

Skinner's' Kent Academy

Sandown Park, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN2 4PY

Inspection dates 8–9 June 2016

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school is led by an exceptional and ambitious executive principal, skilfully supported by the principal, senior team and governors. Together they have created a culture based on the belief that all pupils can achieve well.
- The very high quality of teaching leads to pupils making outstanding progress. Teachers use their very strong subject knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs to prepare very well-structured lessons. These, together with probing questions and valuable feedback, contribute to pupils' high achievement.
- Outcomes for pupils are excellent. Pupils make excellent progress across a wide range of subjects, whatever their circumstances.
- Disadvantaged pupils make similar and sometimes better progress than other pupils nationally because school leaders ensure that they receive extensive and effective support.
- Excellent behaviour in classrooms and around the school means that pupils get on very well together and are exceptionally keen to learn. They are polite, friendly and very supportive of each other.
- The welfare and safety of pupils are a very high priority for all staff. Staff work closely with parents and external agencies to ensure that pupils get any support they might need.
- The sixth form is skilfully led and managed. Students make excellent progress from their starting points.
- Governors are highly committed and know the school well. Members of the governing body bring to their roles a wealth of experience, skills and knowledge, which enables them to support further improvements to the school.
- The curriculum helps pupils grow into self-confident, inquiring and resilient learners. Pupils are able to discuss challenging and complex issues in highly articulate and reflective ways.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- As the sixth form continues to grow, widen the range of courses available to students.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Determined and bold leadership by the executive principal and the principal has ensured that this is a highly effective school. They are motivated by a strong desire to give pupils the best life chances and choices. Since the last inspection, leaders and governors have single-mindedly implemented their vision of outstanding education and successfully tackled previous areas for improvement. Staff, pupils and parents acknowledge the positive impact that has been made, particularly on teaching and learning. They are proud of the school and value this strong leadership.
- Senior leaders have a very detailed and accurate understanding of teachers' strengths and areas for development because they visit lessons and look at pupils' work frequently. They use what they know skilfully to harness the expertise of staff and share outstanding practice. This aspect of the school's work is led very effectively. The quality of teaching has improved significantly since the last inspection.
- Senior leaders are uncompromising in their high expectations of staff and pupils. Staff understand these demands and recognise the benefits they bring to their work. One member of staff explained that it felt like they were on 'a winning team'. Staff say they feel motivated and trusted to be creative and innovative in their teaching to support pupils' learning. They appreciate that leaders are visible, approachable and listen to their views. Newly qualified teachers particularly value the time devoted to their development and being made to feel part of the school community from day one.
- Evaluation of the school's performance is accurate and never complacent. The leaders' starting point is that there is always room to be better. Senior leaders plan carefully to secure improvements in all pupils' academic success as well as their personal development.
- Senior leaders and governors understand the importance of effective succession planning. They focus constantly on building leadership capability at all levels of the school and giving staff opportunities to develop the necessary skills. As a result, senior and middle leadership teams are very strong and effective.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils benefit from a broad, balanced and interesting curriculum which has the development of pupils as resilient, resourceful and inquiring individuals at its centre. Pupils are given plentiful opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, including through a varied programme of extra-curricular activities. Nearly 80% of pupils regularly attend one or more of these activities.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils know and understand about British values, such as tolerance and respect for others. There is a culture in lessons of healthy, respectful debate and pupils learn about a range of faiths in religious education. A thoughtfully planned programme of assemblies provides regular opportunities for pupils to reflect on current affairs and experiences that may differ from their own.
- Senior leaders are determined that disadvantaged pupils, including those in the sixth form, should achieve as well as their classmates and this message is communicated relentlessly across the school. Pastoral and subject leaders work closely together to exchange information and share successful approaches about how best to support these pupils. Leaders have ensured that pupil premium funding (additional government funding) is used very effectively, so that these pupils make excellent progress during their time at the school. This exemplifies the ethos of the school, where equality is at its heart.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Governors possess a wide range of relevant skills and experience which they put to very good use by providing a high level of support and challenge to school leaders. This expertise is deployed very effectively to support strategic planning. For example, governors are evaluating the future development of the sixth form with school leaders. Governors are a regular and active presence in the school, checking on the progress of initiatives and closely monitoring the work of leaders. For example, governors recently audited provision for pupils who have special educational needs or disability.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leadership of this area is very strong. Staff engage with parents, carers and external agencies very effectively to make sure that pupils are safe and supported. School leaders often go above and beyond what might be reasonably expected to ensure that pupils who find themselves in challenging circumstances can attend school and access all it offers in the same way as other pupils. Procedures to ensure that all staff receive relevant training, including about the risks related to radicalisation and extremism, are very strong as are the practices for record-keeping.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teachers have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teachers use their very strong subject knowledge effectively to teach well-structured lessons that strike the right balance between consolidating and deepening pupils' understanding. High-quality teaching across the school, including in the sixth form, enables pupils to make strong and sustained progress.
- Highly effective questioning is a common feature in lessons. Teachers use this strategy to check and challenge pupils' understanding. Pupils are encouraged to question each other and the teacher to test out their thinking, and they often do.
