

Knowl Hill School

School Lane, Pirbright, Woking, Surrey. GU24 0JN

Inspection dates 4-6 November 2014 and 28 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement	3
Leadership and management	Requires improvement	3
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement	3

Summary of key findings

This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Over time, those in positions of governance have not held school leaders to account for improvements with sufficient rigour. Directors have not held a precise enough view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school, including relating to students' achievement.
- Thorough procedures to record the suitability of staff have only very recently been implemented. Safeguarding concerns are not always well documented. Students' safety has not been thoroughly enough ensured.
- A small proportion of students require high levels of support to manage their behaviour.
- Strategic leadership rests too heavily with the headteacher. Other senior and middle leaders do not play a clear enough role in school improvement. These leaders have had too few opportunities to develop leadership skills.
- The quality of teaching varies too widely across the school and also across subject areas. Not all teachers take enough account of what students already know and can do.
- Senior leaders' monitoring of teaching has not led to students making better progress.
- Students achieve less well in mathematics than in English or other subject areas. Tracking data indicate that students make faster progress in Key Stage 4 than in other key stages.

The school has the following strengths

- The highly skilled therapy team works effectively with teaching staff to provide specialist support for pupils.
- The recently appointed headteacher is clear about what needs to improve and how this can be achieved. Within a short period of time the failings identified at the emergency inspection of January 2014 have been addressed.
- Standards achieved in some subjects including art, design and photography are very high. There is superb work on display and in students' portfolios.
- The school's curriculum is broad and covers an appropriate balance of academic and vocational subjects to enrich pupils' learning.
- Students are happy at school. They are proud to take on positions of responsibility such as head boy, head girl, mentor or prefect.
- A new behaviour management system has reduced incidents of poor or disruptive behaviour.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection of November 2014 was carried out with one day's notice. The inspection was extended as more evidence was required. The inspection of January 2015 was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspectors observed eight lessons with seven different teachers. They held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders including those responsible for safeguarding children, behaviour management and curriculum development; the special educational needs coordinator and members of the therapy team. Meetings were also held with groups of staff and students.
- The inspectors took account of written communications from parents, 19 questionnaires completed by members of staff and discussions with pupils.
- A range of documents was scrutinised, including the school's safeguarding and behaviour management policies and the records relating to pupils' progress. Inspectors also considered how the school tries to promote improvement and manage teachers' performance.
- Particular focus was given to how the school manages pupils' behaviour, as complaints relating to this had been made to the Department for Education. The inspection was brought forward as a result of these complaints.

Inspection team

Jo Caswell, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Hilary Macdonald

Her Majesty's Inspector

Angela Podmore

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Knowl Hill School is an independent day special school for students with specific learning difficulties, principally dyslexia. Students may also have dyspraxia, attention deficit disorders or autism.
- The school was founded in 1984 and accepts up to 65 pupils aged from 7 to 16 years. There are currently 53 pupils aged from 9 to 16 years on roll. Of these, 45 students have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school has a number of aims to foster students' learning and help them to return to mainstream education. One of the school's objectives is: 'To support and help pupils improve their self-esteem and to make them realise that it is possible for them to achieve their potential.'
- The school was last inspected on 30 January 2014, when it was judged to be inadequate. A progress monitoring visit took place on 15 July 2014. During this visit, it was noted the school was making good progress in addressing the development points from the January inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching and raise achievement within the school so that it is consistently good or better by:
 - ensuring teachers routinely use information on pupils' prior attainment when planning lessons and additional support
 - sharing the good practice that already exists within the school more widely so that teachers have opportunities to learn from each other.
- Improve the leadership and management of the school by:
 - ensuring that the monitoring of teaching is robust and always linked to pupils' progress
 - continuing to strengthen the role of the directors so that they carry out all of their duties with appropriate rigour
 - providing leadership training for those in middle and senior leadership roles in order that they clearly understand their roles in driving school improvement.
- Improve behaviour and safety by ensuring that:
 - the use of the 'quiet room' is fully implemented and reviewed.
- Improve safeguarding arrangements within the school by:
 - ensuring that recruitment and vetting procedures are always fully completed and accurately recorded and that references are checked by telephoning the referee
 - improving the quality of written records relating to safeguarding by ensuring that details of concerns, actions taken and outcomes are recorded using precise language and that the difference between facts and what is alleged is always clear.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management

