

Wrotham School

Borough Green Road, Wrotham, Sevenoaks, Kent TN15 7RD

Inspection dates

21–22 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The executive headteacher and the headteacher are passionate about improving the life chances of every pupil in the school. They aim for excellence in all aspects of school life. They have ensured that there is a culture of ambition and high expectations among staff and pupils.
- Senior leaders are well supported by a highly effective senior team. Leaders consistently hold staff to account for continued improvement. They support staff in aiming high in all aspects of school life. As a result, leadership at all levels is now outstanding.
- Governors are fully involved in setting the strategic direction of the school and they ensure that they are well informed about the different aspects of school life.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge and create interesting lessons which pupils enjoy. They accurately assess pupils' progress, and the recent changes to the assessment system ensure that pupils know what they need to improve further.
- Pupils' personal development and welfare have a high priority in the school. The support provided for vulnerable pupils is impressive. The school makes a strong contribution to the personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.
- Pupils are polite and friendly. They behave well within lessons and around the school. Attendance has improved and is now in line with the national average. Leaders are working hard to improve the persistent absence of a small number of vulnerable pupils.
- The curriculum provides a good range of choice for pupils' options in Year 8. Leaders have also invested in high-quality careers provision which supports pupils in being well informed about options to suit their career ambitions. The sixth-form students particularly value the advice and guidance provided by the careers specialists.
- Leaders have improved teaching at sixth-form level and extended the enrichment opportunities. Outcomes for the academic programmes have improved, and the sixth form is now good.
- Outcomes for disadvantaged pupils have improved and their progress is good. In some lessons, the most able pupils are not sufficiently stretched, and leaders are continuing to take swift action to address improved progress for this group.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve outcomes for the most able pupils by ensuring that they are suitably challenged to make stronger progress.
- Reduce persistent absenteeism, particularly for vulnerable pupils.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher's clear vision has led to steady and thoughtful improvements over the last few years. He inspires loyalty and commitment from the staff and, together, they have forged a strong community where every pupil is valued. He is passionate about providing a high-quality education for all. This includes extensive opportunities to explore a wide range of educational experiences to prepare pupils for the world of work and bolster their confidence and sense of well-being.
- Senior leaders have developed an ethos where the education of the whole child is important. Leaders do not just ensure that academic progress is secure, they develop pupils' curiosity about the wider world and ensure that they are well cared for.
- Senior leaders are open to, and welcome, new ideas. Teachers reported that leaders have created a climate in which teachers are trusted to take risks with their teaching, and innovate in ways that are right for the pupils. Staff have been able to contribute their ideas to support workload reduction.
- Leaders know their school well. Evaluations of the school's effectiveness are sharply focused and leaders take appropriate action to make the necessary improvements. Middle leaders value the support and challenge provided by the senior staff. The recent links with a local partner school have added further expertise to broaden the experience of middle leaders. The middle leaders enjoy the collaborative nature of leadership across the school.
- Subject leaders are an enthusiastic and committed team who ensure that the curriculum is regularly reviewed to underpin the school's aim of maximum achievement for all. Leaders have changed the curriculum to ensure that all pupils have access to a broad and balanced suite of academic subjects. In key stage 3, leaders have maintained an emphasis on the creative and performing arts.
- Alongside the taught curriculum, there are many opportunities for learning outside the school day and taking part in a range of activities to further develop pupil leadership. As a result, the school's provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all pupils is exceptional, and personal development and welfare are outstanding.
- Governors and leaders ensure effective use of additional funding, including that for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Actions taken by leaders have resulted in a rapid improvement in outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- Leaders make sure that the Year 7 literacy and numeracy catch-up premium is used to good effect to raise standards for those pupils arriving in the school with lower-than-average attainment in English and/or mathematics. Year 7 pupils who were interviewed were very proud of the progress they have made in reading.
- Leaders have added extra resources to support careers education, which they feel is a top priority for this school. There is a wide variety of opportunities for pupils to have contact with local employers and learn about a range of possible future careers. Leaders seize openings to further this work and currently are engaged with the Sutton

Trust to try and open wider access for those applying for the most competitive universities. Sixth-form students recognise how effectively they have been supported in deciding their destinations. The programme of support and guidance to assist them to progress to their chosen university and other destinations is very impressive.

