

Sketchley School

Manor Way, Sketchley, Burbage LE10 3HT

Inspection dates 10–12 May 2016

Overall effectiveness **Outstanding**

Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Sixth form provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The principal's determination to provide the very best education for the pupils is evident in all she does. Her exceptional leadership ensures that this successful school continues to improve.
- Leaders, including governors, create a culture in which both pupils and staff fulfil their potential. Everyone is encouraged to do their best and contribute to school improvement.
- Leaders ensure that the school meets each of the relevant independent school standards.
- Teachers use their in-depth knowledge of pupils' interests, skills and abilities to plan exciting learning opportunities.
- Time is used brilliantly throughout the school day. Opportunities to promote pupils' learning during breakfast, lunch and breaktimes are seized upon by the staff team.
- The expert therapists who work with the school provide pupils with the skills and knowledge they need to support their successful learning.
- Leaders ensure that systems to keep pupils safe are extremely well managed. Staff are well trained to deal with any concerns they may have about pupils' well-being.
- The care and attention given to supporting pupils in understanding their autism and their personal development are of the highest order. Pupils are taught to manage their anxieties very well.
- Pupils' behaviour improves considerably over the time they are at the school. Pupils are motivated to participate in their lessons and the many additional activities offered to them.
- Sixth form students have access to a highly personalised curriculum which meets their needs and prepares them well for life after school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure the system for tracking and improving the progress of pupils in all academic subjects is as effective as it is in English, mathematics and science.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The inspirational principal is the driving force behind this highly effective school. She combines her excellent understanding of autism with a wealth of practical experience to enable pupils to thrive. Pupils consistently told the inspector that they enjoy coming to school. One pupil said 'I don't like school: I love it!'
- Leaders have created a highly effective school. One parent summarised the views of many others by saying, 'My child's character, attitude to learning, confidence and self-esteem have been transformed since he has attended this school. The school's common sense and flexible approach to learning has enabled my child to grow individually. I am very happy.' This parent's description of the school aligned with what the inspector found.
- The positive culture created by leaders directly benefits the pupils' experience of school. The principal splits her time between the two sites, which means she has a good understanding of how each pupil is progressing. Each site has a deputy headteacher who acts as the responsible member of staff when the principal is not there. Pupils are reassured by the consistency this provides. The two deputy headteachers are impressive and highly credible professionals. Like the principal, they have an excellent understanding of autism and a strong commitment to the school. Their leadership is highly valued by the staff team. When talking about the support school leaders had offered them to improve their teaching, one member of staff commented, 'I can't thank the management enough.' This comment was typical of feedback from staff throughout the inspection.
- School leaders use the staff team in an effective way, maximising the skills of staff to secure outstanding progress for pupils. They think carefully about the needs of pupils and match these well to the skills of individual members of staff. For example, one of the school's senior administrators is also a trained reflexologist. Her skills in this area are put to good use working with pupils who benefit from this treatment, ensuring that these pupils are better prepared for their lessons.
- School leaders ensure the learning environment is of a high quality. Clever use of every available space maximises learning opportunities for pupils. An outside area at the Forest House site has been covered over with a canopy so that pupils can develop their practical do-it-yourself skills. At the time of the inspection two pupils were using this space to develop their English, mathematics and work skills by building a garden bench for use in the school grounds.
- The curriculum is well matched to the needs of the pupils. Leaders keep the curriculum model under constant review. They are quick to respond to the emerging needs of each pupil. Leaders ensure that pupils receive a broad and balanced curriculum which meets the individual needs identified in their statements of special education needs or education, health and care plans.
- Leaders, like all staff, are excellent role models for pupils. They demonstrate tolerance and respect in all they do. British values are promoted well throughout the curriculum. During the inspection pupils were engaged in several activities related to the Sikh faith. Pupils engage with these activities in an exceptionally mature way. Provision for developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding in the areas of spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is strong.
- Leadership throughout the school is highly effective. Staff responsible for pupil behaviour, autism, school administration and therapeutic approaches all demonstrate an intense desire to ensure their areas of responsibility are of an excellent quality. All leaders enable the pupils to excel and these members of staff are successful in their work.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The school's proprietor, The Priory Group, delegates the governance of the school to specific personnel within its organisation. The named 'chair of the governing board' is the central region's operations manager.
 - Since April 2016 there have been further improvements in how school leaders have been held to account. The operations manager and principal have regular conversations about the work of the school. They professionally challenge each other to improve outcomes for pupils.
 - The reporting systems set up by The Priory Group mean that the governing board has weekly reports about the effectiveness of the school. For example, the governing board has accurate information about pupil behaviour, financial performance and staff training. The regular face-to-face governing board meetings are well informed by this high level of contemporary information, which results in governors asking searching questions of school leaders. This level of scrutiny means that the school maintains its high-quality work and meets the independent school standards.

