

The WREN School

61–63 Bath Road, Reading, Berkshire RG30 2BB

Inspection dates

19–20 June 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	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher has established an ethos that enables pupils to succeed. Her tenacity and commitment are reflected in the life of the school. Staff and governors share a determination to achieve this vision.
- High aspirations for pupils' achievements are evident throughout. Leaders have persevered and overcome notable barriers to improvement, such as staff recruitment, pupil mobility and managing the current site and new school building project.
- Leaders' clear understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses supports ongoing improvements. They recognise the need to manage the pace of development, so that their efforts do not become diluted by trying to do too much at once.
- Governors (who are also trustees) support the school very well. They use their expertise effectively to challenge leaders about the impact of their work. They understand the importance of planning strategically for the school's ongoing expansion.
- Leaders make successful use of wider training and support to help raise standards in the school. Staff work closely and regularly, particularly with colleagues from the Excalibur Academies Trust, to share effective practice and validate their work.
- Pupils learn well and make good progress because teaching is typically effective. Teachers make creative use of limited resources to help pupils engage successfully with their learning.
- Leaders are developing the curriculum thoughtfully to meet pupils' needs and prepare them well for the future. Leaders keep the curriculum under constant review as the school grows.
- Learning in lessons is enriched by a range of extra-curricular experiences. Pupils are motivated by clubs and visits that help them to join different aspects of their learning together.
- Pupils are very well looked after. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Their active pursuit of extra help for the most vulnerable pupils is commendable. Parents and carers recognise staff's dedication and care.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. Where absence rates are too high, leaders take determined and effective action to reduce them. They are clear about the ongoing work that is needed in this regard.
- Pupils typically conduct themselves well. Staff deal appropriately with pupils whose behaviour is challenging. Exclusion rates are above average, but are beginning to fall as leaders' high expectations are reinforced.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure that recent actions to reduce absence and exclusions lead to sustained and increasingly rapid improvements.
- Use careful evaluation to prioritise next steps for school development precisely, so that standards are maintained as the school grows and moves into its new building.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides the school with clear leadership and direction. From when she was appointed, before the school opened, she has worked with absolute determination to establish an ethos of inclusion and aspiration. Consequently, staff, pupils and parents have a shared understanding of what it means to be part of The WREN School community.
- Parents' confidence in the school's culture and the quality of provision is evident in the increasing number of pupils in each year group. There is a sizeable waiting list for a place in Year 7 in September 2018. As one parent said, 'This is a great community school which with good leadership will go from strength to strength.'
- Leaders reflect regularly on the impact of their work, using what they learn to adapt approaches accordingly as the school grows. They are ambitious to sustain and develop the school quickly. They recognise the need to prioritise actions that will most rapidly improve standards in the school.
- Leaders actively seek advice and support from relevant professionals, particularly colleagues from the Excalibur Academies Trust. This helps them to validate the school's work and take steps to raise standards further. Staff typically feel well supported by the wide range of professional development they benefit from, which has a positive impact on the quality of their work.
- This year, governors and senior staff have sharpened the focus of targets used to measure staff performance, so that their work is closely linked to the difference it makes to pupils. As a result, staff understand clearly how leaders expect them to contribute to the school's work and do this well.
- Staff are supported well to develop the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Leaders at all levels are increasingly involved in checking standards, so that they are empowered to make improvements which are pertinent to their subject areas. The resulting and carefully structured programme of professional learning helps staff to improve the quality of teaching across the school in a sustainable way.
- Leaders have built a curriculum that meets pupils' needs successfully. Formal study across a suitably broad range of subjects at key stage 3 helps pupils to make useful connections between the different aspects of their learning. This prepares them well for their key stage 4 subject choices, for which leaders endeavour to provide without compromise through their curriculum offer.
- Pupils' work in lessons is complemented well by wider learning opportunities, which support the development of their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils enjoy experiences that bring their formal learning to life and encourage them to think about their responsibilities as members of British society. They are encouraged to make effective use of frequent and planned reflection time to consider how different aspects of their learning link together and contribute to their personal development.
- Leaders make careful use of extra funding to support pupils who have additional needs. Their joined-up approach is diminishing differences in progress between different groups of pupils in the school, such as disadvantaged pupils and those who

have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. In some instances, leaders' written evaluations of the impact of this extra funding are not as clear or detailed as the work that is actually being carried out.

