

The GFC School

Mems Prestfield Stadium, Redfern Avenue, Gillingham, Kent ME7 4DD

Inspection dates

30 April–2 May 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new leadership team has brought about rapid and sustainable improvements in the quality of teaching and outcomes for pupils.
- Pupils receive outstanding care and opportunities for personal development. The school is transforming the lives of some of the area's most vulnerable pupils.
- Pupils attend school far more regularly than they did previously because they value the education the school is providing.
- Leaders have ensured that the curriculum meets the needs of pupils very well. It helps them catch up with English and mathematics, provides them with useful practical skills and prepares them well for the next stage of their education or employment.
- Current pupils are making good progress from their starting points, especially in English and mathematics.
- Sometimes, the most able pupils are not challenged in lessons. Questioning in some subjects is not as precise as it could be.
- Some pupils are regularly late for school.
- The proprietor and governors have taken decisive action to appoint leaders who could achieve their vision for the school.
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Safeguarding is effective. Staff and leaders do all they can to protect pupils from harm.
- Teaching is effective because tasks are relevant and interesting. Relationships are highly positive and this encourages pupils to try hard and make progress.
- Staff are proud to work at The GFC School. They work as a team to make a positive difference to pupils' lives, and feel exceptionally well supported by leaders.
- Parents, carers and pupils are very positive about the new opportunities and fresh start the school provides.
- Pupils on the outreach programme are not integrated into school as quickly as they could be. They have missed many opportunities to make more progress socially and academically than they are making currently.

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?

- Increase the progress that pupils make across the curriculum in order for them to make up for previous underachievement, by ensuring that:
 - teachers plan activities that always challenge the most able pupils
 - teachers' questioning and feedback are precise
 - leaders maintain their high expectations of what all pupils can achieve
 - all areas of the curriculum are well resourced
 - pupils on the outreach programme are quickly integrated into the school and attend regularly.
- Develop a strategy to improve pupils' punctuality.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- There is a strong sense of pride and professionalism around the school from leaders and staff. Pupils are increasingly demonstrating this pride too and it is leading to them making good progress.
- The proprietor's vision for providing high-quality education to some of the most vulnerable pupils in the area is extremely ambitious. He has brought together a talented team of leaders and governors who are making the vision a reality.
- There has been a complete change in school leadership since the previous inspection. Leaders have a wide range of excellent skills and experience between them that help to operate and improve the school efficiently and successfully.
- Leaders have ensured that all of the independent school standards continue to be met in full.
- Staff and older pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the improvements that have been made to the school under the current leadership. One Year 11 pupil said that the school is 'organised better and there are more interesting activities.'
- The strong culture of teamwork has ensured that the staff have worked together very well under the direction of highly skilled leaders to make rapid improvements to provision. Staff feel valued and are proud to be part of the school. They recognise the positive difference they are making to pupils' lives.
- Leaders have improved the curriculum greatly in a short space of time. Connections in the football club and wider community have been exploited to offer a range of purposeful opportunities for pupils to learn and experience more.
- The curriculum is planned well. It helps pupils catch up in English and mathematics by applying these skills elsewhere in the curriculum. Pupils attend school more regularly because the curriculum is enjoyable and tailored carefully to their needs.
- There are many opportunities in the curriculum for pupils to learn how to keep themselves safe. The forest school curriculum enhances the provision the school offers. It allows pupils to thrive socially and develop new skills and knowledge that can be applied elsewhere.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is well planned. Real-life, meaningful opportunities are planned to help pupils to develop a much wider and more informed view of the world around them.
- Leaders, including the assistant headteachers, have a very accurate view of the quality of teaching. Teachers are helped to improve through regular coaching and continuing high-quality professional development opportunities.
- Parents are extremely positive about the difference The GFC School is making for their children. One commented that: 'The staff are amazing with my son. They teach him right from wrong and he is making progress, which is something he hasn't done since starting secondary school.'

- The local authority has great faith in the provision provided by The GFC School and is positive about the difference the school can make to the most vulnerable pupils in Medway.