- Governors have ensured that an effective system of performance management or appraisal is in place for all staff. Rigorous targets are set by leaders and a wealth of evidence is used to establish the quality of individual staff members' work. These processes help to improve pupil outcomes because the staff are highly skilled.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and meet statutory requirements. Staff training in this area is regular and of high quality. The principal and deputy headteachers are all fully trained designated safeguarding leads. Staff recruitment is rigorous and the necessary checks are completed on new members of staff to ensure their suitability to work with pupils. Pupils say they feel safe and cared for at the school, because they are.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding because it is highly personalised to meet the needs of pupils. Teachers and teaching assistants know pupils really well. They understand when to challenge pupils to improve their work and when to support them emotionally. In one lesson the inspector observed the excellent use of directed questions to specific pupils about the use of first aid. The pupils answered the teacher's questions with well-reasoned responses and were highly engaged in the debate which followed. Another pupil was given a different task to complete until he was ready to engage in this particular aspect of learning.
- Teachers use the information provided in pupils' statements of special educational needs or education, health and care plans to inform their thorough planning. The use of this information, combined with the good subject knowledge of teachers, ensures that the tasks set for pupils are consistently at the right level for pupils with different abilities.
- Pupils' learning is enhanced through the effective use of time and of teaching assistants in lessons. In a design and technology lesson for example, pupils were making progress because they had a clear plan of what to do and a high level of quality support to complete their tasks. In this lesson pupils talked with pride about the work they were completing.
- Pupils demonstrate a desire to work hard because staff are skilled at making learning fun and matching the abilities and interests of pupils to the learning activities in lessons. In an English lesson, the teacher used props and a digital camera to engage pupils in learning the content of a story. As a result of these strategies the pupils were able to recall key facts and engage in a discussion about the text.
- Staff are quick to intervene if pupils do not make the progress expected of them. Throughout the inspection the inspector observed staff responding effectively to the needs of pupils. For example, during lessons pupils were encouraged to use different spaces when anxious, or encouraged to try to solve a problem in a different way. Any barriers to learning are dealt with effectively by staff.
- Teachers' marking of pupils' work is highly effective. The school policy is implemented by all staff and this results in pupils being clear about what they have done well and how they can achieve their next steps. Regular moderated teacher assessments inform pupil and whole-school priorities.
- School staff communicate constructively with parents via home/school books, parent meetings and telephone calls. As a result of this, parents are able to support their children's school targets at home. There are examples of how pupils have gained part-time employment as a result of working on employability skills in school.
- The highly skilled therapists work in partnership with education staff to develop highly effective programmes of work. This strong liaison directly benefits pupils because it helps them develop the fundamental skills needed to learn successfully. During the inspection the inspector observed a pupil being supported by a one-to-one therapeutic approach used by the school. This helped the pupil to resolve a personal issue so that he could respond appropriately to certain situations.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils have an impressive understanding of how their autism affects their lives. This is due to the highly skilled way in which the staff team supports pupils to develop their self-awareness. Pupils develop strategies to support themselves rather than relying on adults.

- Pupils and their families make positive decisions about the future because there is an effective programme of careers education in place. Planned sessions to learn about future opportunities, combined with independent advice and guidance, means pupils have the information they need to support these decisions.
- Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe online. Staff understand how pupils use technology to communicate and they design programmes of work which address personal safety. Leaders are quick to respond if pupils use technology inappropriately.
- The culture of the school promotes pupils' welfare. Pupils feel safe and they have the utmost confidence in the staff to deal with any of their concerns. Pupils told the inspector that they do not worry about any challenging situations because they know the staff will always respond.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' attendance at school is good because they enjoy the activities on offer and the care provided by the staff.
- Pupils' behaviour during breaktimes and lunchtimes is excellent. Older pupils become self-disciplined because they have been taught effective strategies to cope with unstructured times. Opportunities to teach pupils how to interact with others are seized upon by staff during these leisure times. Pupils become increasingly confident and skilled in communicating with each other and developing friendships.
- Bullying is very rare, as is the use of derogatory language. Any instances of these behaviours are quickly dealt with by staff.
- Pupils' behaviour during lessons is very good because staff have high expectations and pupils are helped to have strategies to deal with any anxieties. As pupils spend more time at the school they become increasingly better at managing their own behaviours, and this means they are very well prepared for life after school.
- When attending off-site college courses older students' behaviour is excellent because they are so well prepared to start their courses.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils are exceedingly well prepared for the next stages of education, employment or training because the support they receive is tailored to meet their individual needs. Each point of transition for pupils is well thought through and effective. Movement between classes in school and supported visits to colleges are examples of this work.
- Personalised opportunities for pupils to develop employability skills, such as through work experience, result in pupils having high aspirations and being very well prepared to undertake the next phase of their lives after leaving school.
- No group of pupils makes significantly more or less progress than any other.
- In a wide range of subjects and across all year groups pupils usually make at least good progress and often outstanding progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils' work over time clearly demonstrates this. School leaders recognise that there is more work to be done so that they can fully assure themselves that pupils make the progress they should in subjects other than English, mathematics and science.
- Leaders use a commercial database of information related to pupil progress in English, mathematics and science to compare how well pupils at Sketchley School learn compared to other pupils with the same starting points. Leaders are able to demonstrate that Sketchley School pupils make better progress than the majority of other pupils in this database.
- The strong progress made by pupils in academic subjects is well supported by the progress they make in therapy sessions. For example, pupils make excellent progress in recognising and then responding to their sensory needs.
- Pupils' reading skills are well promoted through regular opportunities for them to read enjoyable texts. Pupils make excellent progress in reading because staff support them to do so through a variety of effective strategies, such as through the use of technology and linking new text to exciting topics.