Governance of the school

- The governing body works effectively to support and challenge school leaders about the impact of their actions. The governors bring helpful expertise and experience to their role. They are firmly committed to supporting the school's aspirational and inclusive culture, working closely with school leaders.
- Governors understand their legal duties and carry them out successfully. They ensure that the school's policies and processes are fit for purpose and reviewed regularly. Their meticulous records of meetings, visits and training ensure that they are collectively well informed about the school's strengths and relative weaknesses.
- Governors recognise the importance of being appropriately trained, including in relation to their safeguarding responsibilities. Their regular checks on the governing body's shared skill set ensure that they identify and participate in relevant training which enhances their work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders' focus on keeping pupils safe is unquestionable. It underpins the culture in the school, which values all pupils, regardless of their challenges and circumstances.
- Staff and governors complete useful training to equip them well for their roles in school. This includes focusing on relevant local issues that staff need to be aware of. Leaders invest in a higher level of training than is required, so that capacity to manage concerns grows along with the school. This demonstrates the vigilant approach that they champion.
- Staff work thoughtfully to translate appropriate policies into diligent practice. They know pupils well, making them well placed to identify behaviour which may indicate a concern. They act appropriately to report any possible issues, keeping careful records securely. Where necessary, leaders' perseverance helps vulnerable pupils and their families to access support that might not otherwise be available.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers use their suitably detailed subject knowledge well to plan learning across the curriculum. They have realistically high expectations for what pupils can and should achieve. This helps pupils to make good progress over time.
- Teachers have responded creatively to the limits placed on them by their surroundings while the school is in temporary accommodation. Pupils' learning is not adversely affected by the restricted space and facilities. Pupils and teachers eagerly anticipate moving into the new school building and the opportunities this will bring.

- Most pupils approach their learning with respectful and positive attitudes. This enables them to make effective use of time in lessons. Sometimes, pupils disengage if learning is too easy or does not catch their interest sufficiently. When this happens, teachers use clearly established routines to manage less positive behaviour and minimise the disruption to other pupils.
- The helpful dialogue between pupils and adults supports learning in lessons. Staff know pupils well, understanding where vulnerability exists and planning to meet specific needs. Inspectors observed some instances where questioning was used very well to draw out pupils' understanding.
- Pupils receive useful feedback about their work, in line with the school's policy. In a number of subjects, most notably English and computer science, pupils use this information routinely to check their understanding and improve their work. This helps them to make good progress. In some subject areas, routines are less well embedded and so have less impact over time.
- Most pupils have literacy and numeracy skills that enable them to access the curriculum successfully. Where pupils arrive at the school needing to catch up in English or mathematics, leaders ensure that they receive helpful support that accelerates their progress. Those with weaker reading skills are still willing and confident to read aloud, tackling unfamiliar words with perseverance.
- Leaders are evolving assessment processes over time, to ensure that these are increasingly precise and fit for purpose. Staff work closely with colleagues from other schools to check that their judgements about standards are accurate. Leaders are currently working with staff to further develop the validity of assessments in some areas where judgements appear to be conservative when compared with the quality of work that pupils produce.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. All staff focus on pupils' welfare first and foremost. They recognise the importance of reducing or removing barriers that may have affected pupils' engagement with learning in the past.
- Leaders consider carefully where it might be appropriate for a pupil to attend an alternative provision, on a temporary, part-time or longer-term basis. They work closely with a range of relevant providers to match placements to pupils' specific learning or behavioural needs. They liaise regularly with adults and pupils at these other provisions to ensure pupils are safe, well looked after and making progress with their learning.
- Pupils benefit from rich opportunities that develop their understanding of the world around them. Assemblies and the carefully planned citizenship programme complement pupils' subject-based learning well. Leaders introduce specific activities and events to tackle particularly relevant issues, such as some pupils' use of derogatory language. Consequently, pupils have an age-appropriate understanding of values such as tolerance and democracy, and an increasing respect for each other's differences.

- Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe and respond appropriately to risk, including when accessing the internet and social media. They demonstrate their maturity in this respect when following well-rehearsed routines during regular visits off site to the nearby sports facility used for physical education (PE) lessons.
- Pupils have an appropriate understanding of bullying. They are confident to report any concerns that they may have to a trusted adult. While they recognise that bullying sometimes happens, they are confident that their teachers deal well with any reported incidents. Most parents responding to the online questionnaire broadly support this view, although a notable minority do not feel that their concerns about bullying are dealt with as well as they should be.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. The vast majority of pupils conduct themselves very well in lessons and during social time, despite the current constraints of the school site.
- Staff have recently raised their collective expectations for pupils' behaviour, in response to some emerging concerns. Pupils note the positive difference this has made to their learning environment, and most have responded well to this more rigorous approach. Where some pupils still struggle to behave consistently as well as they should, pupils and parents say that adults deal with this well, using clear and consistent routines.
- Rates of fixed-term exclusions are currently high compared with those of other schools locally and nationally. This, in part, reflects leaders' reinforcement of their raised expectations for pupils' behaviour, including for the above-average proportion who join the school other than at the start of Year 7 and often with additional needs or challenges. Leaders' recent actions are beginning to result in a decline in exclusion rates, through exploring and developing appropriate alternative strategies that address underlying issues more effectively. Leaders and governors recognise that reducing exclusions is a key priority.
- Most pupils attend school regularly. However, overall absence rates have risen this year, after being in line with national figures last year. Leaders can account for this increase, which links at least partly to the transition of pupils joining the school mid-year from other providers. Leaders use rigorous and effective processes to tackle instances of poor attendance. They are able to demonstrate how their work is leading to improvements in attendance rates, particularly for children looked after and those who are disadvantaged.
- Leaders make careful and regular checks on pupils who attend alternative provision. Pupils attend these settings regularly and respond appropriately to adults' expectations for their behaviour. This helps leaders to be confident that pupils are safe and accounted for while not working on site at the school.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils' work shows that they typically achieve well across a range of subjects, equipping them well for their future learning. Rates of progress are consistently strong in English and are accelerating in a number of subjects and year groups, such as in humanities. In some subject areas, such as mathematics and art, pupils' work suggests

