The school ensures there is provision to listen to pupils if they raise concerns. Pupils confirm that they know there are a variety of people to whom they can turn for support which they are happy to use should a safeguarding concern arise. Pupils receive a response when they express concerns, and appropriate action is taken where necessary. Pupils understand how to keep themselves and others safe, including when online. The school has appropriate filtering and monitoring systems to ensure pupils' online safety.
- 2.5 All staff, including those in positions of responsibility for safeguarding, are suitably trained in line with locally agreed procedures. There is a nominated safeguarding lead for the EYFS. Interviews with leaders and staff from all parts of the school confirm they understand their different roles in safeguarding. In particular, staff understand different types of abuse, including child-on-child abuse and sexual harassment, and the particular vulnerability of pupils with SEND. Staff are ready to identify, report and investigate potential abuse.
- 2.6 The school has a clear policy on whistleblowing which the staff are fully aware of. There is an appropriate staff code of conduct. Staff confirm they would actively raise any concerns with senior staff. Suitable arrangements to handle allegations against adults working with pupils are implemented effectively when they are raised. However, staff understanding of the concept of 'low-level concerns', concerns which do not meet the harms threshold, remains insecure. Staff are not fully conversant with the correct reporting lines outlined in the school policy. An awareness of raising low-level concerns or self-referral has not been fully embedded into the school culture, and concerns are not consistently recorded in a centralised log.
- 2.7 Safeguarding records suggest that pupils have received help when needed, and the school has worked with a number of partner agencies. The role of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) has been in transition since September 2023 whilst the new postholder completed training. Systems for recording safeguarding issues are also in transition from a paper-based system to an electronic management system. Current records are not fully complete, as they have not recorded all actions taken, and they are not filed systematically. This makes it hard for new post holders to have full understanding of any patterns or full knowledge of all cases. Various overview logs are held by different senior staff. Not all post holders are fully aware of the contents of the logs, which hold different information. This makes it difficult for all those responsible to track patterns of events or individual cases over time. It is planned that this will be rectified by the planned introduction of a centralised electronic management system, but staff have yet to be trained in how to use the new system.

- 2.8 Since the previous inspection, the school has made improvements to its processes for checking the suitability of new staff or others who are working in the school. The school ensures identity checks on contractors are taken on arrival. It has ensured that checks against the barred list are undertaken before staff start work, as this check is now done separately for all new staff as part of the recruitment process. All new staff have prohibition from management checks, although this check is not necessary for many of the new appointments. Two references have been obtained for all staff before appointment. However, evidence to support entries on the single central record of appointments was not available in staff files to confirm this. Anomalies found during the inspection suggest that training for those tasked with managing recruitment checks has not been fully embedded in order to ensure effective record keeping.
- 2.9 The safeguarding policy describes the arrangements for proprietorial oversight of the implementation of safeguarding arrangements. The governors are appropriately trained in safeguarding. However, the continued anomalies in staff files and in recruitment checks in several areas show that monitoring and oversight are not sufficiently effective. The proprietors have not fully implemented their action plan in this regard.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- 2.10 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.11 The school has a suitable accessibility plan. This is implemented effectively, including when making suitable access arrangements for pupils taking external examinations.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors [ISSR Part 4, paragraphs 18–21; NMS 19; EYFS 3.7, 3.9 and 3.12]

- 2.12 The school does not meet all of the standards and the requirements.
- 2.13 The school has carried out most of the required checks to verify the suitability of most newly appointed staff. However, the school was not able to provide evidence of checks on the qualifications of staff for several recent appointments and medical fitness checks were not completed prior to appointment for a number of staff. The school does not use supply staff. Checks on proprietors have been completed effectively.
- 2.14 The school keeps a suitable single central register of appointments.

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

- 2.15 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents.
- 2.16 For a period of time during the summer holidays 2023 and up to the inspection, a safeguarding policy was not available on the school website. This was rectified during the inspection.

Manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33]

- 2.17 The school meets the standard.
- 2.18 The school has an appropriate complaints policy which is implemented effectively. The school keeps appropriate records which show that it responds in a timely and appropriate manner to concerns raised at all stages.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 2]

- 2.19 The school does not meet the standards and the requirements.
- 2.20 The school's leadership and management have made some progress in implementing the actions required by the previous progress monitoring inspection. However, there are still instances in which recruitment procedures do not follow statutory guidance. This continues to signify a lack of informed oversight. Lack of effective oversight during the transition between implementing new safeguarding record keeping processes and training key staff has meant that some records are incomplete. Planning has not mitigated potential risk arising from decision making in these areas. This means that the school does not yet effectively promote the wellbeing of pupils. 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 and the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022 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, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 8; EYFS 3.6, 3.7 and 3.9

- The school must ensure that pupils' safeguarding records are kept consistently and comprehensively, to enable the transfer of all relevant information and to monitor patterns and trends [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1; EYFS 3.7].
- The school must ensure that staff training is sufficient to enable all to have a thorough understanding of how to report concerns about staff that do not meet the harms threshold [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1; EYFS 3.6]
- The school must ensure that entries made on the single central record of appointments are supported by the required evidence in staff files [paragraphs 7(a) and (b), 8(a) and (b); NMS 8.1; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].
- The school must ensure that monitoring and 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 8.1; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

ISSR Part 4, Suitability of staff, paragraph 18; NMS 19; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9

- The school must ensure that checks are undertaken to ascertain that all newly appointed staff are medically fit and, where relevant, have appropriate qualifications to fulfil their roles. These checks should be undertaken before staff begin working in the school [paragraph 18(2)(c)(ii); 18(2)(c)(iv); 18(2)(f); 18(3); NMS 19.1; EYFS 3.7 and 3.9].

ISSR Part 8, Quality of leadership and management, paragraph 34; NMS 2

- The proprietor must ensure that the school's leaders demonstrate good skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently and the wellbeing of pupils is actively promoted [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 2.1, 2.2, 2.4, 2.5 and 2.8].

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with governors. They talked with groups of pupils. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.