

Knowl Hill School

School Lane, Pirbright, Woking, Surrey GU24 0JN

Inspection dates

7–9 November 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Leaders have improved the school, following a period of turbulence. They have implemented significant changes across the board, and have well-considered plans in place to secure continuous improvement.
- Leaders have ensured that the school fully meets the independent school standards.
- Staff are dedicated to meeting pupils' needs. In pursuit of this aim, leaders have introduced successful new approaches to tracking pupils' progress, managing behaviour and raising the quality of teaching.
- Middle leaders and subject leaders now make a greater contribution to improving the school. They are well supported in their roles by the headteacher and deputy headteacher.
- Teaching has improved and is now generally effective. Some teaching, especially in the junior school, promotes pupils' progress exceptionally well.
- Pupils make strong progress based on a range of indicators, including those relating to confidence in speech and language. Carefully considered therapies have a positive impact on pupils' learning and well-being.
- The curriculum meets pupils' needs well. Pupils benefit from the combination of academic, creative and vocational courses provided. Changes to the timetable and school day have aided pupils' learning and enjoyment.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is successfully promoted throughout the curriculum and in dedicated lessons.
- Pupils behave well, treating each other, and staff, with respect. They feel safe, are keen to learn and give of their best.
- Directors have stepped up to the challenge of improving the school. They now work closely with leaders to ensure that pupils' needs are met and procedures are properly followed.
- Practice in assessment is not as consistently strong as other aspects of teaching. Some teachers do not check to see if the tasks they set are enabling pupils to make strides in their learning.
- Despite leaders' efforts to build effective parental partnerships, parents' views remain polarised. The majority of parents are very positive about the school but a number are not.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop teachers' practice in assessment so all pupils, especially the most able, make the progress of which they are capable, by:
 - checking that the tasks teachers set enable pupils to strengthen their knowledge, skills and understanding
 - adapting planned learning in response to checks, especially increasing the levels of challenge.
- Directors and leaders should refine and extend ongoing work to build a strong partnership between the school and the parent body, by:
 - ensuring that parents gain a better understanding of the different ways the school meets each pupil's individual needs, the rationale behind the decisions leaders make, and the school's many strengths
 - developing leaders' responses to parental feedback, including better communicating any changes made in response to parents' suggestions and concerns.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- Following a period of turbulence, in which the two previous headteachers left in fairly rapid succession, leaders and directors have improved the school so that it is now good. The new headteacher and deputy headteacher, working effectively together, have made deep and far-reaching changes, ensuring that all independent school standards are fully met. The school has a caring and optimistic atmosphere, placing pupils' needs at the forefront of its work. Leaders and directors are not complacent and are determined to make the school as effective as it can be.
- Leaders have redefined the culture in the school so that it is more focused on meeting pupils' individual needs. For example, they have developed the curriculum and the way pupils' behaviour is managed. Leaders now carefully check that support for pupils is tailored to their requirements.
- Senior leaders have a sharp understanding of where the school is in its improvement journey. They accurately identify where strengths and weaknesses lie in all areas, including in teaching. Senior and middle leaders have successfully improved teaching by providing teaching staff with detailed feedback following their quality assurance checks. Teaching staff have responded well to this feedback because it has helped them to better meet the needs of individual pupils and also develop their own practice.
- Leaders have successfully developed a new system for tracking the progress pupils make towards targets based on detailed assessments carried out at the start of the academic year. Senior leaders meticulously analyse tracking information to identify pupils whose progress towards their end-of-year targets is too slow. Where necessary, they refine the support pupils receive to ensure that their rates of progress increase. Following leaders' thorough review last term, the tracking system in the senior school is being revamped so that it links more closely with GCSE grade descriptors.
- Middle leaders now play a much greater role in moving the school forward. They have benefited from external training as well as support provided by senior leaders. Middle leaders quality assure the work of the colleagues they manage with increasing confidence. They also make good use of information from pupil progress tracking to identify where teaching approaches may need further refinement.
- The two special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) have a highly detailed understanding of each pupil's individual needs and how best these needs should be met. Review procedures have been strengthened and there is now greater clarity about the different types of support that assistants and therapists provide for pupils. Monitoring of the impact that assistants and therapists have is also more thorough.
- The changes that leaders have made to the curriculum have benefited pupils' learning and progress. Learning is mostly structured in shorter, more focused sessions which aid pupils' concentration. The daily reading slot helps younger pupils develop their phonics skills and older pupils to develop their love of reading. Pupils' creative skills are enhanced through courses in photography, textiles and art. Timetabled enrichment activities enable pupils to harness their enthusiasm and also develop their social skills.
- Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is effectively promoted through

