

Wessex College

Wessex Lodge, Nunney Road, Frome, Somerset BA11 4LA

Inspection dates

13–15 March 2018

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The proprietor has ensured that Wessex College continues to provide a good and improving standard of education for pupils.
- Leaders rigorously check that they meet the independent school standards in full. There is a careful scrutiny of policies and procedures to ensure that pupils are safe and looked after.
- Recent changes to the structure at leadership level are securing strong improvement to the quality of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Staff have a deep understanding of pupils' often complex needs. They successfully plan adaptations to ensure that pupils enjoy their learning and make good progress.
- Pupils benefit from a varied and rich curriculum. Activities support pupils' confidence and self-esteem as well as promoting positive aspirations for the future.
- Leaders nurture positive partnerships with parents and carers. A well-planned transition programme and ongoing communication ensures that everyone is involved in securing the best outcomes for pupils.
- Attendance quickly improves as pupils settle. They enjoy their time at school and want to attend, as they feel respected, safe and valued.
- The new assessment systems provide good information about the progress that pupils make. Sometimes, this progress is not as clear to pupils.
- Morale is high and staff have responded well to leaders' high expectations and to the improvements being made to the quality of teaching and learning. Staff are developing their skills to ensure that pupils learn to work independently, rather than to be reliant on help.

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?

- Continue to make improvements to the quality of teaching and learning so that pupils are consistently given the right amount of support to help them successfully complete tasks while also learning to be independent learners.
- Embed the new assessment system to ensure that pupils are able to see the progress they are making and that this is clear in their workbooks and folders.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The last year has seen a dramatic change of direction for the school. Recognising a need for improvement, the proprietor took action. Changes to the staff team, including new arrangements for leadership, have resulted in much higher expectations and exciting new learning opportunities. Leaders are uncompromising in their ambition to secure the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- A real strength of the school is the rich curriculum on offer for pupils. At the school, pupils have regular art and music sessions. The recent addition of a farm site to the school has led to a broadening of the curriculum, which now provides a wealth of vocational learning experiences. Activities are carefully organised across the two sites and decisions about learning paths are based on pupils' aspirations. Staff work creatively and flexibly to match learning with pupils' interests. As a result, pupils who previously have not engaged with learning are now enjoying school and growing in self-confidence.
- Staff set high expectations of respect and tolerance. Pupils are expected to be polite, tolerant of differences and to consider the views of others. While this is challenging for pupils, staff are relentless and consistent and therefore pupils are increasingly able to rise to this expectation. This helps to prepare pupils well for their next steps beyond school.
- Leaders have ensured that the schools standards are met. They have reviewed all procedures and policies to ensure that there is a clarity and transparency about their expectations. There is a culture of continuous improvement and leaders have thorough systems for ensuring that standards are checked. For example, a detailed audit system ensures that aspects of health and safety are continually monitored.
- Staff are buoyant and excited by the challenges set by the director of education and the headteachers. Robust performance management and ongoing professional development continues to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Leaders take care to support the well-being of staff. They also spot strengths among the team and ensure that they share good practice. They hold teachers to account for the quality of their work through clear and transparent appraisal systems.

