

The Island Project School

Diddington Hall, Diddington Lane, Meriden, CV7 7HQ

Inspection dates 20–22 January 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress. Pupils make good gains in communication, interacting with others and reducing their levels of anxiety.
- Teaching is good and is planned well for each individual pupil. The range of subjects and experiences offered to pupils are highly appropriate and help to prepare them well for the future.
- The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding. Senior leaders and trustees have ensured that pupils thrive in a positive and secure environment.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted exceptionally well. They are encouraged to be reflective and consider other people's perspectives.
- The quality of leadership and management is good. Regular monitoring of the work of the staff has ensured that teaching and achievement are consistently good.
- The quality of the newly established off-site sixth form is good. Students undertake a wide range of courses, enjoy their lessons and make good progress.
- Senior leaders and trustees have ensured the school complies with all the independent school standards.
- The school is held in high regard by staff and parents.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Not enough use is made of pupil assessment information to improve teaching and achievement.
- Occasionally in lessons, pupils are not encouraged to be as independent as they might be.
- The governance arrangements for the school do not hold the school to account precisely enough for its academic standards or quality of teaching.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed seven lessons or part lessons. Most lessons were jointly observed with a member of the senior leadership team. Pupils' work, surveys, annual reports and other records, were scrutinised. Discussions with senior and middle leaders took place and 44 staff responses to a questionnaire were analysed.
- The school's documentation was examined, including planning for subjects, records of pupils' progress and the welfare and safeguarding of pupils.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools.
- The views of parents were gained through their responses to a school based questionnaire and annual reviews, as there were insufficient responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire, Parent View. The inspector also met with one parent.

Inspection team

Frank Price, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Island Project is an independent special day school for pupils who are on the autistic spectrum and often have additional communication difficulties. Currently there are 24 pupils on roll aged between six and 19 years.
- The school is located in a large country house and grounds in Solihull in the West Midlands. The school opened in 2007 and was last inspected in January 2012.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school draws pupils from five local authorities within the region.
- The school opened an off-site sixth form provision near Birmingham in January 2015, following approval from Ofsted in September 2014.
- The school does not make use of alternative providers.
- The school is broadly based on the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). It aims to 'teach children the knowledge and skills to give confidence that will enable them to reach their full potential and lead a more independent life' and 'to foster the ability to make relationships, to better communicate with a wide range of people and to encourage the ability to make personal choices.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve teaching and pupils' progress through:
 - improving the use and analysis of assessment information in order to better identify strengths and areas for improvement
 - ensuring pupils' independence skills are maximised.
- Strengthen the governance arrangements, so that trustees hold the school to account more rigorously.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- Leaders motivate and inspire staff. Staff who responded to the inspection questionnaire agree that they are proud to be members of staff at the school and understand what the school is trying to achieve. This has led to an atmosphere which enables pupils to be safe, make excellent improvements in their behaviour and succeed well in line with their abilities.
- The work of staff is checked regularly, as senior leaders are very visible around the school and provide advice to improve teaching. This has helped to secure consistently good teaching across the school and led to good and sometimes outstanding progress for pupils.
- Staff receive impressive continuous training, incorporating many different aspects such as sensory training, communication, behaviour management and safeguarding, to help them to be as effective as possible in their role.
- Middle leaders in the school provide good leadership and management. They are keen to further improve and develop their practice.
- The subjects and experiences offered to pupils are excellent and prepare them well for their next steps. Pupils' different needs are very well met through the curriculum and the level of individual support made available. A strong emphasis is placed on developing pupils' functional and academic skills, so that they can become more independent, although occasionally this is not fully consistent in all classrooms.
- Plentiful opportunities are given to promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The school actively promotes British values although information about this provision is not yet posted on the school's website, as required. More-able pupils learn about aspects of the law, while others learn how to improve their behaviour. Exceptionally good relationships are fostered throughout the school and the value and dignity ascribed to each pupil ensure they have equal opportunities.
- The accommodation is very suitable to meet the needs of pupils. They have access to extensive grounds and some pupils enjoy looking after small animals such as chickens, gerbils and reptiles. The premises allow individual and smaller group teaching as appropriate to pupils' needs. The sixth form accommodation is superb.
- The information made available to parents in written form and on the website is extensive and annual reviews are thorough, giving parents a clear view of their child's progress over the year. The complaints policy meets requirements and there have been no formal complaints in the last year.
- The school has a reasonable view of its strengths and areas for improvement, although the school's self-evaluation does not always have enough evidence to support its judgements and trustee involvement in this process is limited. The school development plan sets out how long-term improvements are to be achieved appropriately.
- Individual pupil assessment information is tracked closely, to check that they are making the expected progress. However, the use and analysis of assessment information to compare the school with national standards, is in the early stages of development.
- Older students receive impartial advice to help them make decisions about their future and the sixth form provides an excellent environment for them to develop their maturity.
- The recent setting up of the new off-site sixth form is a good indication of the school's capacity to improve further.