- Teachers adapt their plans very well to meet the needs of different learners. There is not a one-size-fits-all approach in this school. Teachers structure tasks very effectively for lower-attaining pupils so that they make excellent progress. The most able pupils are challenged well through more difficult work or through discussion that leads to deeper understanding. For example, a Year 8 mathematics class of the most able pupils made excellent progress when tackling a higher-level GCSE mathematics paper.
- There are very strong working relationships between staff and pupils based on mutual respect. This creates a positive environment where pupils feel confident and encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.
- Pupils' literacy skills are developed extremely well across subjects. Pupils use an impressive vocabulary because teachers encourage them to use new words and explain their meanings. Teachers frequently correct pupils' spelling, punctuation and grammar errors. Pupils develop excellent communication skills because teachers structure class and group tasks very effectively. As a result, pupils fluently and confidently discuss challenging topics.
- There are effective and consistent methods of assessment across subjects. Pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. The feedback pupils receive from their teachers contributes to their high achievement. This is particularly effective in English, where pupils' books are 'working documents' showing reflective and mature communication between teachers and pupils.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils feel very safe and well looked after by the school's staff, a view shared by the overwhelming majority of parents. Pupils have total confidence in staff to help and support them should they have any concerns.
- A culture of mutual respect and trust is evident across the school. The values of acceptance and cooperation permeate all aspects of school life to create an inclusive and harmonious community, where difference is embraced and celebrated. Pupils who met with inspectors explained that racist, homophobic or sexist behaviour would not be tolerated by staff or the great majority of pupils.
- Pupils are highly resilient and self-confident. They are not afraid to say they do not understand because this is not viewed by staff or pupils as a weakness but as a chance to learn something. Pupils value feedback from their classmates and teachers because it offers them an opportunity to improve their work. Parents who spoke to an inspector felt their children's confidence and self-esteem are being very well developed by the school.
- Incidents of bullying are very rare. They are dealt with swiftly and effectively. Pupils and the large majority of parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, have confidence in the school's systems to tackle such behaviour. Staff closely monitor when unacceptable behaviour has been dealt with previously to make sure that it does not continue. Parents who spoke to an inspector particularly appreciate this approach.
- Pupils are well informed about how to keep themselves safe online because of effective teaching about potential risks communicated effectively through assemblies and lessons and by outside speakers.
- As a result of frequent and open communication, close and effective checks are kept by school staff on the safety and well-being of the pupils who attend alternative provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They are polite, friendly and outgoing. They are proud of their school and their achievements. Pupils are self-disciplined. Little or no adult action is needed to ensure that pupils act in a calm and orderly way.
- Pupils demonstrate a keen desire to learn. They show genuine engagement and real enthusiasm for their work. Pupils value the standard of education being offered to them and understand what difference it will make to their life chances. Pupils are able to concentrate on their learning because low-level disruption is extremely rare. The number of pupils who receive a fixed-term exclusion is very low.
- Attendance has improved, markedly so for vulnerable groups of pupils, to be in line with national figures. This is a result of determined and focused work by staff to provide extensive help and support to pupils and their families.
- Pupils listen carefully to others and work very cooperatively together to share ideas and perspectives and to give each other feedback, demonstrating supportive and well-developed communication skills. Inspectors saw many examples of pupils talking maturely and articulately about challenging and complex issues in a manner that was beyond their age.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- For the last three years, by the end of key stage 4, pupils have made particularly strong progress when compared with national figures in English and mathematics. In 2015, the proportion of pupils who made good or better progress in these subjects was significantly above national averages.
- Pupils join the school with levels of attainment that are much lower than the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving five A* to C grades for GCSE, including English and mathematics, has risen from 39% (significantly below the national average) in 2012, to be in line with the national average of 56% in 2015. School assessment information shows that the current Year 11 pupils are likely to achieve a further improvement on this figure.
- Standards are high across the curriculum but high proportions of pupils secure better than average outcomes in English, drama, mathematics, and design and technology.
- Disadvantaged pupils make the same or better progress than other pupils nationally. This is because the achievement of these pupils is a high priority across the school and personalised provision is closely matched to their needs.
- From their starting points, pupils who have special educational needs or disability make similar strong progress to their classmates. These pupils are closely monitored by teachers and leaders, with effective support put in place where it is most needed.
- Pupils who attend alternative provision make good progress as a result of close liaison between school staff and providers.
- The most able pupils benefit from the culture of high expectations and challenge, and make very strong progress across the school.
- Pupils in all year groups are well supported in their next steps by a strong careers education programme that includes visiting speakers, one-to-one interviews and contact with local businesses. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education, employment or training.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- Members of the sixth form make a very strong contribution to the culture of the school. They are self-motivated and have excellent personal skills. Students are positive role models for younger pupils. Through their community service programme, students provide very valuable practical support and guidance to other pupils and to members of the wider community, for example through voluntary work in a local hospice.
- Leaders evaluate the quality of sixth-form teaching, learning and assessment in highly analytical ways to ensure the high standards and aspirations seen in the rest of the school are replicated in the 16 to 19 study programmes. Effective work with other local schools contributes to strong quality assurance processes which check the accuracy of teachers' assessment.