Governance of the school

- Governors are effective in holding leaders to account for their work to improve the school. Governors are linked to aspects of the school and they meet the school leaders regularly to check progress. This allows them to have a more in-depth overview of specific aspects and supports them in being able to question leaders effectively.
- Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities effectively. They undertake regular training to ensure that they remain up to date. They ensure that they oversee the school's work around safeguarding. They provide excellent support for management of the school's finances. Currently, they are working with leaders to develop the multi-academy trust.
- Governors have considerable expertise and a wide range of skills to support the school's leaders. They are proactive in their backing and give generously of their time, visiting the school regularly. Governors ensure that leaders put the pupil premium funding to good use. Consequently, disadvantaged pupils make good progress.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The headteacher is instrumental in leading the highly effective safeguarding team. He is passionate about ensuring that the needs of the most vulnerable pupils are met. This means that there is a strong culture of safeguarding across the school. All appropriate checks are carried out to ensure that staff are safe to work with pupils. The recording of these checks meets the statutory requirements.
- Pupils told inspectors that they feel safe at school. They are well prepared to keep themselves safe in a variety of ways, including when online. Parents and carers strongly agree with these views. All staff understand their role in keeping children safe and are rigorous in following up any concerns.
- Pupils are taught well about all aspects of safeguarding, for example e-safety and child sexual exploitation. The safeguarding team is tenacious in following up any child protection concerns with the appropriate external agencies.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching is good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and communicate their enthusiasm to pupils. Many support their teaching with interesting resources which pique the pupils' curiosity. This was seen in a geography lesson where Year 8 pupils were fascinated by a presentation on how different animals have adapted to living in the desert. Teachers have extremely good relationships with pupils and, as a result, pupils are cooperative and engaged in their learning in most lessons.

- Teachers work together in departments to plan series of lessons. The most effective teachers use skilful questioning to probe more deeply and encourage pupils to think more independently. In a Year 10 history lesson about Elizabethan England, pupils were able to transform their notes into longer pieces of extended writing, and were very secure about the amount of detail and depth required.
- Teachers insist on the correct use of technical vocabulary and this enables pupils to use a wider range of words in their writing and speaking activities in class. Good support is available for pupils with SEND, and they are well integrated into the life of the school.
- School leaders have recently changed the assessment system, and this ensures that pupils have many more opportunities to redraft work, learning from their mistakes. Pupils know what they need to show evidence of because of good modelling by teachers, and they are becoming very adept at critiquing their own and others' work. This was observed in a drama lesson where pupils were supporting one another to further improve the performances based around a play script.
- Teachers track pupils' progress effectively and use the information to address any gaps in learning. They provide a wide range of support after school and at other times to support any pupil who needs to catch up. Pupils and parents really value the fact that teachers give so generously of their time when pupils need it.
- Leaders have introduced an initiative to make learners think more deeply about their work. During the scrutiny of some Year 8 and Year 10 class books and in lessons, inspectors saw good examples of this in action. English, history and mathematics books showed strong evidence of excellent mapping of work to challenge the full range of pupil ability. Pupils were able to learn from mistakes and misconceptions, and the standard of work was high. In some other subjects, the picture was less consistent, and some of the books for science, art and food technology did not demonstrate the same high standard of progression in skills and knowledge. Some of the most able pupils were not being sufficiently challenged to produce their best work.
- Nearly all the parents who responded to the online survey feel that their children are well taught at this school and that they receive valuable information about their children's progress. One parent summed it up: 'The staff at the school are exceptionally hard-working, inspiring and guide their pupils to achieve their potential.'
- Pupils perform very strongly in English and mathematics and, more recently, in history. The science department has now stabilised after a period of staffing difficulties. Recruitment difficulties have also challenged leaders in securing better teaching and learning in modern foreign languages. Leaders are fully aware of these issues and have recruited some additional teachers for the autumn term.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enjoy the personal, social, health and economic education lessons where they have an opportunity to debate and discuss a wide range of topical issues, which contributes to their confidence as active citizens.