Governance

- The proprietor has a sound and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to develop further. She is a visible presence around the school and very much part of its development. Recently, she recognised that some changes were needed to improve the leadership arrangements and wasted no time in ensuring that these improvements were put in place. Her vision to ensure that pupils have the best possible learning opportunities is shared across the staff team. Staff feel valued and trusted and as a result, they give their best.
- There is a recently formed governing body. Governors are active in the school. They visit frequently, and the visits are productive. Governors have particular areas of responsibility and they make checks and challenge leaders to ensure that standards remain high and the school continues to improve.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The safeguarding policy meets current government requirements and is available on the school's website. Recruitment procedures and checks are thorough and well-organised.
- There is a strong culture of keeping pupils safe and staff are well informed of how to notice concerns through a programme of safeguarding training. The training schedule is meticulously organised to ensure that everyone has the information and guidance they need to keep pupils safe. Training covers a wide range of topics including child sexual exploitation and radicalisation. The designated safeguarding lead ensures that any concerns are reported quickly and escalated appropriately.
- Staff know pupils very well and this is supported by the daily communications with parents. Leaders have frequent meetings with parents to discuss aspects of pupils' well-being and achievements. The strong partnerships help staff to keep pupils safe, as they have a full and up-to-date knowledge of any additional challenges or pressures being faced.
- During daily conversations, staff share observations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes and they use this information to help plan out activities and staffing arrangements for the following day. This careful consideration of what works for each individual ensures that pupils are kept safe, and that they can be successful in their lessons.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Staff are skilled at nurturing positive relationships with pupils and this starts with getting to know their particular interests. Staff build on this knowledge and draw pupils in to learning activities that they enjoy. Before they realise it, pupils are developing new skills and acquiring new knowledge.
- Leaders have put in place clear strategies to secure consistent approaches to teaching and learning. These are helping pupils to feel more secure during learning times. For example, pupils have a visual plan for each lesson that sets out the planned learning, the skills or knowledge to be covered and the likely order of each part of the lesson. There are helpful reminders, useful key words and extra tips to support success. Pupils readily refer to these plans throughout lessons.
- There is a detailed action plan in place for each pupil and these give good information to staff to help to ensure that pupils work towards and meet specific learning targets. Staff make adjustments throughout lessons as they encourage pupils to try hard and to be resilient.
- Much is done by staff to boost pupils' self-esteem and confidence, which in turn helps pupils to take part in learning activities. For many pupils, this is the first time they have been able to do so.
- Leaders have introduced a new assessment system to ensure that they are able to check the progress that pupils make in a range of subjects. Staff say that this is helping them to be more precise in planning pupils' learning as they now have a much clearer understanding of what pupils know, understand and can do. This can be seen in the

learning taking place around the school. For example, pupils look for signs to read in the environment which build on their knowledge of words and sounds.

- Leaders have also supported staff to review how much support teachers and teaching assistants give pupils throughout the day. There is an emphasis on achieving a balance between giving support, while also ensuring that pupils develop good attitudes to working things out for themselves.
- In lessons, staff often successfully judge when to provide individual support and when to step back. As a result, pupils are increasingly confident to complete tasks independently. For example, pupils could follow instructions and complete a series of steps during a hair and beauty class. Leaders are aware that this process can continue to be improved further across subjects and phases.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Threaded throughout the curriculum, there are a number of areas identified to support pupils to become successful learners. Aspects such as managing feelings, motivation, empathy and social skills are talked about with pupils, and staff encourage them to actively work on improving each one. This clear breakdown helps pupils to understand and appreciate what their next steps are.
- Leaders set high expectations for pupils in keeping themselves safe and healthy. A no smoking rule was introduced recently. Strong support from parents, clear explanations to pupils, as well as consistency by staff now mean that there is no smoking on site. This contributes to pupils being able to have healthy lives.
- Staff support pupils' emotional well-being well. There is a strong, nurturing ethos and pupils are listened to and cared for. Learning about personal, social, health and economic themes such as drugs awareness and internet safety is integral to the learning across each day. Leaders recently introduced a no mobile phone policy to safeguard pupils from any dangers of social media while in school.
- Staff encourage pupils to respect and care for each other, to be physically fit and to be prepared for life beyond school. Staff identify those who may need extra help to eat healthily or to exercise more and they provide extra support or activities for these pupils.
- Occasionally, pupils do have disagreements with each other. When this happens, staff take the time needed to talk through the issues and help pupils to overcome friendship difficulties. As a result, issues are quickly dealt with.

Behaviour

- Staff report that the behaviour of pupils is improving and is usually good across both school sites. This is because there are clear boundaries set by leaders that are consistently applied by staff. At the farm site, pupils are particularly well motivated to learn and are seen engrossed in their activities. Pupils are polite and well ordered.

