

Walderslade Girls' School

SEF: September 2019

Context of the School

Walderslade Girls' School is an average-sized 11 to 18 secondary modern school for girls which has a roll of 756 in years 7 – 11 and 110 in the sixth form, making a total of 866 on roll and became an academy in November 2012. When last inspected in September 2017, it was judged Requires Improvement overall. The school joined the 'Skills for Life' Multi-Academy Trust in September 2018.

The school has a long established sixth form partnership (PGW – Partnership of Greenacre and Walderslade) with our neighbouring school, Greenacre Academy (the founder school of the Skills for Life Trust and a boy's school). Numbers have steadily risen and now stand at over 250 pupils in total.

Most pupils in the school are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the proportion who speak English as an additional language are very small compared to national averages. The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for the Pupil Premium is above the national average. The proportion of disabled pupils and those with special educational needs is higher than the national average.

Pupils make good progress at all key stages from lower than average starting points. Typically, each year group contains significantly more 'low' pupils and significantly less 'high' ones in comparison with national figures. These challenging circumstances are further exaggerated by the local admissions system which now allows grammar school to recruit the high pupils from non-selective schools during the year at every age.

The Head teacher has been in post since September 2017.

Following the September 2017 Inspection Report the following improvement areas were established with teaching staff and became a focus for lesson planning, delivery and observation.

1. How are essential skills and knowledge identified and mastered by students at key stage 3.
2. How are the main elements of weak knowledge in key stage 4 pupils' understanding identified and addressed by teachers.
3. Ensuring that teachers fully understand and teach to a high standard the requirements of the new GCSE and GCE specifications.
4. Checking that pupils, especially the most able do not do work that is too easy for them.
5. Ensuring that when necessary more challenging work is provided for those that are ready to move on in all ability groups.

6. Ensuring that teachers and pupils are using subject-specific language appropriately.
7. Ensuring that teachers develop and use a variety of different styles of questions that make pupils think hard and justify their answers.

Using these seven clear statements has enabled staff to focus on the areas identified as requiring improvement within lessons.

1. Quality of Education: Current Judgement: Good

Intent

The quality of education has improved since the last inspection through the use of the seven points stated in the introduction. These are visited whenever lessons are observed.

Overall the curriculum is ambitious and broad, designed to allow all pupils to progress and obtain the academic and cultural education they require to succeed in life. This is delivered through subject lessons, form and PSHE time alongside a wide variety of assemblies, visiting speakers and performers and educational visits and trips.

Teacher knowledge and pedagogy are excellent and constantly updated through targeted CPD in school and external training courses. Staff are always encouraged to broaden their professional knowledge and encouraged to take part in courses such as the suite of National Professional Qualifications.

Implementation

There has been a focus on the speaking aspect of MFL which is leading to an increase in pupils confidence. This has been enhanced by cooperative work with GA school and a newly established MFL department spanning both schools.

Mathematics teaching has addressed the problems reported and now accurately works to the new specification as evidenced by the results in 2018 and improved again in 2019. Again cooperative working with GA has played a significant role here.

The help of specialist staff from GA has improved pupil progress in several subject areas where best practice has been shared and adopted, for example in Business Studies where a very experienced subject head has addressed areas of concern here.

In common with GA the school now operates a weekly CPD slot on Fridays. Much of this is joint working addressing specific aspects of teaching and learning where both schools have felt the need to improve practice. This joint sharing of expertise has benefited both schools. Examples of topics include better questioning, low level disruption and a SEN focus. This is helping to achieve a better consistency of good teaching across all subjects.

Assessment at KS3 has been completely changed and reflects best practice from GA. As a result parents are better informed of pupil's progress and achievement.

Alongside this teaching in KS3 has been changed to mixed ability grouping but with one 'Alpha' set in each year group. There have been social and academic benefits to this, with one AHT having specific responsibility for focusing on the most able in KS3 and 4.

Underpinning all of this remains the good relationship between pupils and staff, the strong bonds evidenced by the trust pupils have that teachers will allow them to achieve their goals.