Require improvement

- Until very recently, the school's directors have not held a precise enough view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Over a substantial period, systems to monitor the school's effectiveness and to hold senior leaders to account have been weak. Since the appointment of the new headteacher, directors have been provided with detailed information, including regarding students' attainment and progress. Consequently, directors now hold an increasingly accurate picture of the school, ask more challenging questions and are able to track school improvement.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding students meet the minimum requirements. The site has recently been made more secure and, equally recently, long-standing gaps in the school's records of checks of staff suitability have been systematically checked and completed. All staff have recently completed health declarations. To date the school has not followed up references with verification telephone calls.
- Records of safeguarding matters contain all of the necessary information and detail, but some records lack precision. The form used for recording information does not specify where outcomes must be recorded and consequently this information is not readily accessible. The difference between facts and allegations is not always made explicitly clear.
- Leadership is not well shared. Until recently, neither senior nor middle leaders had been provided with specific leadership training and their roles and responsibilities were unclear. These matters are being addressed. However, senior and middle leaders are, typically, yet to take sufficient responsibility for securing school improvement.
- Under the leadership of the headteacher, who took up her post formally in September 2014, a culture of school improvement has been secured. New systems to monitor students' progress and strengthened processes to promote the quality of teaching have been introduced. Teaching, support and therapy staff understand that they are accountable for students' achievement.
- New assessment procedures have been introduced and these already show that pupils, including the most able are making progress. Senior leaders are able to identify pupils who need extra support to make good progress. Leaders have a clearer picture of where teaching is most and least effective.
- The senior leadership team recognises more work is necessary to develop the skills of some staff to take lead responsibility for certain aspects of teaching and learning. The school is starting to think about how teachers can take responsibility for some aspects of the curriculum, but this is not yet fully developed.
- Teachers are observed regularly and receive direct feedback regarding improving their teaching. Monitoring has not focused rigorously enough on students' progress and overall, monitoring has not resulted in significantly improved teaching or achievement. Steps are being taken to ensure that students' progress is at the heart of all monitoring. Skilled teachers are providing coaching and teachers are being afforded opportunities to observe one another and see first-hand what works well.
- A new behaviour policy has been successfully implemented. After some initial inconsistency, staff are now clear about how to respond to different types of behaviour and what to record. Records are reviewed daily and additional interventions and support are provided to students and also, where needed, to staff. Records demonstrate that there has been a decline in poor behaviour. Staff and students confirm that this is the case.
- Some parents raise concerns that some teachers lack expertise in teaching pupils with dyslexia and managing complex behaviour issues. All staff undertake professional training and receive additional support from more experienced teachers. Induction processes ensure that new teachers first become familiar with the students' needs and the school's approaches to teaching. Subsequent to this, new teachers access additional training in order to better understand students' specific special educational needs.
- Senior leaders recognise that communication is crucial to further improve links with parents and carers. Informal, fortnightly meetings offered to parents and carers as well more frequent newsletters are ensuring parents have better access to the information they require.
- The improvements in pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are beginning to help most pupils develop better attitudes towards learning. The enhanced curriculum ensures that most pupils learn to value each other's opinions and differences and this prepares them better for their futures and for life in modern Britain. Furthermore, a strong emphasis is placed on preparing students for their next step in education or employment. Courses at colleges and universities are thoroughly explored and students and their families are helped to make important choices.

