

The Small School

Fore Street, Bideford, EX39 6AB

Inspection dates

20–22 May 2015

Overall effectiveness

Inadequate

4

Leadership and management	Inadequate	4
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Inadequate	4
Quality of teaching	Inadequate	4
Achievement of pupils	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

This is a school that is inadequate because

- Leadership and management are inadequate because those in leading roles in the school do not demonstrate sufficient skills and knowledge to ensure that all the independent school standards are consistently met.
- Leaders, including trustees, have been ineffective in implementing safeguarding procedures and, as a result, the school's work in safeguarding is inadequate.
- The board of trustees has placed too much emphasis on retaining the intimacy of the small school community and not enough focus on improving the quality of students' academic achievement and personal development.
- Trustees admit to financial constraints which limit the improvements required for professional development and for providing adequate resources and training for the school.
- Teaching is not consistently challenging enough across all subjects to ensure that the progress and achievement of different groups of students are consistently good or better.
- Procedures for the monitoring and recording of students' work are underdeveloped. Teachers do not check students' understanding regularly enough to ensure that students gain a secure understanding and that gaps in their knowledge are being filled.
- Students do not achieve well enough because they do not produce their own written work in sufficient quality or quantity in order to develop good learning skills.
- Students have been given some effective careers guidance for the next stage of their education, but their plans are too often spoiled by poor results.
- Although the behaviour of students is compliant, not all are well prepared for lessons.
- Personal, social and health education is not taught across all year groups, which negatively affects the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Students are not challenged sufficiently to extend their personal development.

The school has the following strengths

- Students contribute to tasks which help the running of the school, such as preparing lunch and cleaning.
- Additional effective support is provided for students with special learning needs.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school does not meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. Details are recorded in the report.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed 10 lessons, looked at students' work, teachers' planning and information about students' progress.
- Discussions were held with members of the board of trustees, the headteacher, teaching staff and pupils.
- School policies and other documentation were examined including for safeguarding, attendance and behaviour.
- The inspector took account of the responses in 14 staff questionnaires.
- The inspector took account of 15 responses to the online Parent View questionnaire.

Inspection team

Flora Bean, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The Small School is a co-educational, non-selective independent school for students aged 11 to 16 years.
- The school was established in 1982 by a cooperative of parents and carers who wished to provide a secondary education on a small scale.
- The aim of the school is to 'promote education in a small community where learning takes place in a nurturing and creative atmosphere, where human scale values are promoted for the development of individual talent, the acquisition of new skills and a sense of social responsibility'.
- The school is located in former chapel premises in Hartland, North Devon.
- A board of trustees, which includes parents, has responsibility for the governance of the school.
- There are 24 students on roll, 21 of whom attend full time. The three students who attend part time are home educated for the remainder of their schooling. Students often join and leave the school at a variety of different times during the school year.
- There is one student with a statement of special educational needs.
- The school does not make use of any off-site alternative provision.
- The school was last inspected in January 2012.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of the leadership, management and governance of the school by:
 - ensuring that leaders and managers have sufficient knowledge and skills to ensure that all of the independent school standards are met
 - establishing a culture of high standards and expectations of what students can achieve
 - establishing robust systems to accurately check on and evaluate the school's work and ensure that the outcomes are consistently used by all staff to bring about improvements
 - ensuring that trustees have relevant and accurate information to enable them to play a full part in the long-term improvement of the school and to hold leaders closely to account for the school's performance and students' safety.
- Improve the procedures for ensuring students' safety by:
 - ensuring that leaders are trained appropriately so that procedures for the welfare, health and safety of students, including for their well-being, are robust and followed in line with statutory guidance
 - ensuring that policies are reviewed and updated in line with the latest statutory guidance and are implemented effectively.
- Improve the quality of the teaching and learning by:
 - planning activities that ensure high levels of challenge for all groups of students
 - checking students' learning during lessons and adapting teaching so that progress is rapid and gaps in knowledge and understanding are identified and addressed
 - insisting on high standards and expectations with regards to the quality and quantity of work produced so that students are able to see visible progress over time and revisit their work for revision purposes
 - setting ambitious targets for students' achievements and making sure students understand what they need to do to achieve the targets set for them
 - ensuring that students act upon any feedback they receive so that they understand how to improve their learning and achieve more.
- **The school must meet the following independent school standards:**
 - ensure that a written policy on the curriculum is drawn up and implemented effectively, and that it is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work (paragraphs 2(1) and 2(1)(a))
 - ensure that there is a programme of personal, social, health and economic education which reflects the school's aims and ethos and encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to the

protected characteristics set out in the 2010 Act (paragraphs 2(2)(d); (2)(d)(i) and (ii))

