

# Isambard Community School

## Inspection report

---

<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131196
<b>Local Authority</b>	Swindon
<b>Inspection number</b>	381315
<b>Inspection dates</b>	9–10 November 2011
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Grahame Sherfield HMI

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

---

<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	1168
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Kevin Gray
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rachael Mattey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	17–18 March 2009
<b>School address</b>	Redhouse Way Redhouse Swindon SN25 2ND
<b>Telephone number</b>	01793 705400
<b>Fax number</b>	01793 707596
<b>Email address</b>	admin@isambard.swindon.sch.uk

---

<b>Age group</b>	11–16
<b>Inspection date(s)</b>	9–10 November 2011
<b>Inspection number</b>	381315

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

© Crown copyright 2011



## Introduction

This inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and four additional inspectors. The inspectors visited 38 lessons and observed 36 teachers. They held meetings with members of the governing body, staff and students. Inspectors looked at key documents, such as the school's plans for improvement and the minutes of meetings of the governing body, as well as 110 questionnaires returned by parents and carers.

The inspection team reviewed many aspects of the school's work. It looked in detail at a number of key areas.

- How successfully the school is improving the progress made in mathematics and by boys.
- How well students contribute to the local community.
- How well teachers challenge more-able students and provide feedback on how to improve.
- How well the 'accelerated curriculum' meets students' needs.
- The effectiveness of departmental reviews in improving practice and impacting on students' progress.

## Information about the school

Isambard Community School is larger-than-average and serves a mainly White British community in the urban area surrounding the campus. The proportion of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities, including with a statement of special educational needs, is similar to that found nationally. The number known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The school has specialist status for the performing and media arts.

Isambard opened as a new school in 2007 with Year 7 only. It has grown in size rapidly as new cohorts joined each September. In 2011, the first students entered Year 11. Early years day-care provision on the campus is not managed by the governing body and is subject to a separate inspection.

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

## Inspection judgements

**Overall effectiveness: how good is the school?**

**2**

**The school's capacity for sustained improvement**

**1**

## Main findings

This is a good and rapidly improving school. Students' attendance is high and they behave well and flourish within the caring and supportive environment created by the headteacher and the staff. Students make an outstanding contribution to the school, contributing their views and taking on a very wide range of responsibilities, and to the local area where they engage in the work of many different groups. The school is a harmonious community and students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding.

Students make good and improving progress throughout the school. Progress is strong in English and the school has worked successfully to accelerate progress in mathematics. There has been success in improving boys' progress in English, although there remains more to do to close the gap fully between boys and girls. The evidence of the school's first GCSE results in the summer of 2011 is very positive. Both the school's own data and inspection evidence indicate that the improvements are continuing.

Attainment is above average and rising. The school's success in improving teaching during a period when many new and inexperienced staff have joined has made an important contribution to this. The quality of teaching is rigorously monitored by senior staff in order to help teachers to develop and consolidate their skills and this is supported by regular opportunities for professional development. Students' progress is tracked carefully and additional support provided for students identified at risk of underachieving. Support is targeted well, for example to those who might otherwise just miss a grade C in GCSE mathematics.

Teaching is good and some is outstanding, although occasionally strategies for meeting the varying needs of students in the class are limited and depend too much on additional support or challenge from the teacher. At these times, students' progress slows, including that made by the more able. Teachers' oral feedback to students on the quality of their work and how to improve is good and highly regarded but not always sufficiently supported by written comments. Students work well in lessons but sometimes their skills in learning independently are underdeveloped and they can be rather passive. Students benefit from the good curriculum, particularly from the sometimes exceptional opportunities to engage in the creative and performing arts.

The headteacher has a very clear view of the school's strengths and areas for

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

development as a result of rigorous and realistic self-evaluation. Supported by the strong senior team and effective governing body, she has led and managed the rapid growth of the school and its staff exceptionally well, maintaining the strong impetus for school improvement and the good and improving quality of teaching. The specialist status makes a very positive contribution to the school's development, particularly to the curriculum and to links with the community. Partnerships are outstanding. Very challenging targets are used well, students' progress is accelerating, their personal development shows some significant improvement and there are some highly effective middle leaders. Consequently, the capacity to improve further is outstanding.