- Senior leaders have recently reviewed the school's curriculum policy. The new changes mean that pupils now benefit from daily reading practice and personalised learning programmes. However, these changes are still in the early stages. Equality of opportunity has been strengthened through these changes.
- Vocational subjects, such as food technology, sport, carpentry, metalwork and photography help to broaden pupils' learning and interests. Off-site activities at a nearby farm and gardens are used well to extend pupils' learning and vocational skills.
- Good progress has been made in addressing the unmet independent school standards identified at the inspection of January 2014. All required policies and procedures are in place and have been systematically reviewed and updated over recent months. As a result of some very recent changes and improvements, including relating to safeguarding, the school is now compliant with the independent school standards.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - has not, until recently, been sufficiently aware of the data on the school's performance and has not been rigorous enough in monitoring the school's work to raise students' achievement
 - has held an imprecise view of the school's strengths and areas for improvement over time
 - is increasing the level of challenge to school leaders about the quality of teaching and staff performance management, including how teaching is rewarded or challenged, in order to be adequately informed
 - has not, until recently, taken steps to ensure that the school's safeguarding practices, including processes for recording checks of staff suitability are fully compliant
 - provides a high level of support and advice to the headteacher and senior leaders and is quickly addressing the need to be better informed and to hold leaders to account more thoroughly.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

requires improvement

Behaviour

- Students' behaviour requires improvement. Students say that behaviour in school has got better recently as students and staff have all become familiar with the new behaviour policy. Students' behaviour is tracked on a daily basis and the information is used to identify the triggers for poor behaviour and also to target additional support where it is most needed.
- Observations during inspection show that most students behave well in class and work hard. Students are clear that the adults in school are there to help them and deserve to be treated with politeness and respect.
- From time to time, the behaviour of a minority of younger students prevents them from making progress. This typically occurs when the students are less interested in the subject matter and the activity fails to capture their interest. At such times, students quickly lose concentration and learning is then disrupted.
- The use of a 'quiet room' has just been introduced. A period of supervised reflection in the 'quiet room' offers students who have significantly lost concentration or who are at risk of disturbing others with the chance to reflect upon their behaviour and identify how they could respond differently in the future. Students and therapy staff report that this is going well but it is too soon for there to be any measurable evidence of impact.
- Learning support assistants and the office staff provide relevant pastoral support to pupils.
- Through the school's programme of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, pupils develop a keen awareness of the needs of others. For example, a wide range of issues, such as the importance of justice, understanding identities and respecting diversity are discussed in assemblies. Older people from the village have visited the school to discuss their experiences in the Second World War and pupils have presented assemblies on Black History Month.
- Pupils understand the importance respecting others because they learn about democracy, the laws of the country, rights and responsibilities and different world faiths. They are empowered to challenge one another and learn about different pupils' needs. For example, pupils in the school have presented assemblies on what it means to have autism.
- Attendance is closely monitored and there is no unauthorised absence. Some students arrive late to school. Once in school students are punctual to their lessons.
- The independent school standards relating to the development of positive behaviours, including enabling students to learn right from wrong are complied with.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure requires improvement.
- Until recently, not enough regard was given to ensuring that the building contributed to students' safety. It is now well presented and tripping hazards are removed. A buzzer has been installed on the front door to alert staff of students exiting the building during the school day.
- The school has relevant systems in place to prevent bullying. Pupils clearly understand the school's Charter of RESPECT (Reliable, Equipped, Smart, Punctual, Eager, Caring and Tidy) and most try hard to tackle any negative behaviour issues and form positive relationships with adults and other pupils.
- All staff have received training in safeguarding and the school's written policies were created in partnership with a safeguarding expert. Systems to report any concerns about a pupil's welfare are understood. However written records lack detail and clarity.