- Leadership of the sixth form is strong and developmental. Leaders recognise that as the number of pupils in the rest of the school increases, the provision of a wider variety of courses is crucial to the sixth form's continued growth and success.
- Positive relationships contribute to high-quality learning in the sixth form. Students receive detailed, constructive feedback where teachers pinpoint what they need to do to succeed in their subject. Carefully planned lessons ensure that learning is embedded and that deeper, insightful thinking is promoted.
- Students make excellent progress in their International Baccalaureate Diploma subjects, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, often from low starting points. In the current Year 13, all students have achieved the equivalent of a C grade or above and a third have achieved the equivalent of a B grade or above.
- Almost all students complete their study programmes. In 2015, all students who completed their study programmes progressed to sustained education, employment, training or apprenticeships. Students benefit from highly personalised, impartial careers advice and work experience placements closely linked to their individual plans for the future. Students were at pains to point out how much they value this guidance.

School details

Unique reference number	135888
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10000604

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy sponsor-led
Age range of pupils	11–18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	738
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	28
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Richard Sax
Executive Principal	Sian Carr
Principal	Matthew Tompkins
Telephone number	01892 534377
Website	www.skinnerkentacademy.org.uk
Email address	info@skinnerkentacademy.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	7–8 March 2012

Information about this school

- The school is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. It is a non-selective school in a local authority which operates a selective system.
- The school is an International Baccalaureate World School. Pupils follow the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme in Years 7 to 11. Students in the sixth form follow the Career-related Programme. The sixth form opened in September 2013.
- The proportion of pupils who have special educational needs or disability is above average.
- The proportion of pupils for whom the school receives pupil premium funding (additional government funding) is above average.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage. The number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds is below average, as is the proportion who speak English as an additional language.
- The school meets the government's current floor standards, which set the minimum expectations for the attainment and progress of pupils.
- The current principal took up the post in September 2015 and was previously the school's vice-principal. At the same time, the previous principal was appointed as executive principal for this school and Skinners' Kent Primary School.
- Ten pupils currently access alternative provision at the Two Bridges pupil referral unit and the Hawkwell centre, part of West Kent Health Needs Education Service.
- The school's website is compliant and meets the requirements for the publication of specific information.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made 13 short visits and 22 more extended observations of pupils' learning in lessons, including many with senior and middle leaders.
- Inspectors met with governors, senior and middle leaders, a group of staff and a group of newly qualified teachers. An inspector met with a group of parents.
- Inspectors met with pupils from each key stage and observed them in form time, in class and at informal times such as during breaktimes.
- Inspectors considered 74 responses to Parent View, 67 free-text responses from parents, 82 responses to the staff questionnaire and 59 pupil survey responses.
- An inspector had a telephone discussion with members of staff from the Two Bridges pupil referral unit and the Hawkwell centre.
- Inspectors scrutinised documentation, including leaders' evaluation of the school's performance, information relating to the quality of teaching, information about pupils' progress, school policies and procedures, and the school's arrangements for safeguarding.

Inspection team

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