curriculum subjects as well as through enrichment activities and personal development programmes. Pupils gain a thorough grounding in the fundamental British values in dedicated citizenship lessons, through presentations from visitors who play key roles in the community, and by participating in debates, as well as taking part in a mock 'Brexit' referendum. Pupils apply their understanding of tolerance when responding to their peers who have different views and perspectives.

- Leaders' endeavours have led to improved relations with parents, many of whom commend the school. The majority who responded to the Parent View online survey indicated that they would recommend the school. Several parents visited inspectors on site to endorse the school, with one describing it as a 'life-line'. However, despite improved relations, some parents remain dissatisfied and expressed concerns about the provision. Leaders acknowledge that they need to continue building positive relationships with parents to create a broader consensus across the parent body.

Governance

- Governance is more effective than it was. The chair of directors is determined that governance continues to evolve and is very receptive to external guidance and advice. Directors are determined to maintain their heightened focus, and have stepped up their involvement in the school, especially in checking the school's responses to safeguarding issues, as well as responding to concerns raised by parents.
- Directors have not shied away from making difficult decisions in pursuit of their high ambitions for the school, including dealing vigorously with poor performance. Of note, is how directors have used their professional expertise to good effect. Directors know the school very well, visiting during the school day to meet with staff and pupils. They make good use of information on pupils' performance from the headteacher's detailed reports to ask probing questions and challenge leaders.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The chair of directors diligently oversees the school's work in this area. For instance, she meets frequently with the designated lead to check how well leaders have responded to safeguarding issues and that any learning points for staff have been taken on board. She wisely ensures that records from these meetings are shared with the board of directors so they can guide planned improvements to safeguarding policies and procedures. The school complies with safeguarding guidance, including having a suitable safeguarding policy on its website.
- The headteacher works closely and effectively with external safeguarding agencies. She has acted fully on their advice about the best ways to make expectations and boundaries clear to staff. In addition, the designated lead assiduously refers concerns about pupils' safety with the appropriate local authority's welfare officers. Working in conjunction with the headteacher, she uses her highly nuanced understanding of each pupil's needs to feed back to welfare officers about the suitability of proposed support.
- The headteacher and the school's safeguarding lead have a deep understanding of each pupil's requirements and how this impacts on their ability to stay safe. They use this when making decisions about supporting individual pupils, including ensuring they have access to counselling and therapies. The emotional support the school provides has a tangible