The quality of teaching

requires improvement

- There are significant differences in the quality of teaching within the school and also between subjects. Provision to support pupils' learning is better within the Upper School as teachers work more closely with the therapy team and teaching assistants to support pupils' individual learning needs. In these lessons, teachers pitch work well to suit the abilities and interests of pupils. For example, in a Year 10 Food Technology lesson, there was good interaction between pupils and teaching staff which resulted in a well-structured, engaging lesson.
- The effectiveness of teaching in the Lower School has been affected by many recent staff changes. Some staff lack a clear understanding of the differing needs of pupils and fail to plan for these accordingly. Plans do not adequately take account of what students already know and can do. For example, when pupils told a teacher they had already completed a set activity with another teacher in a separate lesson, this was overlooked and the planned lesson continued.
- Within the Upper School, teachers assess pupils' learning well and use information on students' prior attainment when planning lessons. Teachers correctly identify when to move the lesson on or when pupils need additional support. Teachers have high expectations and plan and deliver lessons which engage pupils and make good use of resources.
- In some subject areas, including art, design and technology teachers convey passion and expertise in their subject area. As a result students are also highly enthusiastic and make good, and in some cases remarkable progress.
- Opportunities are being increased for teachers to observe one another at work in order to share and promote best practice.
- The marking of pupils' work varies in quality and effectiveness. Students are not always provided with enough advice to help them understand how to improve their work and secure higher marks.
- Leaders and managers prioritise developing the literacy and numeracy skills of pupils. Reading sessions and numeracy activities are carried out on a one-to-one basis and in small groups to accelerate progress, especially for the pupils with dyslexia and dyspraxia.
- Relationships between most pupils and staff are positive and there is a focus on mutual respect. As a result, most pupils enjoy the lessons and are motivated to learn.
- Full-time supervised education is provided. The independent school standards related to the quality of teaching are met although lessons do not consistently result in students making good progress.

The achievement of pupils

requires improvement

- The senior leadership team and those in positions of governance recognise that previous procedures for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress lacked rigour. New systems for tracking and monitoring students' progress were introduced in September 2014. The school has now developed a process for completing assessments throughout the year.
- A greater focus is now being given towards ensuring all pupils, irrespective of their different learning needs make progress. Analysis over time has been insufficiently detailed to check whether students with specific learning difficulties such as attention deficit disorders, dyslexia and autism achieve as well as other pupils in school. Evidence from students' work indicates that over time all students, irrespective of their learning needs, make progress from their individual starting points. Rates of progress vary between classes and subjects. As yet, the analysis of data is not used sufficiently well to inform action plans and lesson planning to accelerate students' progress.

- Teachers work effectively with other schools to moderate pupils' work and to ensure that assessments are accurate. Pupils in Year 6 in 2014 did not complete Standard Attainment Tests as all were assessed to be working below expected levels. Pupils in Year 11 took GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. The grades they obtained were typically below average. No students were entered early for GCSE examinations.
- The rate of pupils' progress is clearly linked to the quality of teaching. Progress is faster when teaching is effective and lessons capture pupils' interests. Where behaviour is managed well in class, pupils are more engaged in their learning, and make better progress.
- Scrutiny of students' work indicates that most able students typically make good progress in most subject areas. Their progress is better in English than in mathematics. The school provides additional support to those students identified as being particularly talented in any particular subject. For example, additional time and access to resources is provided for art students completing highly complex pieces of art work.
- Classrooms and specialist teaching areas are well resourced. Pupils have regular access to computers and technology to support their learning. Teachers make good use of resources to capture pupils' interests and engagement. For example, in a Year 11 Citizenship lesson, pupils engaged in animated discussion and debate after looking at images of Great Britain and reflecting on what being British means in today's world.
- The broad and balanced curriculum provides the potential for pupils to achieve in different areas. For example, pupils develop teamwork and leadership skills through classroom activities and participation in sporting events, or through the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. A number of opportunities exist within the school for pupils to take on extra responsibility and to promote their personal and social development. For example, older pupils act as peer mentors for younger pupils. Some pupils are elected onto the school council, or are appointed as prefects. Through discussion, pupils demonstrate that they take their responsibilities seriously and enjoy contributing towards the development of the school.
- The independent school standards relating to the achievement of students are met and students have the opportunity to learn and make progress in academic and vocational subjects. However, achievement is better in some subjects and year groups than in others.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053.

School details

Unique reference number	125436
Inspection number	452991
DfE registration number	936/6554

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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 school
Age range of pupils	7–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	53
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Knowl Hill Foundation
Chair	Norma Todd
Headteacher	Dr Ruth Bailey
Date of previous school inspection	30 January 2014
Annual fees (day pupils)	£15,762
Telephone number	01483 797032
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