Governance

- Governors are well skilled and have a precise view of the school's strengths due to the information they receive from leaders and from visiting the school themselves.
- In May 2018, the governors commissioned a school improvement partner to work with them. This was the catalyst for rapid improvements in many aspects of the school. Governors now hold leaders rigorously to account for making the improvements that are needed to the school. As a result, pupils are attending and achieving more.
- Governors are very clear that The GFC School should give pupils another chance and ensure that they have the social skills and competence to succeed both in and beyond school.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The designated safeguarding leader (DSL) is well trained and understands the complex cases that she is dealing with. She ensures that there are strong links with other agencies to protect pupils from harm, even though this is sometimes difficult. The deputy DSLs provide knowledgeable and helpful back-up.
- All staff have been trained in a wide range of key aspects of safeguarding that link to the complex local context of the school. For example, staff are well informed about serious youth and gang violence, drug misuse and child sexual exploitation.
- Record keeping is secure, contemporaneous and comprehensive. The single central record of recruitment checks meets all requirements.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website and meets the latest statutory requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Adults throughout the school build extremely positive relationships with pupils. This enables adults to engage pupils in purposeful learning in classrooms and other teaching areas. Additional adults are particularly successful at supporting teachers by keeping pupils focused, interested and on task.
- Teachers in English and mathematics have strong subject knowledge and plan tasks wisely to engage pupils. They use questioning and feedback very well to help pupils make progress and to recall previous learning. For example, in English, pupils enjoyed the challenge of studying some of Shakespeare's most famous sonnets, developing both their literacy skills and cultural awareness.
- Many teachers have strong subject knowledge in the areas that they teach, for example in cooking. This allows them to bring learning to life for pupils and provide tasks that help to develop useful knowledge and skills. Pupils are encouraged to apply their English and

mathematical skills in a range of subjects, including cooking, for example by following recipes and calculating the cost of producing a healthy meal on a budget.

- Teaching in the forest school is of a very high standard. Expert subject knowledge and positive relationships ensure that pupils are engrossed in their learning and make good progress in developing new skills and knowledge.
- While teachers are consistently enthusiastic and engaging, they sometimes lack precision in their questioning or choice of tasks. This sometimes hampers progress, especially for the most able pupils, who need to be challenged. Some subject areas are less well resourced than others, meaning that pupils do not have all the expertise and equipment needed to make the progress of which they are capable.
- Assessment is used well, particularly in English and mathematics, to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and skills and plan activities to address them. Pupils on outreach support receive helpful feedback to enable them to improve their work and answer simple exam-type questions more successfully.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff know the pupils exceptionally well as individuals. Staff use humour really well to welcome pupils into school, and ensure that there is a calm start to the school day.
- The school is a very safe place, with tight security and extremely high levels of care. For example, pupils' possessions are sensitively searched at the start of the day, and pupils are then served a healthy breakfast and often engage in conversation or games. This provides a social start to the day and puts pupils in a positive frame of mind.
- Teachers are able to motivate pupils to enable them to find and discuss their own positive qualities. This supports pupils' positive mental health.
- Everyone is treated fairly and respected as an individual. Equality is promoted well throughout the school and differences are celebrated. There is very little bullying. Any inappropriate use of language that could be offensive is quickly tackled.
- Pupils are helped to prepare for the world of work through employability sessions where, for example, they learn to write a CV. Well-planned careers education, visits to local colleges, and links with other business areas within the football club help pupils become aware of the next steps available to them.
- Opportunities to prepare pupils with the attitudes and skills required for life in modern Britain are well planned. During the inspection, the pupils welcomed the local member of parliament to the school and listened with interest and respect to his talk about democracy and the importance of voting.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.