### **What does the school need to do to improve further?**

- Continue to improve the quality of teaching and learning so that all lessons are good or better by:
  - securing the consistent use of approaches that meet students' varying learning needs well
  - ensuring teachers provide clear guidance in their marking on how students could do better
  - sharing the best practice within the school.
- Develop students' skills in learning independently by planning and providing systematic opportunities for students to take greater responsibility for their own learning.

### **Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils**

**2**

Students respond particularly well when teachers use their understanding of students' levels of attainment to ensure that the challenge appropriate to them as individuals is very clear. For example, in a Year 8 design and technology lesson, students made outstanding progress as those of differing levels of attainment all understood what was expected of them in evaluating a jewellery design. Students rise to the challenge when offered the opportunity to develop their skills in learning independently and organising their own ideas. For example, in a Year 9 English lesson, students preparing for an individual presentation and group discussion relating to *Of Mice and Men*, showed themselves to be attentive, responsive, thoughtful and conscientious. In another English lesson in Year 10, students shared their individual thoughts about their learning in the planned opportunity provided. Students respond well to the chance to engage in active learning, as in a Year 9 science lesson when students acted as 'particles' to develop their understanding of convection. However, when learning is over-directed by the teacher, students can become a little passive and find it more difficult to engage so wholeheartedly in their learning.

The achievement of all groups of students, including those with special educational

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

needs and/or disabilities, is currently good and improving quickly. Most enjoy school. They have a good understanding of the importance of diet as well of exercise in a healthy lifestyle. Students report that they feel safe and are confident that any bullying that might rarely occur is effectively tackled by the staff. Students work well in class and with their above-average attainment, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

*These are the grades for pupils' outcomes*

<b>Pupils' achievement and the extent to which they enjoy their learning</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attainment <sup>1</sup>	2
The quality of pupils' learning and their progress	2
The quality of learning for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their progress	2
<b>The extent to which pupils feel safe</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Pupils' behaviour</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils adopt healthy lifestyles</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils contribute to the school and wider community</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The extent to which pupils develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account:	
Pupils' attendance <sup>1</sup>	1
<b>The extent of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development</b>	<b>1</b>

## How effective is the provision?

Teachers' subject knowledge is generally good and effective links are made with students' previous learning. Relationships in most classrooms are positive and behaviour observed by inspectors in lessons was good and sometimes better. Most teachers ask effective questions to check students' understanding and provide good verbal feedback to students on how well they have done and how they might do better in the future. In the best teaching observed, teachers' lively and engaging style enthused students and well-planned activities resulted in good, and sometimes better, progress. Students were provided with opportunities to reflect for themselves on the quality of their work and how it might have been improved, sharing ideas with their peers. Classroom displays were purposeful and supported learning well. Where satisfactory teaching was seen, although there were frequently objectives for three different levels of ability, assessment information was not being used well enough to provide classroom activities matched to students' varied learning needs. In practice, tasks were often the same for all. Teachers' marking did not offer students enough

<sup>1</sup> The grades for attainment and attendance are: 1 is high; 2 is above average; 3 is broadly average; and 4 is low

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

guidance on how they might improve their work or that they could consult subsequently.

The curriculum is adjusted frequently to ensure that it is well tailored to students’ interests and needs. The school’s specialism has a significant impact on provision in the creative and performing arts as well as more widely. For example, the Arts Blast activities which take place twice a year involve subject departments working together creatively to provide integrated activities that are highly valued by students. Extra-curricular provision is strong, particularly in sport and the arts, and well attended. Cross-curricular provision for literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology is generally good and very well planned in some departments, although this high quality is not fully consistent in all subjects.

The school is inclusive and welcoming. Heads of year and academic mentors monitor students’ academic and personal development closely and tailor their support well to varying levels of need. Students clearly value the help provided. Good work with a range of agencies enables those students in need of a little extra help to make the most of their opportunities in school. Very effective arrangements sustain high attendance.

*These are the grades for the quality of provision*

<b>The quality of teaching</b>	<b>2</b>
Taking into account: The use of assessment to support learning	2
<b>The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils’ needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of care, guidance and support</b>	<b>2</b>

## How effective are leadership and management?

The strong ambition for continuing improvement is widely shared. Senior leaders have very effective systems for monitoring and evaluating the school’s work. These include making very good use of the independent perspective of external consultants. Middle leadership is of good quality, with some exceptionally skilled staff. Detailed reviews are carried out in each subject and resulting action plans secure good improvements in practice and in students’ progress. The headteacher is rightly keen to build on these systems to strengthen middle leadership further and new group leaders have been established who play a central role in monitoring and promoting improving progress and teaching through the new Achievement and Standards Group. There is a significant commitment to professional development with time allocated systematically to activities to develop and share practice in teaching. The governing body is well organised and well informed by the headteacher and other senior staff. Members thus have a good knowledge of the school’s strengths and areas for development and are well placed to ask suitable

**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

questions of leaders and managers. The governing body has reviewed its own work, correctly identifying that an audit of skills is needed to inform its further development.