The school has reverted to a three year KS3, lengthening the amount of time pupils follow a broader curriculum.

KS4 choices are made late in Year nine allowing more mature decisions. All pupils make a choice from geography, history or MFL and then three more choices from three predetermined blocks. Thus at KS4 pupils continue to follow a broad curriculum. Art subjects remain very popular and pupils may choose discounting subjects.

Reading is a focus within school, with all pupils tested in Year 7 and Year 10. Accelerated reading has been introduced in KS3 and is seen to be having an effect on reading age. This year more is being invested in age appropriate books for KS4 to encourage more reading for pleasure, especially amongst the most able.

The strong SEND department fully support pupils' needs as they progress through the curriculum. The qualified SENCO is supported by a team of specialist LSAs who work with pupils to allow them access to as wide a range of learning as possible.

Impact

With a clear focus on the quality of teaching pupil outcomes in 2018 improved significantly but were still limited by the number of pupils not entered for a full P8 'bucket two'. The current Year 11 is the final year where this occurs.

P8 improved to -0.28

P8 disadvantaged improved to -0.24, establishing that there was no 'gap' in performance compared to our non-disadvantaged pupils.

4+ En & Ma improved to 52%

5+ En & Ma improved to 27%

A8 rose very slightly for all pupils and significantly for disadvantaged pupils.

The provisional 2019 Results are as follows:

4+ En & Ma 49%

5+ En & Ma 24%

4+ En 64%, 5+ 42%

4+ Ma 59%, %+33%

Overall P8 -0.29

Results in science have been disappointing. 30% 4+ in 2018 with a small rise to 33% in 2019, although grades 7 and 8 have been achieved. The school has acted and appointed a new Head of the Science faculty with a new very experienced line manager.

This is the final year of the legacy curriculum where a number of pupils were not entered for a full P8 'bucket two'

2. Behaviour and Attitudes Current Judgement: Good

The move to three small schools, each led by an Assistant Headteacher with a light teaching load is now three years old and has further strengthened behaviour and attitudes. They set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and conduct, constantly reinforcing these during assemblies and form time. As a result pupils behave well in lessons and around school. Low level disruption is not evident and lessons proceed without interruption. They take pride in their learning and the work that they produce.

Each AHT is able to lead on pastoral care, academic progress and behaviour management. Working together they have achieved a consistency of approach over the whole school. As a result behaviour is good and relations with parents are improving, evidenced by a significant reduction in complaints. Fixed term exclusion is used appropriately with rates continuing to fall. Permanent exclusion is used as a very last resort with only one in 2018-19.

The school is working hard with parents and the local authority to improve attendance, with issues around parentally condoned absence and long term school refusers being addressed. First day action is taken with all instances of pupil absence. To improve attendance there has been a renewed focus on early intervention with pupils who were PA last year supported with robust intervention by the LA ASSA team. The ASSA works closely with Heads of Year and Heads of school, arranging the prosecution of parents where appropriate. Alongside this fortnightly competitions and form prizes, and the 100 club have been reinvigorated to encourage pupils to attend.

Pupils feel safe and are safe and able to discuss matters with staff and the large team of trained DSLs. Safeguarding is of paramount importance with excellent practice in place. As a result issues are dealt with swiftly and discretely with the full involvement of external agencies when appropriate.

Staff and pupils work hard to create and maintain a very positive atmosphere within the school. Bullying and all forms of aggression and unkindness are not tolerated and will always be treated very seriously should they occur. Pupils display a high degree of care towards each other with all groups comfortable to express themselves freely. Pupils relationships with staff are respectful and thoughtful allowing the school to function smoothly and purposefully.

3. Personal Development Judgement: Good

SMSC is a particular strength of the school delivered by form tutors in form time and a dedicated fortnightly period along with regular assemblies and events. For example sex education is delivered annually to all pupils by specialist staff.

