

Name of School:	The Wymering School
Headteacher/Principal:	Sally Rogers
Hub:	Beacon Hub
School phase:	Specialist Provision Age 9-16
MAT (if applicable):	The Southern Education Trust

Overall Peer Evaluation Estimate at this QA Review:	Effective
Date of this Review:	26/01/2026
Overall Estimate at last QA Review:	N/A
Date of last QA Review:	20/01/2025
Grade at last Ofsted inspection:	N/A
Date of last Ofsted inspection:	N/A

Quality Assurance Review

The review team, comprising host school leaders and visiting reviewers, agrees that evidence indicates these areas are evaluated as follows:

Leadership at all levels Effective

Quality of provision and outcomes Effective

AND

Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs Effective

Area of excellence Accredited

Previously accredited valid areas of excellence N/A

Overall peer evaluation estimate Effective

Important information

- The QA Review provides a peer evaluation of a school's practice in curriculum, teaching and learning, and leadership. It is a voluntary and developmental process, and the peer review team can evaluate and offer 'peer evaluation estimates' based only on what the school chooses to share with them.
- The QA Review estimates are not equivalent to Ofsted grades. The QA Review uses a different framework to Ofsted and the review is developmental not judgmental.
- The QA Review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. If you choose to share this report, or extracts thereof, externally (e.g. on your website or with parents), please ensure that it is accompanied with the following text:

Challenge Partners is a charity working to advance education for the public benefit. We are not a statutory accountability body. The QA Review does not audit schools' safeguarding or behaviour policies and practices. However, Lead Reviewers and visiting reviewers are expected to follow Challenge Partners' safeguarding policy and report any concerns as set out in the procedures.

1. Context and character of the school

The Wymering School is a smaller than average special school located in Cosham, Portsmouth. It opened as a new free school in April 2023 and is now in its third year of operation. The school is part of The Southern Education Trust and currently has 77 students on roll from Year 5 to Year 11.

The school provides specialist education for students with social communication and interaction difficulties, speech, language and communication needs, and high levels of anxiety and/or associated distressed behaviour. All students have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The proportion of disadvantaged students is well above the national average, while the proportion of students who speak English as an additional language is below average.

Although pupil-level deprivation indicators sit close to national figures, the wider local area experiences levels of deprivation well above those seen nationally.

Its motto, 'Do good, feel good', and the values of togetherness, resilience, enthusiasm and kindness shape the school's ethos. This commitment to wellbeing has recently been recognised through the National Children's Bureau Wellbeing Award for Schools.

2.1 Leadership at all levels - What went well

- The school demonstrates a deeply embedded culture of inclusion that students describe as transformative. Highlighting the impact of the school's relational ethos, one reflected, "No one is left out or bullied... In my other school I kept getting bullied. It made you feel the odd one out". This sense of belonging stems from deliberate leadership and a consistently lived approach, with staff using clear language and specific praise to help students feel understood, safe and ready to learn. Strong relationships sit at the heart of the school's success where emotional, social, academic and therapeutic needs are held in equal regard.
- A key improvement since last year's 'Even Better If' is the strengthened self-evaluation, driven by sharper analysis of the student contextual profile. The self-evaluation form now includes clear graphs and commentary that explain the cohort's complex needs, such as high anxiety, disordered eating or wider mental-health challenges, giving leaders and governors a more precise understanding. This work led to class-level contextual profiles and the introduction of 'Know me to teach me' documents, co-constructed with students. These bring together personalised feedback on communication and learning preferences with key information such as diagnosis, therapy and sensory needs and academic levels. Staff say this gives a clearer, more practical understanding of how to plan for and support each student.