- Teachers encourage pupils to speak openly and freely about topics of importance to them. A range of interesting resources are available to tutors to stimulate discussion around the theme for the week. During the inspection, pupils were reflecting on the theme of compassion. This provoked wide-ranging discussions where pupils were really engaged. Teachers skilfully manage debate so that pupils feel safe to express themselves and can agree or disagree in a polite and thoughtful manner.
- All the pupils interviewed felt that bullying was rare and, if it happened, they trusted the staff to deal with it effectively. Pupils know who to go to if they have a problem.
- School leaders have invested in extra staffing to provide a comprehensive back-up system of pastoral care and support, including school counsellors and psychotherapists to intervene with early support. There is a separate house on-site which is a haven for pupils who are experiencing mental health issues or just need a quiet space for some time out to calm down when upset. Highly experienced staff are adept at providing the correct level of support, with the aim of returning pupils to their lessons as soon as possible. Some pupils who have experienced difficulties rated this provision highly and felt it had really helped them to stay at school.
- Pupils say the school has a strong approach to dealing with any form of discrimination. They said the school was a tolerant community and they were not aware of any racist or homophobic incidents. This is backed up by the school records.
- Younger pupils said that the mentoring system, where they are each matched up with a sixth-form student, was very effective in providing effective support. Sixth-form students also enjoyed this experience as part of their voluntary service in school.
- Year 11 has a strong focus on careers in tutor sessions. Pupils have heard a range of visiting speakers from local businesses, which has resulted in some finding out about a much wider range of options than they had originally considered. Careers guidance for all year groups is widely available, and accessible information is provided in a range of ways, including a section on the school website.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils are happy at school and wear their uniform with pride.
- Behaviour around the school is calm. Pupils move around the site in a purposeful manner and are respectful of others. There is practically no litter around the school site, including after lunchbreak, when pupils often eat outside.
- Most pupils take a pride in their work, and class books are well kept. Pupils come well prepared for lessons and rarely forget their essential equipment for learning.
- In some lessons, a small number of pupils are off-task and involved in low-level disruption. Quite often, this happens when the teaching is less strong and, as a result, some pupils can be easily distracted. Pupils respond quickly to correction when needed.
- Attendance has improved over time, including for disadvantaged pupils. Leaders work well with external agencies and have good communication with other support organisations. For a small number of pupils who are persistently absent, pastoral

leaders continue to search for ways of trying to ensure that they attend school more regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- The historic trend over time is one of continued improvement for academic and vocational achievement at GCSE. Many progress outcomes are now broadly in line with national expectations.
- There is an improving picture for disadvantaged pupils, especially last year for the GCSE outcomes in 2018. This is a strong improvement on the previous year's results for this group of pupils.
- Pupils who had low prior attainment on entry to the school make excellent progress. The outcomes for this group are well above national expectations.
- Senior leaders use performance information very effectively to track performance and provide intervention where gaps are emerging. They provide useful headline information to the governors, who hold them to account for further improvements.
- Middle leaders track progress across the curriculum and work with senior leaders to ensure that any emerging gaps are swiftly addressed. Teachers moderate internal assessments so that the information is accurate. Teachers are increasingly able to use external moderation with a partner school to provide further validation.
- Leaders have shown that the identified needs of pupils with SEND are usually met. With a small number of exceptions, parents of these pupils are generally complimentary about the school's provision. A group of Year 7 pupils were very proud of the good progress they had made in their reading since joining the school.
- Parents were really pleased with the amount of individual support and guidance which pupils receive as individuals when they need it. There is an impressive number of revision classes and after-school intervention groups which pupils can attend.
- Leaders have already worked with the staff and have provided professional development around improving challenge for all learners. This includes support to address better outcomes for some high-attaining pupils. While their outcomes are broadly in line with national averages over time, they do not perform as strongly as other groups in the school. This was evident during visits to some lessons and in some of the books for high-attaining pupils where expectations had slipped.
- Leaders are tracking outcomes in key stage 3 with a new assessment system based on predicted GCSE grades and converted into annual targets as milestones. At the most recent performance information collection point, the most able pupils were further away from their school targets than other groups of pupils in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. This indicates a stubborn challenge for leaders to continue to work on.
- Parents receive good clear information about how well their children are making progress. Pupils feel very well prepared for making choices about the next steps in their future options.