- At the school site, pupils also behave well. Leaders have made improvements over recent months and there is now an emphasis on rewarding positive behaviour which happens throughout the day. This system helps pupils to check their behaviour and make changes if they need to. Each week, pupils have a reward certificate to take home which describes their successes for the week. This is highly motivating for pupils and appreciated by parents.
- Staff receive frequent training about behaviour strategies and are therefore well-equipped to manage any incidents that do occur. Records of behaviour incidents show that, over time, incidents significantly decrease.
- Attendance figures show that once pupils settle at school following arrival, their attendance steadily improves. The frequent communication and the support given to pupils and parents contribute to pupils' sense of security at school. They want to attend as they look forward to their activities. There are many examples of pupils' attendance being much higher than seen at previous settings.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils join the school at various times throughout the academic year, often with skills that are well below those expected for their age. This is usually due to having poor attendance at their previous school or long periods of time without education. Staff ensure that, whenever possible, they have meetings before the start date in order to gather information about the pupils, particularly about areas they may be interested in.
- Staff then work to make the introduction to the school as positive as possible, by drawing on those interests. Following an assessment period where staff establish what pupils already know, understand and can do, they put together an action plan and a personalised learning programme follows. This well-planned induction helps pupils to be successful and settle quickly.
- As pupils' confidence in staff grows and their interests and learning needs begin to be met, pupils gradually develop more positive attitudes to their learning. This shows through in pupils' workbooks. Over time, many pupils go from just a few words on a page to edited, well-presented and detailed work.
- Leaders bring together a range of factors to assess the progress that pupils make. These include their attendance, their achievements, how engaged they are in lessons, their behaviour and their attitudes to learning. Due to the particularly complex needs of pupils and their varying starting points, leaders compare achievement data with that of other similar schools. The school's data shows that current pupils are making at least good progress by these measures. The longer that pupils attend, the better progress they make.
- Pupils in key stage 4 are offered qualifications to match their abilities. This may be GCSEs, functional skills, entry-level tests in English and mathematics or vocational courses such as in hair and beauty. The school also offers an increasing range of vocational training at the farm site. Key stage 3 pupils follow an equine therapy course, which leads some of them to want to study animal care courses. Pupils can also follow interests in horticulture, car maintenance and catering. Pupils are introduced to work-based skills. A pupil explained that, for the first time, he is attending school regularly, as he has found

something he enjoys and is really good at. His growing confidence, brought about by the skilled support of staff, has now encouraged him to plan a future in the army.

- Pupils' workbooks, folders and art sketchbooks demonstrate the progress they make over time through the improving quality of their work. Now that there is a consistent assessment system in place, teachers are able to identify pupils' progress and to precisely plan pupils' next steps. However, the progress is not easy for pupils themselves to see and celebrate. This is because sometimes work is not in one place, or not in a sequence that shows how the standard of their work improves over time.

School details

Unique reference number	133522
DfE registration number	933/6210
Inspection number	10041375

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	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jo Sams
Chair	Jo Sams
Headteachers	Nigel Troop Lukasz Miecznikowski
Annual fees (day pupils)	£57,200 to £67,600
Telephone number	01373 453414
Website	www.enhancedchildrensservices.co.uk
Email address	n.troop@wessexcollege.co.uk lukazm@enhancedchildrensservices.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–13 March 2015

Information about this school

- Wessex College was established in 2001 as an independent day school. It offers specialist provision for up to 16 boys and girls aged from 11 to 16 who have social, emotional and behavioural needs.
- The school is part of Enhanced Children's Services. The proprietor has changed the leadership structure to include a director of education who oversees the quality of education at the both school sites under the name of Enhanced Learning Services. There are currently two co-headteachers.

- Pupils are referred and placed by a local authority and attend for varying amounts of time depending on the agreement with the local authority.
- There are currently 13 pupils on roll, 12 of whom attend full time. One attends part time.
- There are 11 pupils with an education, health and care plan.
- The school has admitted pupils above and below the registered age range having received appropriate permission for a temporary change from the DfE.
- The previous inspection was in March 2015, where the school was judged to be good in all areas.
- Since the previous inspection, the proprietor has acquired the use of a farm site at Triskele Farm near Frome, in Wiltshire. Pupils from the school have a timetable that can include learning at either or both sites, depending on their learning needs and interests.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.
- Pupils use the facilities of a nearby leisure centre for physical education.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited learning alongside senior leaders at the school and the farm site. Several discussions were held with the headteachers and the director of education. A range of pupils' workbooks and folders were scrutinised.
- The inspector made checks to the premises in order to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- There were insufficient views on Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, to take into account. The inspector met with a parent during the inspection. Views from pupils were gathered by talking informally to pupils. The inspector also had meetings with staff and took account of the 11 responses to a staff questionnaire.
- The inspector spoke to the school improvement adviser that supports the school and had a meeting with the proprietor who is also the chair of the governing body.
- Several school documents, including the school improvement plan, pupil progress information and schemes of work, were scrutinised. Other documents relating to safeguarding, including risk assessments, training records and the single central record, were taken into account. Health and safety documents and records to do with attendance were also checked.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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