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- Leaders have taken a reflective and responsive approach to refining the Key Stage 4 curriculum after recognising that the original offer was not sustaining engagement or consistent attitudes to learning. Although students could access the BTEC qualification content, the two-year structure and sustained cognitive demand did not suit their needs, leading to declining interest. The curriculum was reshaped, with the qualifications offer reviewed, clearly communicated and broadened to include a more flexible pathway and range of options. Leaders are clear that reviewing this annually is a central strand of their strategy to ensure every cohort receives the right balance of qualifications at the right level.
- Student voice is used meaningfully to enhance provision, with students leading the redesign of a personalised version of the Zones of Regulation. Rather than focusing on “being in the green zone,” students have shifted the emphasis towards recognising and managing emotions in ways that feel authentic and achievable. Their thinking has informed an innovative visual model based on the school’s tree sculpture, with language and concepts expressed in students’ own words to strengthen ownership and relevance.
- The school has developed a clear ‘careers intent’ document and a standalone curriculum that builds students’ understanding progressively across all phases. Younger students explore different jobs and roles, while older students take part in workplace and business visits and access work experience tailored to need, ensuring all students reach Year 11 with a clear next step. The careers leader’s extensive citywide connections secure a wide range of placement opportunities, and provision is rigorously quality-assured through peer reviews and governor oversight. As a result, the school is the only setting in Portsmouth to achieve 100% of the revised Gatsby Benchmarks.

2.2 Leadership at all levels - Even better if...

- ... subject leaders’ monitoring and evaluation was further developed to support consistent practice and identify opportunities for cross curricular links.
- ... the school extended its presentation of the existing curriculum model to include the wide-ranging assessment framework.
- ... the careers leader used their passion, knowledge, connections and expertise to lead a cross-school group that improves careers education and supports the next steps for students across the Trust.

3.1 Quality of provision and outcomes - What went well

- Students arrive with a wide range of educational and personal experiences, yet common patterns include limited independence, low confidence shaped by previous schooling, gaps in understanding their own needs and high levels of vulnerability, including mental-health concerns. Leaders have responded with a deliberately flexible curriculum. English, mathematics and PSHE provide a stable core, while the wider offer blends therapeutic input and EHCP-driven work in proportions that shift as needs evolve. Staff judge skilfully when to adjust expectations or increase challenge, ensuring students re-engage with learning, build confidence and make meaningful academic and emotional progress.
- Leaders prioritise accessible and engaging literacy strategies, including “sneaky learning” across the curriculum. This embeds reading and writing into practical, low-pressure activities so students engage without the anxiety that often accompanies formal tasks. Alongside daily comprehension work, phonics-based interventions and assistive technology such as Clicker, this has increased students’ willingness to read and write, particularly for those with significant literacy anxiety, and has begun to narrow gaps in reading comprehension for disadvantaged students. One student with extremely low literacy levels, supported through Clicker, progressed from being unable to read or write independently to completing tasks like a written set of instructions for a recipe.
- Teaching is adapted thoughtfully, supported by scaffolds such as chunked learning, differentiated tasks and scribes. In a highly motivating PE lesson, well-structured resources enabled all students to access the activity safely while still being challenged. One student who was initially anxious about jumping began at the lowest level and went on to complete higher jumps independently. Students were keen to show staff their progress, and the impact on their confidence was clear as several moved onto more demanding equipment. Staff also tailor introductions, examples and expectations to individuals and groups. In an emotional-regulation session on recognising signs of anxiety, delivery was flexibly adapted so one group could work interactively while another engaged individually with trusted adults, ensuring all students accessed the learning in a manageable, supportive way.
- Classrooms are intentionally designed with multiple zones and sensory options, including soft seating, floor chairs, individual booths and breakout rooms, so students can choose spaces that help them feel safe and grounded. This flexible environment reduces anxiety and supports sustained engagement. In a mathematics lesson, students selected from a range of sensory seating, from floor chairs to a breakout room and a spinning chair to meet movement needs, enabling all students to remain regulated and fully involved in group discussion and collaborative problem-solving.
- The school manages diverse needs in shared spaces through a highly individualised and inclusive ethos, captured in the motto “you do you,” which

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promotes acceptance of different ways of regulating and expressing emotions. Staff recognise quickly when students need space, time or sensory input and respond with timely, well-judged interventions. Explicit teaching of self-regulation strategies helps students to understand and manage their own needs, supported by simple prompts such as offering ear defenders or a quieter space. Staff also educate students about each other's needs so that differences are understood rather than judged. Students spoke positively about this approach: "They let us do what we want when we need it. If you need a break or a walk, have one."