The school ensures that students with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar progress to their peers and works with some success to improve the achievement of boys. This shows its effectiveness in promoting equal opportunities for all students to achieve as well as they can. It strives to ensure that discrimination against any group is avoided at all times. The school makes a good contribution to community cohesion. It is a highly cohesive community with very strong links with the local area and activities are underpinned by detailed planning. Relationships with a school in Germany are well established and links are being developed with an establishment in a contrasting area in Britain.

A small minority of parents and carers responding to the Ofsted questionnaire indicated some concerns, particularly over the school’s help for parents and carers in supporting children’s learning. However, information evenings are held four times a year and the school has established focus groups, for example on academic mentoring, to seek parents’ and carers’ views. The school provides suitable reports on students’ progress and parents and carers can access current data on their children’s progress on the school’s website. Frequent newsletters provide good information on many aspects of school life.

Outstanding partnerships with the community and external organisations extend the opportunities for students in their work and in their personal development, particularly in the creative and performing arts. Multi-agency approaches are used to support individual students as needed and there are very good links with local primary and secondary schools. The school’s arrangements for safeguarding are good. Careful checks are made on all adults who work within the school and all necessary policies are implemented well.

*These are the grades for leadership and management*

<b>The effectiveness of leadership and management in embedding ambition and driving improvement</b>	<b>1</b>
Taking into account: The leadership and management of teaching and learning	2
<b>The effectiveness of the governing body in challenging and supporting the school so that weaknesses are tackled decisively and statutory responsibilities met</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of the school’s engagement with parents and carers</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of partnerships in promoting learning and well-being</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes equality of opportunity and tackles discrimination</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness of safeguarding procedures</b>	<b>2</b>



**Inspection grades: 1 is outstanding, 2 is good, 3 is satisfactory, and 4 is inadequate**

Please turn to the glossary for a description of the grades and inspection terms

<b>The effectiveness with which the school promotes community cohesion</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>The effectiveness with which the school deploys resources to achieve value for money</b>	<b>2</b>

## Views of parents and carers

A smaller proportion of parents and carers responded to the Ofsted questionnaire than is commonly found. The large majority of parents and carers who did so have positive views on all aspects featuring in the Ofsted questionnaire. However, concerns were expressed by a small minority about a number of aspects. These include how the school helps parents and carers to support their children’s learning, the extent to which children are prepared for the future, the way the school deals with unacceptable behaviour and its leadership and management. Inspection evidence does not endorse these concerns. The school does much to develop its partnership with parents and carers, students are well prepared for the future, their behaviour is good and the leadership and management of the school have many strengths.

### Responses from parents and carers to Ofsted’s questionnaire

Ofsted invited all the registered parents and carers of pupils registered at Isambard Community School to complete a questionnaire about their views of the school.

In the questionnaire, parents and carers were asked to record how strongly they agreed with 13 statements about the school.

The inspection team received 110 completed questionnaires by the end of the on-site inspection. In total, there are 1,168 pupils registered at the school.

Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
My child enjoys school	49	45	47	43	12	11	1	1
The school keeps my child safe	52	47	53	48	5	5	0	0
The school informs me about my child’s progress	31	28	58	53	14	13	3	3
My child is making enough progress at this school	36	33	50	45	15	14	4	4
The teaching is good at this school	21	19	75	68	12	11	0	0
The school helps me to support my child’s learning	27	25	53	48	22	20	3	3
The school helps my child to have a healthy lifestyle	19	17	65	59	19	17	0	0
The school makes sure that my child is well prepared for the future (for example changing year group, changing school, and for children who are finishing school, entering further or higher education, or entering employment)	29	26	47	43	18	16	4	4
The school meets my child’s particular needs	28	25	58	53	15	14	2	2
The school deals effectively with unacceptable behaviour	27	25	49	45	16	15	6	5
The school takes account of my suggestions and concerns	17	15	57	52	15	14	6	5
The school is led and managed effectively	25	23	59	54	16	15	5	5
Overall, I am happy with my child’s experience at this school	45	41	49	45	8	7	3	3

The table above summarises the responses that parents and carers made to each statement. The percentages indicate the proportion of parents and carers giving that response out of the total number of completed questionnaires. Where one or more parents and carers chose not to answer a particular question, the percentages will not add up to 100%.