16 to 19 study programmes

Good

- The outcomes for academic subjects are improving and are now broadly in line with national averages for current students. Leaders have revitalised the sixth-form provision, ensuring that there is strong leadership in place to oversee this aspect of the school's work. Historically, the courses chosen did not match the spread of student ability. This has now been addressed and an important addition to the choices is the possibility to study the International Baccalaureate careers pathway, which allows a mix of academic and vocational subjects. Leaders have also widened access to apprenticeships.
- Careers provision is a real strength of the school. Sixth-form students feel well prepared for the next stage of their education or employment. Local businesses have supported students, helping them in writing curricula vitae and with interviewing techniques.
- Sixth-form tutors deliver a pastoral programme which includes up-to-date information about keeping safe. There is also a programme of wider enrichment activities. This includes social skills, vocational preparation, teamwork and engagement in wider community links. The students arranged afternoon tea for some of the local care homes at Christmas.
- Lessons visited during the inspection provided some of the most effective teaching seen in the school. An example of excellent teaching was seen in a mixed group of Year 12 and 13 students in an English lesson. The majority were reading academic journals about Shakespeare's 'Othello' and then extracting key arguments to add to their understanding. The teacher had planned activities which were precisely related to A-level grades so that students could check the quality of their work and, consequently, become more confident. Students were able to explain their ideas in profound detail, using complex ideas.
- The head of sixth form tracks students' chosen destinations and keeps in close contact with those who change their minds. Some who left last year are still having support in now swapping to an apprenticeship.

School details

Unique reference number	139542
Local authority	Kent
Inspection number	10067146

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 18
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	807
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	134
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Sheila Smith
Headteacher	Michael Cater
Telephone number	03000 658 320
Website	www.wrothamschool.com/
Email address	rdearing@wrotham.kent.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5 June 2018

Information about this school

- The school has formed a multi-academy trust, Divergent Partnership Trust, so that it can formally work alongside other local schools, particularly those needing support. The Department for Education and the local authority are behind this arrangement.
- The previous headteacher is now the chief executive officer of the trust.
- The largest ethnic group is White British (90.7%). The school was in the lowest 20% of all schools for the proportion of girls in 2018 (43.4%).

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed pupils' learning in 53 lessons across a range of subjects and year groups, including the sixth form. Several of these lessons were visited jointly with senior leaders.
- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders, middle leaders, other staff and governors. Inspectors took account of the views of 58 staff who completed Ofsted's online staff survey.
- Inspectors also examined a selection of pupils' work from key stages 3 and 4.
- An inspector held a telephone call with leaders of alternative provision where a pupil is dual-rolled.
- Inspectors took account of 110 responses from parents to Ofsted's Parent View questionnaire, as well as written comments submitted.
- Pupils' views were gathered from meetings with groups from Years 7 to 10 and the sixth form, and from the responses to Ofsted's pupil questionnaire. Informal conversations took place around the school site.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation. This included leaders' evaluations of the school's performance, the self-evaluation, the school improvement action plan, information about standards and pupils' progress, the school website, records of behaviour and attendance, external reviews, governors' minutes and a range of policies and information, including those relating to safeguarding.

Inspection team

Beverley Murtagh, lead inspector	Ofsted Inspector
Emma Phillips	Ofsted Inspector
Peter Rodin	Ofsted Inspector
Keith Pailthorpe	Ofsted Inspector

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