impact on raising pupils' self-esteem and well-being.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Support and training to develop teachers' practice is effective; as a result, teaching has improved and continues to do so. Leaders and directors have rightly identified that practice in assessment is less well developed than other aspects of teaching.
- In mathematics, teachers make good use of equipment to bring abstract concepts to life and ensure that pupils have a deep and secure understanding of key theories. For example, pupils grasped some of the key concepts of algebra more easily because they could manipulate different coloured teddy-bear models to represent simplifying equations.
- Across the school, literacy is promoted effectively. Pupils develop their reading skills well through additional reading sessions at the start of the day. In the senior school, these sessions provide pupils with opportunities to reflect on characters' motivation and hypothesise about what might happen next in the story. Sessions in the junior school successfully fill any gaps pupils have in their phonic knowledge and support them in applying their phonic skills when reading.
- Additional specialised support from speech and language therapists is effective. The assistance provided helps pupils gain confidence in spelling and defining subject-specific vocabulary. For example, in science, because pupils have a secure knowledge of the appropriate scientific vocabulary, they were able to explain what chemical changes occur and why.
- Teachers use their strong subject knowledge to arouse pupils' enthusiasm for learning. In practical subjects, pupils' competency is enhanced by the demonstrations teachers give.
- In the junior school, pupils develop their basic skills well because most teachers use appropriate methods to gauge how secure pupils are in their learning. As a result, any misconceptions pupils have are quickly tackled.
- Pupils value the individualised support they are given from teachers, who, they feel, 'go the extra mile' for them. Pupils commented on the way that staff have gone out of their way to cultivate their talents, especially their creativity.
- Teachers' questioning supports pupils in strengthening their understanding. Teachers use a variety of question types to help pupils who struggle with recall to fix key ideas in their memory as well as develop their abilities to conjecture and speculate.
- Across the school, teachers do not always check well enough whether the tasks they set are enhancing pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. In particular, most-able pupils are not always provided with the additional challenge they need when they complete tasks quickly. Some pupils also struggle because they are moved on too quickly to the next topic.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils are well nurtured because of the calm school environment and additional support they receive. They display positive attitudes to learning and are keen to complete the tasks teachers set for them.
- Targeted therapies assist pupils in socialising, developing positive attitudes to learning and gaining greater levels of self-awareness. Pupils commented that the school has a 'family feel'. One stated that they 'like everything' about the school and another described the school as their 'life'.
- The effective careers information and guidance programme, which includes a stint of work experience, encourages pupils to pursue their ambitions. Pupils move on to their next stage smoothly because they are well supported through the transition process, including by being accompanied by teaching assistants on visits to post-16 provision.
- Pupils develop a strong understanding of how to keep safe, especially in relation to the internet and social media. Leaders have recently overhauled the personal development programme so it better supports pupils in developing healthy relationships, finding their place in society and valuing the diversity of their local communities. Pupils commented positively on the candid approach that teachers adopt when delivering sex and relationships education.
- Rare incidents of bullying are dealt with vigorously by staff. Pupils recognise that some of their peers find it harder to manage their emotions than others, especially when out of lessons. They are confident that any aggressive or inappropriate behaviour will be dealt with appropriately by members of staff, including those who supervise pupils during the lunch break. Peer mentors also play a crucial role in supporting younger pupils during social times.

Behaviour

- Pupils' behaviour has improved and it is now good. Most parents who shared their views with inspectors, either personally or via free-text within Parent View, commented on how there has been a marked improvement in behaviour. Pupils also behave well during learning sessions delivered by off-site providers.
- Over the last academic year, there has been a reduction in poor-behaviour incidents. As a result of improvements in behaviour management and pupils' needs being better met, pupils no longer have to leave lessons to take time out in the 'quiet room'.
- The school uses fixed-term exclusion as a last resort, and only in order to uphold the higher standards of behaviour and conduct that have now been established. The number of fixed-term exclusions has declined over the last academic year. Pupils commented on how improvements in behaviour made them feel more positive about their school.
- Pupils' attendance is improving, and attendance to date is much better than the same period last academic year. Following a successful clamp down on lateness, punctuality to lessons has also improved.