- ensure that pupils are enabled to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught (paragraph 3(a))
- demonstrate that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress (paragraph 3(g))
- ensure that arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school and that such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State (paragraphs 7, 7(a) and 7(b))
- ensure that a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour (paragraph 9(c))
- ensure that first aid is administered in a timely and competent manner by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written first aid policy (paragraph 13)
- ensure that the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified (paragraphs 16(a) and 16(b))
- ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, fulfil their responsibilities effectively and actively promote the well-being of pupils so that the independent school standards are met consistently (paragraphs (34(1)(a), 34(1)(b) and 34(1)(c)).

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are inadequate

- The leadership and management of the school are inadequate. Leaders have not ensured that all the independent school standards are met. They have failed to sustain an ethos of high expectations with the appropriate systems and procedures in place to ensure rigorous monitoring of all aspects of the school's work.
- The curriculum is not regularly monitored to ensure that all schemes of work are in place and updated to cover all the required areas of learning.
- Not all students receive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE). Year 10 students have lessons in current affairs for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, but no lessons in PSHEE. However, they are being prepared for life in modern Britain as the school has an effective focus on developing British values.
- There is some effective careers guidance, but students' future plans are often impeded by lack of lower than expected results in examinations at Key Stage 4.
- There is no performance management system. Leaders do not monitor the quality of teaching and work in students' books. The preconception is that the quality of teaching is good. This is misguided, as it is not borne out in the work students produce or in the progress they make over time.
- There is no analysis of students' work or tracking of their progress over time to ensure that any gaps in their learning are met consistently. Students arrive in lessons with no books and frequently make no written record of what they have been learning or what they have achieved.
- The school provides effective additional support for students with special learning difficulties. As a result, they are helped in their learning.
- Leaders report that there is no bad behaviour in school. There is no sanctions log. Any misbehaviour is recorded in students' files. The school is not following statutory guidance and does not have enough evidence to support its self-evaluation of the standard of behaviour.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are inadequate. Staff are trained in safeguarding procedures. The school has appointed and trained a designated safeguarding lead. However, procedures for safeguarding are not implemented or recorded effectively and thus do not meet statutory requirements.
- Safe recruitment checks are carried out appropriately for the suitability of staff to work with students. Checks are recorded accurately on the single central register.
- The welfare, safety and security of pupils are not evident in the implementation of all policies and procedures. Policies have not been updated, as required, so that the safety and security of students remain a priority.
- Attendance is average. The school has endeavoured to improve it, with some success.
- The headteacher ensures that the promotion of extremism in political views is prohibited.
- Policies are available to parents via the school's website and are also available on request from the school in hard copy. Parents and carers receive an annual report on their children's progress.
- Staff questionnaires, many of which are from parent volunteers, show that they think highly of the school. On-line parent questionnaires from a good number of parents (over 20%) raise concerns regarding the leadership and management of the school, the quality of teaching and students' progress, student behaviour, response to concerns raised, and provision of information regarding their children's progress. Inspection evidence shows that these are areas where improvement and development are needed in the school.
- Procedures for the handling of complaints meet requirements.
- There are no middle managers. Teachers are responsible for their subject area in terms of schemes of work and for examination preparation. This is not monitored by the school's leaders to ensure that all is in place for the academic achievement of students.
- **The governance of the school:**
 - The school is governed by the board of trustees, three of whom are parents in the school. Although they are committed in their responsibility and duty of care, they have not ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
 - The trustees do not have clear oversight of the school. Although they meet as a board with the headteacher, there are gaps in their understanding of how well students are progressing, and they are failing in their duty to ensure that students' academic achievement and personal development are the priority.
 - Trustees have not ensured that the quality of teaching and learning is monitored to achieve and sustain consistently high quality.
 - Policies and procedures are not updated, as required, including for the safeguarding of students.

- Financial constraints are a limiting factor in the training of staff, performance management and development of resources.