3.2 Quality of provision and outcomes - Even better if...

- ... the school developed a teaching and learning handbook to capture effective practice, support staff consistency, and share as a model for other schools.
- ... the school reviewed its assessment approaches and teaching strategies for foundational writing to ensure students build secure early literacy skills.

4.1 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs - What went well

- A discussion with a group of disadvantaged students highlighted their strong sense of engagement and belonging, alongside a clear understanding of why their education matters. Students spoke with genuine satisfaction about their school experience, describing it as a place that "helps you advance in life" and one they would recommend to others. They linked their learning directly to future independence and employment, noting that "if you don't do learning, you may never get a job and won't get money," and emphasised the relevance of subjects such as mathematics, cooking, life skills and online safety to their aspirations. Pride in personal growth was evident, particularly when students reflected on new experiences, with one noting, "I'm most proud of my cooking skills".
- The introduction of 'Wow Journals' is strengthening how the school evidences progress against EHCP-related targets. Created collaboratively with students and support staff, the journals capture every target achieved across the year and are enriched with photos and student voice, building a detailed record of academic and personal development. The journals offer a powerful narrative of growth and provide a meaningful celebration for students and their families.
- The school has developed a thoughtful and well-structured transition process rooted in gaining understanding of student needs and building trust early. New students begin only after a detailed parent-only consultation, giving staff rich information about diet, interests, behaviours and what helps each student feel safe. This enables proactive planning and clear communication with families about gradual, reduced-timetable starts. Regular check-ins ensure that every

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early experience of the school is positive. Internal transitions are equally well managed, with early planning, careful staff placement and a transitions week. Last summer, a transition project included activities like arranging classroom furniture, choosing the colour of cushions and completing practical tasks related to room design to aid familiarisation, reinforced by other strategies like social stories, visual supports and countdown calendars.

- Attendance is below that of other special settings due to students' complex needs, yet leaders work proactively and persistently with families to promote regular attendance. Attendance systems are becoming increasingly structured with clear procedures ensuring all absences are followed up. The attendance officer is positioned in the office to engage parents quickly and constructively. Positive reinforcement is embedded through newsletters celebrating 100% attendance and points awarded for full-class attendance. When students become severely absent or disengaged, staff respond compassionately, using multi-layered actions such as home visits, video calls, trusted-adult outreach and referrals to outside agencies, showing their commitment to re-engaging highly vulnerable students with complex and shifting needs.
- Suspension rates remain low compared to national figures, indicating that the provision is well matched to the cohort and that proactive strategies are working effectively. Leaders recognise that suspensions rarely teach the intended lesson for many students, so the emphasis is placed on helping them understand the impact of their actions. Following any significant incident, staff use a visual breakdown to explore who was affected, how they may have felt and what can be done to repair the situation, helping students develop healthier strategies for managing themselves.

4.2 Quality of provision and outcomes for disadvantaged pupils and/or pupils with additional needs - Even better if...

- ... leaders used the updated and bespoke electronic assessment system to further deepen their understanding of how different groups of students are performing, enabling clearer identification of patterns, strengths and emerging needs.

5. Area of Excellence

The Wymering Way: Mental Health and Wellbeing Culture and Curriculum

Accredited

5.1 Why has this area been identified as a strength? What actions has the school taken to establish expertise in this area?