- Many of the pupils who attend The GFC School were previously school refusers or had exceptionally low attendance. Attendance for nearly all pupils has improved dramatically since they joined the school. The growing numbers of pupils with 100% attendance are proud to receive their termly attendance certificates.
- In lessons, pupils are calm and fully engaged in their activities. This is clearly evident in the sense of quietness often seen around the school, with pupils being focused on their work or while having individual conversations with staff.
- Parents, pupils and staff who completed Ofsted's surveys during the inspection were extremely positive about how well pupils' behaviour is managed and improved. Year 11 pupils have a real pride in the school and what it has helped them achieve. They are proud to wear The GFC School's uniform.
- Pupils are often engrossed in their work and want to do well. This is because relationships are very strong, and tasks are well matched to pupils' needs, including in the forest school.
- Any swearing or use of inappropriate, including homophobic, language is quickly picked up by adults, with pupils always immediately apologising. Increasingly, pupils are challenging each other about using inappropriate language.
- Pupils' behaviour improves over time due to the clear expectations of leaders and teachers, and consistently implemented behaviour management procedures, and because pupils are treated with trust and respect. The use of exclusion has reduced significantly this year.
- Parents confirm the improvements in behaviour. One parent reported that their child, 'is keen to learn and his attitude has definitely improved as he attends every session and is ready to learn,' while another thanked staff, saying that their child's attitude, 'has changed in all walks of life.'
- Leaders are aware that some pupils are frequently late for school. Leaders are developing new strategies to address this.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Attainment at the end of key stage 4 is improving. This year, all pupils have already achieved a recognisable qualification in English and all are entered for GCSE English and mathematics later this term. Year 11 pupils feel well prepared for the examinations they are about to take. However, attainment overall remains low because most pupils have missed large periods of schooling through non-attendance or exclusion in the past, prior to joining the school.
- Books and folders show that current pupils are making strong progress from their starting points in English and mathematics. Pupils make the strongest progress in English, with some notable examples of pupils making impressive progress in reading to make up for previous underperformance. Progress in mathematics, while still strong, is sometimes stilted because pupils have more gaps in their basic mathematical knowledge and skills.
- Pupils make good progress in developing their social skills, which results in more positive self-esteem and growing ambitions about what can be achieved in the future.

- In practical subjects such as cooking and in the forest school, pupils are making strong progress, developing new skills and knowledge that can be applied elsewhere. For example, the inspector observed pupils in the forest school learning how to skin a rabbit and prepare it to make a rabbit stew.
- In some subjects, schemes of work and resources do not yet meet the precise needs of pupils, and as a result their progress is not as strong.
- Outreach pupils are making steady progress from their very low starting points in English and mathematics towards achieving recognised level 1 qualifications.
- The vast majority of pupils who left the school in July 2018 went on to further education placements or employment. However, due to the changes in leadership, the school has not yet tracked how successfully these placements have been sustained. All current Year 11 pupils are on track to achieve a place at college in September.

School details

Unique reference number	142568
DfE registration number	887/6010
Inspection number	10085999

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	Paul Scally
Chair	Mark Atkins
Headteacher	Lisa Darran (Head of Centre), Nick Rogers (Head of Education) and David Scott (Executive Director of Education)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,000 to £27,000
Telephone number	01634 623420
Website	www.thegfcschool.com
Email address	thegfcschool@priestfield.com
Date of previous inspection	16–18 January 2018

Information about this school

- The school is currently registered for 50 pupils. Most join the school after a disrupted education. Pupils have either been excluded or were at risk of exclusion from other mainstream schools or pupil referral units. Many pupils have an education, health and care plan related to social, emotional or mental health difficulties. All pupils are placed and funded by Medway or Kent local authorities.
- A small number of pupils are taught on a part-time basis by an outreach tutor rather than in the school.

- The school does not use any alternative providers.
- The school was previously inspected in January 2018, when its overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement.
- The proprietor employed a new senior leadership team at the start of the academic year. This comprises a full-time head of centre, working alongside a head of education and an executive director of education, who both work part time and have other responsibilities within the football club. These are related to the academy and apprenticeship programmes, which were not part of this inspection.

Information about this inspection

- The Department for Education commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across the school, always accompanied by a school leader. He also visited the forest school that takes place off site.
- Meetings were held with leaders, the proprietor and governors. The inspector also met representatives from Medway local authority.
- The inspector spoke to pupils and staff informally throughout the inspection. He also spoke with a group of Year 11 pupils and a group of staff more formally.
- The inspector evaluated the work in pupils' books and talked to pupils about their learning and progress.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised, especially documents relating to safeguarding and the independent school standards.
- The inspector considered 10 responses to the Parent View online survey, including six free-text comments.
- The inspector took account of the 15 responses to the pupil questionnaire and 21 responses to the confidential staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Lee Selby, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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