The behaviour and safety of pupils**are inadequate****Behaviour**

- The behaviour of students requires improvement. Although polite and respectful of each other and compliant in lessons, students do not demonstrate sufficiently positive attitudes towards their learning in all subjects. Due to teaching that fails to engage them, students are, on occasion, too passive and do not fully engage in lessons. There is reluctance amongst a small minority of students to accept responsibility for their work.
- Students' attendance is variable but overall is around the national average. The school works with students and parents to improve attendance and there has been some success. Students are not always punctual.
- Although students generally behave well, the school does not keep a log of sanctions for serious misbehaviour as it is required to do.
- Students are aware of different forms of bullying. They report that there is little bullying and if it were to occur it would be swiftly dealt with by the headteacher.
- Relationships between staff and students are too complacent. The comfortable relationships result in a too relaxed approach to academic work so that students are not challenged sufficiently.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is inadequate. However, students report that they feel safe in school.
- Arrangements for the safeguarding of students are inadequate and do not meet statutory guidance. Staff, including the designated lead for safeguarding, are trained appropriately. However, the school has failed to ensure that correct safeguarding procedures are followed and that incidents are accurately recorded.
- The school ensures the suitability of staff through safe recruitment procedures. All the required checks are carried out and are appropriately recorded.
- The school has no member of staff currently trained in first aid procedures. Fire safety meets requirements.
- The school's work in e-safety is good. Students report that they know how to remain safe when working on computers. Teachers ensure that they are safe. Teaching staff work hard so that students have a clear awareness of how they can remain safe from bullying and from any form of cyber bullying.
- The proprietor ensures, through regular discussions with staff and students, that extremist political views are not promoted.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the welfare of students at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy, nor has action been taken to reduce identified risks.
- The school has not ensured that all the independent school standards are met for the welfare, health and safety of students.

The quality of teaching**is inadequate**

- Teaching does not challenge and engage the students and as a result they are often uninterested and do not respond well. Teaching does not encourage students to develop effective means of recording the key content of lessons so they do not have a clear record of work covered over time.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge but are afraid to challenge and to set high expectations so progress, especially over time, is slow.
- Teachers have a clear understanding of students' starting points from initial assessments. However, they do not regularly check and record students' understanding and progress and so have no information to use to plan the next steps of learning. Students have no records of their ongoing progress to help them to know how to improve.
- In literacy, teachers work with students to develop their skills in reading, writing, speaking and listening and annually check reading and spelling ages. However, staff are too ready to praise students' work which does not merit this. Students are not challenged or helped sufficiently, for example when preparing and taking part in a debate or in giving a presentation.

- In mathematics, there is some focus on developing reasoning and problem solving, for example, when students were developing their understanding of quantitative and qualitative data. However, too often students have no exercise books or materials to work from and are reliant on the teacher providing everything for them. Progress is slow and not all students participate.
- In science teaching engages students well through focused questioning and limited resources but students are not provided with the opportunity to make their own notes or to write up results.
- Teaching is not monitored by senior teachers to ensure that high standards are set and maintained.
- Teachers work in isolation in the majority of subjects and have no opportunities for professional development. This limits their capacity to challenge students sufficiently and help them to achieve their potential.

The achievement of pupils

Is inadequate

- Students join the school in different year groups and at different times of the year. Often, they join with knowledge and skills that are below expectations for their age. However the lack of challenge and expectation of high standards results in inadequate achievement. GCSE results from 2012 to 2014 vary from A* to G, with the majority of students achieving C to F. Results in 2014 were lower than previous years across all subjects except for science, classical civilisation and Latin where students achieved B or C grades. English and mathematics results were below average over this three-year period.
- In Key Stage 3 the majority of students have good basic levels of literacy, as seen in their reading and spelling tests.
- Students have a false sense of what they are achieving. The quality and quantity of work in different subjects is too variable and often limited. Scrutiny of a wide selection of students' past and current work demonstrates too much inconsistency in the breadth and volume of work covered, so that progress over time is inadequate.
- When given opportunity to extend their literacy and communication skills, for example through a presentation or a debate, students are content with a level of preparation and work below expectations for their age and ability.
- Students' mathematical and scientific skills show elements of increasing knowledge and understanding. Students cover a wide range of topics, but they do not systematically record their own notes or write up results. As a result, they are not developing effective independent learning skills.
- Students' creative and aesthetic skills are developed through a range of art, film studies, music and drama. In physical education there is room for further development to include a wider range of skills and activities.
- Those who are most able are not always challenged as effectively as they could be and thus they underachieve.
- Students who require additional help in their learning are helped to improve their levels of progress because they are given extra support for their identified learning needs.

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	113611
Inspection number	462860
DfE registration number	878/6036

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
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part time pupils	3
Proprietor	The Small School
Chair	Mary Billsdon
Headteacher	Helen Finn
Date of previous school inspection	25–26 January 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,350–£2,750
Telephone number	01237 441672
Email address	Not available

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