The school has built a highly coherent, research-informed approach to Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, contributing to a reduced need for referrals to external agencies such as CAMHS. As students joined the school, leaders quickly identified that many arrived with complex, often previously unidentified mental health needs, including limited emotional vocabulary and difficulty recognising their own feelings. In response, they made a strategic decision to embed mental health as a core curriculum entitlement rather than an add-on. Weekly small-group sessions, delivered by staff best placed to build trust, provide a universal Tier 1 offer. These sessions are intentionally informal, using activities such as Lego, colouring, football or animal care, to lower anxiety and enable authentic conversations. For students requiring more targeted support, the school has developed a suite of structured, time-bound interventions. These include programmes for anxiety, low mood, anger management and self-esteem.

A whole-school provision map structures this work. Leaders use validated tools such as the Spence Anxiety Scale and a bespoke SEMH assessment to identify needs, target interventions and track progress. Parent surveys, stakeholder evaluations and student feedback inform ongoing refinement.

Expertise has been deliberately developed across the workforce. The mental health lead and deputy headteacher both hold relevant qualifications and have drawn on research around trauma-informed practice and the limitations of cognitive behaviour therapy for neurodiverse students. Phase leaders have completed training on helping young people cope with challenges, stress and change, and staff receive regular professional development on topics like self-harm, adverse childhood experiences and handling extreme responses. A partnership with a mental health organisation staffed by former NHS clinicians has enabled the co-production of bespoke interventions such as the grief and loss programme.

Staff who initially felt unequipped to manage high-level needs now report increased confidence, supported by daily leadership check-ins, open-door supervision and structured debriefs. Expertise is no longer held by a single leader; class teams are increasingly able to deliver interventions effectively because they hold the strongest relationships with students.

5.2 What evidence is there of the impact on pupils' outcomes?

There is strong evidence that the school's SEMH provision is having a significant impact on students' wellbeing, emotional literacy and readiness to learn. Leaders track progress systematically using validated assessment tools at baseline and post-intervention, alongside twice-yearly whole-school SEMH and anxiety assessments. These data sets show substantial reductions in emotional difficulties, anxiety and dysregulation.

Case studies demonstrate the depth of impact. A Key Stage 2 student engaged in a bespoke emotional-literacy and loss-focused intervention, developing the confidence to talk about difficult feelings they had previously been unable to express. A Key Stage 3 student strengthened peer relationships and improved emotional regulation through targeted play-based and self-esteem work. A Key Stage 4 student benefited from focused anger-management and regulation sessions, resulting in calmer responses and greater control over their emotions.

Engagement in interventions is exceptionally high, particularly from students who typically resist withdrawal support. Parents and staff report improved communication, emotional understanding and self-advocacy. There has also been a reduction in referrals to external services for SEMH needs, validating the quality and impact of the school's in-house provision.

5.3 What is the name, job title and email address of the staff lead in this area?

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Following the QA Review

The review report is primarily for the school's internal use to support the school's continuing improvement. However, we encourage you to share the main findings with your hub/hub manager so that they can support your hub's activity planning. Challenge Partners will also collate and analyse content reports from across the partnership of schools and trusts including using AI tools to create an aggregate picture of what is going on across the sector (sharing these with the partnership) each year. The QA Review reports remain confidential to Challenge Partners and the host school. This ensures that schools embrace the review as a development process, acting as a catalyst for their ongoing improvement. This is the primary purpose of the QA review. However, our aim is that the thematic analysis will demonstrate the additional value of a sector wide overview, illustrated with real-life examples.

For further support following your QA Review, schools can access the School Support Directory; the Challenge Partners online tool that enables schools to connect with other schools in your hub and across the national partnership of schools. The School Support Directory can be accessed via the Challenge Partners website. (<https://www.challengepartners.org/>)

Finally, following the QA Review, schools may find it useful to refer to research such as the EEF toolkit to help inform their approach to tackling the EBIs identified in the report (<https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/education-evidence/teaching-learning-toolkit>)