- Safeguarding arrangements are robust and ensure children are safe and protected. The school meets all of the regulations.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The board of trustees is an active and committed body which meets regularly and discharges its duties to the charity effectively.
 - It successfully ensures financial probity, suitable links between salaries and the performance of staff, compliance with safeguarding requirements, and that the school meets all the independent school standards.
 - Trustees do not contribute to school self-evaluation sufficiently. They do not have enough information and knowledge about pupils' progress to enable them to hold the school to account with regard to the quality of teaching and pupils' achievements.
 - Relationships with placing local authorities are generally good.

The behaviour and safety of pupils are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils develop outstanding attitudes to learning in lessons over time. Many feel anxious about learning and interacting with other people. However, they make great strides in becoming more confident and sociable. This manifests itself in lessons, where pupils learn to sustain concentration for increasing periods of time. As pupils become more mature they learn to self-regulate their behaviour more effectively. Many pupils progress from individual learning to increasing their time in group learning.
- Some pupils have been out of school for considerable periods of time. However, their attendance at the school increases dramatically and the overall attendance rate is above average. Some start on a part-time basis and quickly build up to full-time attendance. There are no permanent or fixed-term exclusions.
- The behaviour of pupils in lessons and around the school is outstanding, given their needs. Over time, school records show the vast improvements in behaviour through, for example, the reduction of aggressive incidents or inappropriate behaviour.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well through the curriculum. They are given excellent opportunities to use the local and wider community facilities to extend their experiences.
- Where appropriate, pupils develop their understanding of what it means to be British and make their views known in a democratic way, for example, voting on which pieces of equipment to buy or for preferred activities.
- Pupils have opportunities to increase their understanding of public services and institutions through visits or visitors, such as the police and fire service. Where appropriate they engage in debates, for example about the national HS2 high speed train project which is to affect the school. Some pupils occasionally have very fixed views about different cultures, but they learn respect and tolerance for different people and the school is a harmonious, happy and tolerant community.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Staff ensure that students are well supervised at all times to ensure their own safety and that of others.
- Pupils feel safe and secure due to the high level of professional care and supervision and this, in conjunction with teaching about anti-bullying and cyber-bullying, ensures pupils are confident and comfortable in the school environment.
- Through pupil surveys, they state that they feel safe in school. The trusting and supportive relationships between staff and pupils are a key feature of the school.

- Pupils develop a good awareness of how to keep safe online. In school, the high levels of supervision ensure that this is the case, but the school recognises the importance of equipping pupils with ways to protect themselves online outside of school, for example, the dangers of hacking and not accepting other people's profile at face value.
- There are effective security arrangements within the school and at the sixth form site. The sites are well maintained and there are comprehensive risk assessments to keep pupils safe. Parents state that they also have confidence that their children are safe at school.
- Suitable arrangements are in place for the safe recruitment of staff, and the training of staff in child protection and first aid. The school's health and safety procedures are implemented effectively, including arrangements for fire safety.