Pupils have many opportunities to explore and debate the differences in our world and show a high level of respect and tolerance. In particular they are respectful of different ethnicities and the range of sexual orientation in our community.

The move to the Skills for Life MAT has brought a welcome new focus on developing pupils 'soft skills' and exposing them to regular assemblies led by a wide range of external speakers exploring their career paths. This will become further embedded next year raising our pupil's aspirations, opening their eyes to a huge range of potential careers and helping equip them to enter these careers.

Joint assemblies with the neighbouring boys school is also helping expand the girls' experiences.

A fortnight of work experience is being reintroduced this year into Year 10 to immerse pupils in the world of work and as a prelude to more work experience in Year 12. Alongside this careers education has a high profile, helping pupils understand the needs of the world of work using the Gatsby Benchmarks as a guide.

The school is an accredited DoE centre with healthy Bronze and silver cohorts, teaching pupils essential life skills.

We are also embracing healthy living lifestyles with vulnerable pupils taking part in the 'FitFix' programme delivered in school.

The Extended Project is now being offered to pupils in Years 9, 10 and 12/13 at levels 1-3.

4. Leadership and Management: Current Judgement: Good

Strong new leadership has addressed the decline in the performance of pupils evidenced by an improved set of results in 2018. The provisional 2019 results show a small step backwards, but will need to be analysed alongside national and local trends. Membership of the Skills for Life MAT has also brought new expertise to bear on school leadership and improvement.

The school has a clear vision of working to raise the aspirations of all of our pupils. Medway is an area of considerable deprivation with generational low esteem and poverty of ambition. We work to be a truly inclusive school which caters for the needs of all our pupils. We encourage and celebrate pupil's success and are proud of the social mobility we help achieve. Many of our sixth form leavers will be the first in their families to progress to university education.

The changes that have been made have broadened the curriculum experience and helped raise the rate of progress.

A new Deputy Head Teacher has been appointed with a single focus on monitoring T&L and working with the AHT i/c of CPD to provide bespoke CPD to cover areas of identified need.

A new AHT has taken over responsibility for disadvantaged pupils and is bringing in a more consistent and strategic approach. The performance of disadvantaged pupils has improved with the gap reducing.

An external review of Pupil Premium was undertaken and recommendations have been adopted that have further strengthened the way the school allocates funding, and trains staff to promote better progress for this group of pupils.

Additional funding for Year 7 catch-up and SEN pupils is carefully targeted and its effectiveness monitored with more specialist staff employed.

Governance of the school has changed considerably with the move into a MAT. An external review was undertaken and the recommendations made adopted by the new LGB. Governors now have a good understanding of their role including the importance of challenging the Headteacher and other senior leaders with regard to the quality of teaching and learning. This is evidenced through the minutes of the LGB and subsequent actions by school leaders.

The smaller better trained team of governors with a new chair and clerk have a greater understanding of the schools strengths and weaknesses. Governors are attached to academic faculties, visit more often and take part in Quality Assessment procedures. As a consequence they are better able to challenge school leaders.

Accountability is also considerably sharper with oversight from the MAT Board of Governors and CEO who monitor and challenge school progress through regular meetings.

5. Sixth Form: Current Judgement: Good

This continues to be an area of considerable strength which is still being improved.

A wide and varied range of academic and vocational subjects is offered across both schools under the umbrella of the 'Partnership of Greenacre and Walderslade' allowing pupils to follow subjects appropriate to themselves.

Pupils welfare is a strong focus for the team of form tutors, sixth form study supervisors, pastoral staff and progression mentor. As a consequence the vast majority of pupils complete their two year study plans.

Outcomes are good and virtually all students progress to further study, apprenticeships or employment. Preparation for this has been further enhanced by the introduction of work experience in Year 12.

A small number of pupils are required to resit GCSE English and or maths. This is achieved through timetabled lessons with subject specialist teachers.

Overall the results in the sixth form are improving, both Academic and Applied general qualifications show a neutral or positive progress value with the proportion of top grades improving in A levels.