a higher standard of attainment than leaders' performance information currently indicates.

- The notable proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language respond well to their challenging work. Teachers plan carefully to check and build on pupils' knowledge and understanding over time. Consequently, pupils persevere with their work and make very good progress.
- Children looked after generally make more rapid progress than their peers in school. This is because staff understand their needs carefully and plan effectively to meet them.
- Leaders have clear systems in place that enable them to identify where particular groups of pupils are underachieving. Teachers target their subsequent work successfully on specific weaknesses, which leads to pupils' progress accelerating. For example, where boys were identified to be underperforming in PE, leaders introduced experiences that inspired them and improved their engagement in learning. Consequently, boys' attainment in PE began to improve.
- Pupils who need to catch up in English and mathematics typically make good progress because of the extra support they receive. The reading and spelling ages of pupils receiving additional help increase rapidly over short periods of time. This enables these pupils to access the wider curriculum more successfully than they could before.
- Leaders' effective work is diminishing differences in achievement between groups of pupils in the school, such as disadvantaged pupils and those who have SEN and/or disabilities. In some instances, for example in French and humanities in Year 8, disadvantaged pupils make better progress than their non-disadvantaged peers. However, these improvements are not consistently rapid across year groups and subjects, particularly for those who receive support for SEN and/or disabilities.
- Boys' written work sometimes lacks care and attention to detail. As a result, boys do not typically achieve as well or make as good progress as girls.

School details

Unique reference number	142121
Local authority	Reading
Inspection number	10046638

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

Type of school	Secondary
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	404
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair	Mrs Julia Cottee
Headteacher	Mrs Jo Broadhead
Telephone number	0118 959 1868
Website	www.wrenschool.org
Email address	admin@wrenschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The WREN (West Reading Education Network) School is a free school for pupils aged 11 to 18. It opened in September 2015 and currently has pupils in Years 7 to 9. It can accommodate 168 pupils in each year group. Year 7 is currently full, and there is a waiting list for pupils wanting to join the school in September 2018.
- The school was founded by members of The WREN School Academy Trust. The trust board consists of members and trustees (who fulfil the role of governors).
- More than a third of pupils are eligible for free school meals, which is well above the national average.
- Almost half of pupils are from minority ethnic groups. Approximately a fifth of the total number of pupils are believed to speak English as an additional language.
- The proportion of pupils who require support for a special educational need is above average. A smaller percentage of pupils have an education, health and care plan than is the case across schools nationally.

- A higher proportion of pupils join the school after the start of Year 7 or leave the school before the end of Year 11 than is typical.
- The school has very recently secured approval to join Excalibur Academies Trust in October 2018, after working closely with the trust since the school's inception. Colleagues from the Excalibur Academies Trust visit regularly to support developments in leadership and teaching in the school.
- This was the school's first inspection. It was carried out close to the end of the school's third year of operation.
- The school is currently based in temporary accommodation with limited outside space. Pupils carry out some of their PE lessons off site. The school is due to move into purpose-built premises in September 2018.
- Leaders make occasional use of alternative provision to help meet the needs of a very small group of pupils who have specific additional needs. At the time of the inspection, pupils were accessing alternative provision at Cranbury College and Freiston Hall in Lincolnshire.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors visited lessons across the school, some jointly with school leaders, to observe learning and talk to pupils. They also attended three tutor-time sessions, an assembly and some after-school activities.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, other senior leaders, and with groups of staff, pupils and trustees (governors). The lead inspector also spoke with representatives from the WREN School Academy Trust, Excalibur Academies Trust, the Department for Education (DfE), as well as to the school's improvement partner.
- Along with three school leaders, inspectors reviewed a sample of work from pupils in Years 7 and 9. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work during their visits to classrooms.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation available on the school's website and provided by school leaders. This included policies, safeguarding records, and information about pupils' attendance, behaviour and academic achievement.
- Parents' views were considered via 69 responses to the Parent View online questionnaire, including 17 free-text responses. Inspectors also took into account 38 staff responses and 60 pupil responses to their respective online surveys.

Inspection team

Kathryn Moles, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Dylan Davies	Her Majesty's Inspector

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