The quality of teaching is good

- Teaching is highly individualised; bespoke packages of learning are put together to meet the needs and aptitudes of each pupil well. This means that they are provided with the right level of challenge and enabled to make good progress. Good opportunities are also fashioned for pupils to learn in group situations, when this is appropriate.
- Staff are highly trained in communication strategies and in managing pupils' challenging behaviour due to their autism. Staff are calm and measured in their approach and this creates a positive and purposeful learning environment, to which pupils respond very well.
- Staff make very effective use of sensory methods and often teaching takes place in short bursts, followed by a sensory activity. This helps to maintain pupils' concentration and prevents them from becoming distressed. A highly structured routine is key to pupils' understanding of events, and symbols or text are used to outline the timetable for pupils so they know what to expect.
- Literacy and numeracy are taught well. More-able pupils write for a range of purposes and construct persuasive pieces of writing. Other pupils enjoy listening to audio stories. Some pupils read confidently but do not always have the understanding of the text they are reading, although staff question and discuss with them to secure better comprehension. In mathematics, pupils know how to tell the time and use mathematics in functional ways.
- More-able pupils are stretched well. Over time most pupils become keener to engage in learning and in the sixth form they relish learning and vocational activities. Some access lessons in mainstream schools for specific subjects and this brings greater academic rigour for pupils.
- Staff make good use of very detailed pupil assessment at an individual level, but the use of assessment information to analyse strengths and areas for improvement at a school-wide level is less well developed. This means that any trends in performance, for example in subjects, are not identified and acted upon. On occasions, pupils' independence is not always encouraged as much as it should be.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Pupils make overall good progress. In 2014 the majority of pupils made better than expected progress from their various starting points in English, mathematics and science, when measured against similar pupils nationally. However, the school does not have sufficient evidence that this has been sustained over the last three years.
- Pupils make good gains in developing their communication and independence skills, through a strong focus on these areas. There is a wide range of abilities across the school. Those with more complex learning needs learn to communicate more effectively through the increased use of symbols; they can indicate choices and preferences of activities or food. More-able pupils learn how to communicate appropriately, for example learning how to open and close a conversation, through the use of role play

scenarios.

- Pupils learn to manage aspects of their autism more effectively, so that they learn to become more tolerant of change and increase their ability to socialise and interact with other pupils and adults. More-able pupils develop their literacy skills effectively. They are able to identify imagery in poems and write for a range of different purposes.
- Numeracy skills are developed well, particularly through practical applications. Pupils learn the value of money through buying and selling while running an enterprise project. Some pupils learn to recognise different currencies and which countries they belong to.
- The curriculum promotes pupils' good progress as it is highly individualised to meet their specific needs and often focuses on functional skills that equip them well and prepare them effectively for their next steps. Older pupils study and achieve nationally accredited courses, which boosts their sense of achievement and self-esteem well.
- Parents and carers rightly believe that their children are making good academic progress, and strong progress in developing their personal and social skills.

The sixth form provision

is good

- The sixth form provision is good. It has recently been relocated to new off-site premises and students are still settling into their new surroundings. However, they have adapted to the changes well through effective preparation and taster sessions. These are very well suited to the needs of older students and give them ideal opportunities to extend their academic and vocational studies.
- Students undertake a wide range of accredited courses. They also achieve competence certificates, for example in expressive arts. They are beginning to participate in on-site work experience, with a view to undertaking off-site work related learning when they can cope with this.
- Work is well matched to the different abilities of students. More-able students study history and know the main characters of the cold war. Other students develop their confidence and proficiency in cookery through preparing simple meals.
- The site and procedures to keep students safe are excellent. The sixth form provision is distinctive and provides a mature environment for older students to develop their skills and confidence.
- Where appropriate, college links are used to provide further academic challenge, for example in information technology. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good, with clear plans for further improvements, particularly around developing on-site vocational studies.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	135453
Inspection number	455552
DfE registration number	334/6010

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	Day special school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	5–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Proprietor	Carol Howe and Jacqui Walters-Hutton
Chair	Jacqui Walters-Hutton
Principal	Jacqui Walters-Hutton
Date of previous school inspection	18 January 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£42,500 - £67,000
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