## Glossary

### What inspection judgements mean

Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	These features are highly effective. An outstanding school provides exceptionally well for all its pupils' needs.
Grade 2	Good	These are very positive features of a school. A school that is good is serving its pupils well.
Grade 3	Satisfactory	These features are of reasonable quality. A satisfactory school is providing adequately for its pupils.
Grade 4	Inadequate	These features are not of an acceptable standard. An inadequate school needs to make significant improvement in order to meet the needs of its pupils. Ofsted inspectors will make further visits until it improves.

### Overall effectiveness of schools

Type of school	Overall effectiveness judgement (percentage of schools)			
	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
Nursery schools	43	47	10	0
Primary schools	6	46	42	6
Secondary schools	14	36	41	9
Sixth forms	15	42	41	3
Special schools	30	48	19	3
Pupil referral units	14	50	31	5
All schools	10	44	39	6

New school inspection arrangements were introduced on 1 September 2009. This means that inspectors now make some additional judgements that were not made previously.

The data in the table above are for the period 1 September 2010 to 08 April 2011 and are consistent with the latest published official statistics about maintained school inspection outcomes (see [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)).

The sample of schools inspected during 2010/11 was not representative of all schools nationally, as weaker schools are inspected more frequently than good or outstanding schools.

Percentages are rounded and do not always add exactly to 100.

Sixth form figures reflect the judgements made for the overall effectiveness of the sixth form in secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units.

## Common terminology used by inspectors

Achievement:	the progress and success of a pupil in their learning, development or training.
Attainment:	the standard of the pupils' work shown by test and examination results and in lessons.
Capacity to improve:	the proven ability of the school to continue improving. Inspectors base this judgement on what the school has accomplished so far and on the quality of its systems to maintain improvement.
Leadership and management:	the contribution of all the staff with responsibilities, not just the headteacher, to identifying priorities, directing and motivating staff and running the school.
Learning:	how well pupils acquire knowledge, develop their understanding, learn and practise skills and are developing their competence as learners.
Overall effectiveness:	<p>inspectors form a judgement on a school's overall effectiveness based on the findings from their inspection of the school. The following judgements, in particular, influence what the overall effectiveness judgement will be.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ The school's capacity for sustained improvement.</li><li>■ Outcomes for individuals and groups of pupils.</li><li>■ The quality of teaching.</li><li>■ The extent to which the curriculum meets pupils' needs, including, where relevant, through partnerships.</li><li>■ The effectiveness of care, guidance and support.</li></ul>
Progress:	the rate at which pupils are learning in lessons and over longer periods of time. It is often measured by comparing the pupils' attainment at the end of a key stage with their attainment when they started.

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**

11 November 2011

Dear Students



### **Inspection of Isambard Community School, Swindon SN25 2ND**

Thank you for your involvement in the recent inspection, particularly for the friendly and open way in which you talked to us. Your school is good and improving. This is a summary of our main findings, although I hope you will wish to read the full report for yourselves.

- You make good and improving progress in your work. Attainment is above average and rising.
- Your behaviour is good and you work well in most of your lessons.
- The teaching and the curriculum are good.
- The school cares for you well, safeguarding arrangements are good and you told us you feel safe.
- You make an outstanding contribution to the school and the wider community and are well prepared for your future economic well-being.
- Your spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and your attendance is excellent.
- The governing body, the headteacher and the other staff are very well placed to ensure that the school continues to improve.

We have asked the school to improve two aspects.

- Teaching is good but sometimes teachers do not adjust the level of difficulty enough in your work to meet your varying needs. Teachers' marking does not always provide you with enough guidance on how to do better. We have asked the school to address this. You can help by doing your very best in response to the approaches the teachers use and acting on their suggestions on how you could improve.
- We have asked the school to ensure that you have more opportunities to take greater responsibility for your own learning and engage more actively with the work you do. You can help by rising to the challenge of these opportunities.

Thank you again for your involvement in the inspection and we wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Grahame Sherfield  
Her Majesty's Inspector

**Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone **0300 123 4234**, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).**