- Occasionally, when teaching is less effective, pupils are not as engaged, and they display some off-task behaviour, such as talking when they should be listening to the teacher.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The majority of pupils join the school having experienced difficulties in their mainstream schools, and all have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Some pupils also have significant gaps in their knowledge, skills and understanding. Effective teaching, a curriculum that meets pupils' needs, and precisely targeted additional support enable them to make strong progress from their starting points.
- The education pupils receive at the school means they are very well prepared for the next stages of their education, training or employment. All pupils who left at the end of the last academic year progressed on to further training or post-16 education.
- Staff closely analyse each pupil's results in the wide range of assessments and tests undertaken at the start and end of each academic year. As a consequence, they are acutely aware of how well each pupil has performed and what areas need further development, as well as any underlying trends. Pupils make especially strong progress in comprehension skills and reading accuracy. However, progress in spelling is not as consistently strong, as a number of pupils have specific difficulties with spelling.
- Therapists expertly employ their professional knowledge when assessing pupils' language and communication skills at the start and end of each year. Based on these tests, the majority of pupils make good progress. Due to the dedication and expertise of therapists, some pupils make exceptionally strong progress in developing their communication skills, including their ability to understand and respond to spoken language.
- The tracking system shows that pupils across the school generally make good progress towards meeting their end-of-year academic targets, as well as their communication and speech targets. The way pupils' attainment is measured has been carefully reviewed and changes are underway so that assessment dovetails more closely with the new grading system used for some GCSEs. Pupils make particularly strong progress in practical and creative subjects.
- Pupils access a range of vocational and academic level 1 and 2 qualifications, which include GCSE courses in a variety of subjects. They are well prepared for external examinations by the guidance teachers provide about the best way to tackle questions. In 2017's GCSE examinations, a small number of pupils achieved at least a 'C' grade or the equivalent in mathematics, English literature and additional science. Some pupils also attained good passes in art and design.
- Pupils' confidence and skills in reading are developed well through daily reading sessions, which also support pupils in gaining confidence and competence in reading aloud. As a consequence, the vast majority make good progress in reading from when they are tested at the start of the academic year to when they are retested at the end, with a number making very rapid progress.
- The headteacher has ensured that pupils in the senior school have a knowledge of the basic numeracy skills required in everyday life. As a result, the majority of pupils leave the school competent in essential numeracy skills such as telling the time, knowing the days of the week and months of the year, and using multiplication tables.

- The most able are provided with additional stretch, for example those doing the higher-level mathematics GCSE access extra revision sessions. However, some teachers do not check that the tasks they set are stretching the most able enough. As a consequence, most-able pupils sometimes do not make the rapid process of which they are capable.

School details

Unique reference number	125436
DfE registration number	936/6554
Inspection number	10039158

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	47
Proprietor	The Knowl Hill Foundation
Chair	Norma Todd
Headteacher	Jan Lusty
Annual fees (day pupils)	£16,161 to £22,527 (£31,560 including language class)
Telephone number	01483 797032
Website	www.knowlhillschool.org.uk
Email address	JLusty@khs.education
Date of previous inspection	4–6 November 2014 and 28 January 2015

Information about this school

- Knowl Hill School is an independent day special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties, principally dyslexia. Pupils may also have social and communication needs, dyspraxia, attention deficit disorders or autistic spectrum disorder.
- Although the school is in Surrey, pupils come from approximately ten different local authorities.
- The school is split into a senior school and junior school. The senior school is for pupils in Years 8, 9, 10 and 11 and the junior school for pupils in Years 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7.
- The head of the junior school is also the SENCo for younger pupils. The headteacher is

the SENCo for the senior school.

- The school was founded in 1984 and accepts up to 65 pupils aged from seven to 16 years. There are currently 47 pupils on roll. Of these, 43 pupils have an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs.
- The school aims for each pupil to: 'become a confident resilient learner; reach their academic potential; leave prepared for adulthood, both emotionally and practically; believe that there is no limit to what they can achieve in life'.
- An additional inspection was conducted at the school on 28 September 2016.
- Since the last full standard independent inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors made short visits, on seven different occasions, to observe teaching and learning in most subjects taught in the junior and senior school. On almost all occasions, the headteacher or deputy headteacher accompanied inspectors. Tutorial time as well as reading time and enrichment were also observed by inspectors. Inspectors scrutinised a sample of pupils' work as well as tracking information about pupils' progress.
- Formal meetings were held with pupils on two occasions. Inspectors also met formally with three parents/carers and informally with parents at the start and end of the school day. A telephone call was held with a parent. Inspectors also made telephone calls to the designated officer for Surrey local authority, a manager from the local authority north-west division of the special educational needs team and a representative from Skills Way, the off-site learning provider used by the school.
- Inspectors held meetings separately with senior leaders, middle leaders, the member of staff responsible for work experience, and the leader of the therapy department.
- Documentation and policies, which included the school's own evaluation, development plans, records relating to safeguarding and information about pupils' progress, were checked for compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspectors took account 26 responses to the Parent View survey, 20 comments made by parents on free-text and a total of 28 questionnaires submitted by members of staff.

Inspection team

Sarah Hubbard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jenny Boyd

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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