Sixth form provision

is outstanding

- School leaders have high expectations of what students will achieve during their final years at the school. Study programmes are designed to maximise opportunities for students to be highly prepared for their next steps. Where appropriate, students access courses at a college so that they can develop their understanding of this different environment. Some of these courses are vocational in their nature, such as painting and decorating. Students choose these courses based on highly effective careers education and guidance.
- Leaders ensure the 16 to 19 study programmes fully meet requirements. Provision for work experience is strong. Students are given access to appropriate opportunities to develop a positive work ethos. This ranges from school-based opportunities, for example, where students conduct health and safety checks in school, to extended placements elsewhere, with students working in a library, hotel or shop.
- The sixth form provision builds upon the effective curriculum pupils have experienced throughout the school very well. School leaders ensure that students are able to further develop their functional skills in English and mathematics. Students make excellent progress with these aspects of their curriculum because no momentum is lost from their previous studies.
- Retention rates on courses at the school are very high. All students move on to education, employment or training opportunities because the staff instil such a strong sense of ambition in students.
- The quality of teaching that students experience during their time in the sixth form is outstanding. Effective use of assessment information and good-quality targets together with activities designed to motivate students are at the heart of teachers' planning. Students spoke to the inspector about how their interests were used to engage them in their studies. During one of these conversations one student demonstrated great pride in his gardening work, which has made the Forest House School site look an attractive place to study.
- All sixth form students spoken to during the inspection demonstrated impeccable attitudes to learning. Students told the inspector that their study programmes are highly positive because they are being well prepared for college. Students said they are helped to be successful. One student said 'I am grateful for the chance to get better GCSE grades this time.'
- Sixth form students receive the same excellent teaching about British values as the younger pupils. Similarly, their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is developed extremely well.

School details

Unique reference number	135217
Inspection number	10012936
DfE registration number	855/6026
Type of school	Special
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	50
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	8
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Priory Group
Chair	James Imber
Headteacher	Sarah-Jane Astbury
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,000–£100,000
Telephone number	01455 890 023
Website	www.priorygroup.com/location-results/item/sketchley-school-leicestershire
Email address	sketchleyschool@priorygroup.com
Date of previous inspection	15–17 May 2013

Information about this school

- Sketchley School is an independent special day school which opened in April 2007 and was last inspected in May 2013. It is owned by The Priory Group.
- The school is based in two locations approximately 13 miles apart from each other. One site is in Sketchley, Leicestershire and the other is in Narborough, Leicestershire. The school site in Narborough, known as Forest House, opened in September 2013.
- The school caters for up to 55 pupils and students aged between eight and 19 years of age. All pupils have autism and most have further additional needs.
- All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Local authorities place pupils at Sketchley School, often following a period of disrupted education elsewhere.
- The school currently uses Stephenson College to provide some part-time vocational courses for some older students.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection took place over two and a half days. The inspector visited lessons and held meetings with the principal and both deputy headteachers throughout the inspection. A meeting about governance was also held with a representative from The Priory Group.
- The inspector met with the school's autism lead teacher, behaviour manager and administration manager.
- The inspector scrutinised records related to the safeguarding of pupils, including the checks made by the school during the recruitment of staff.
- The inspector observed a meeting of the school council at Forest House. The inspector spoke with many pupils and staff throughout the inspection.
- The inspector undertook several tours of the school sites.
- Meetings were held with the speech and language therapist, music therapist and occupational therapist.
- Sixteen responses to Parent view (Ofsted's online questionnaire for parents) were considered.
- Forty-two responses to the staff survey were scrutinised by the inspector.
- The inspector considered information provided by some of the placing local authorities.

Inspection team

Phil Harrison, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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