

Kisimul School

The Old Vicarage, 61 High Street, Swinderby, Lincoln LN6 9LU

Inspection dates

15–17 June 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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The quality of teaching is outstanding and enables pupils to make excellent progress towards the challenging targets in their individual learning plans.
- Pupils who have previously been unable to maintain a successful placement in school attend regularly and enjoy school.
- Pupils develop appropriate ways to express their anxieties and concerns. They learn to self-regulate their behaviour as a result of exceptional improvements in their communication skills.
- The quality of cooperative working between teachers, therapists and school leaders ensures that they meet the needs of individual pupils very effectively.
- The curriculum, delivered in school and in the wider community, is creative and stimulating. Pupils engage positively in active, practical activities that address their emotional, social and sensory needs very effectively.
- The school has piloted a comprehensive approach to the assessment of outcomes for pupils and students (The Kisimul Test). This provides leaders with an extremely accurate overview of the impact of the school's provision.
- The post-16 provision provides outstanding opportunities for students to develop levels of independence, with support, appropriate to their individual starting points.
- Robust arrangements for all aspects of safeguarding ensure that pupils and students are safe at all times. Pupils, parents and staff all agree that the school provides a safe environment.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership including rigorous quality assurance and self-evaluation. All staff work effectively to ensure that the school improvement plans are fully implemented.
- Senior leaders, working very successfully with the proprietor's director of education, ensure that the school continuously improves in its quality and effectiveness.
- The proprietor's senior management group provides excellent governance, including through robust arrangements for the accountability of school leaders and staff.
- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

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?

- Extend the implementation of the school's '10 strands of progress and outcomes' (The Kisimul Test) to include all pupils.
- Monitor the effectiveness of this new approach to assessment to ensure that it supports improvements in pupils' achievement and personal development.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Senior leaders, working effectively with the proprietor's director of education, have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- The headteacher provides outstanding leadership. He provides a clear sense of direction and ensures that staff work together very effectively to achieve the school's priorities and planned developments.
- The ethos of the school combines high expectations and a supportive culture in which the effectiveness of staff is recognised and rewarded. The great majority of staff who completed the questionnaire are proud to work at this school and they believe that the school is well led and managed.
- Staff at all levels of responsibility develop excellent relationships with pupils. They show outstanding care and consideration for the pupils they work with. All staff provide continuous support to help pupils overcome the barriers to learning associated with their emotional, social and communication needs.
- As a result of the challenge and support provided by the staff, pupils make very strong progress from their low starting points in oral communication and signing, listening, reading, literacy and numeracy.
- School leaders demonstrate a strong drive for continuous improvement. Staff receive regular training and a number of staff have gained additional qualifications in order to take on new responsibilities within the school.
- The curriculum is extremely well adapted to meet the variety of pupils' complex needs. Teachers take good account of the requirements of the national curriculum at levels appropriate to pupils' various starting points. The therapy staff provide extensive and outstanding opportunities for the development of pupils' speech and language, emotional resilience and sensory awareness.
- Excellent attention to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development underpins all aspects of the curriculum. The school develops pupils' understanding of British values extremely well, for example through the student council election week and the production of a Kisimul 'Magna Carta'.
- All pupils are valued equally. Staff demonstrate excellent patience and resilience in ensuring that all pupils can benefit from the rich and varied activities provided.
- The school has established strong lines of communication with senior leaders in the children's homes. Through secure daily handover arrangements, they address any immediate concerns quickly and cooperatively.
- Almost all parents who responded to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, agree or strongly agree that their child is happy and safe at the school and making good progress.
- **The governance of the school**
 - The proprietor's senior management group provides a good balance of support and challenge to senior leaders and staff.
 - The director of education works very closely with the headteacher, assisting with the review of provision and supporting the headteacher's imaginative plans for continuous improvement.
 - The senior management group receives detailed, regular information from the headteacher, based on rigorous evaluation of the school's work. Arrangements for the management of staff performance at all levels are rigorous. The headteacher, leaders and staff agree appropriate targets and they review and evaluate these thoroughly.
 - Leaders and managers tackle any underperformance robustly and reward exceptional contributions appropriately.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are very effective. Senior leaders ensure that all staff understand the vulnerability and emotional characteristics of pupils, and they are regularly trained in new or current aspects of safeguarding. Recent training has ensured that staff are aware of their duties to help counter the risks associated with radicalisation and extremism.
- Staff assess thoroughly the potential risks in all aspects of school life and take appropriate action to minimise these. The school implements rigorous arrangements for the safe recruitment of suitable staff.
- The company's facilities manager implements and records meticulously all aspects of welfare, health and premises safety, including all the required regular checks on fire safety.
- Senior leaders, under the strong guidance of the headteacher, demonstrate excellent capacity for continued improvement.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The outstanding quality of teaching, learning and assessment has a consistently strong impact on pupils' progress.
- Throughout the school, teachers' planning takes full account of the learning characteristics and previous achievements of pupils. A major strength in most of the teaching is the way in which staff use each pupil's individual learning plan to create targets and ensure high levels of challenge in tasks and activities.
- Staff use high-quality resources, including a wide range of visual aids, to promote effective learning and communication. Staff vary the use of signs, gestures, picture exchange and verbal communication expertly to ensure that all pupils are engaged and progressing well. Many pupils make excellent use of electronic aids, including tablets and computers, to communicate and to research.
- Classroom assistants provide excellent one-to-one support throughout lessons, supplementing teachers' instructions and ensuring that each pupil is able to maintain concentration and make progress.
- Pupils in each teaching group, despite the range and variety of their learning needs, know what they have to achieve individually in each lesson. Teachers and teaching assistants work together very effectively. They work flexibly and adapt impressively to changing needs as lessons progress. Staff never give up in their efforts to stimulate and support learning.
- Teachers demonstrate excellent leadership within their lessons. They monitor the work of their colleagues and pupils continuously, and intervene appropriately when additional guidance or redirection is required.
- Speech and language therapists and the psychology team provide expert advice and support to their colleagues, in addition to working with individuals and groups of pupils in the classroom. In a lesson with a group of key stage 4 pupils, for example, they enabled pupils to describe their own emotions and to identify appropriate symbols associated with these. They encouraged pupils to describe what makes them angry, using concrete examples to explain an abstract concept.
- The curriculum includes a strong emphasis on sensory stimulation and regulation. One pupil in the outstanding SMILE sensory room, for example, was very interested and engaged when experiencing a range of colours and sounds associated with a beach environment. Staff work with excellent imagination and perseverance to ensure that the experiences provided enable each pupil to make progress with their sensory development and communication.
- All members of staff contribute to the systematic and comprehensive approaches to the assessment of pupils' work. They encourage pupils, for example, to evaluate their own progress, for example in meeting a target to provide leadership for other pupils, or in being able to match colours, symbols and words.
- The assessment of pupils' progress includes the celebration of small steps and successes. These represent outstanding achievements for the majority of pupils.
- There is a strong and effective focus on learning through real-life situations. Pupils learn very effectively through 'doing' and through discussing what they are experiencing with staff. The school sports day, for example, involved all pupils from both sites taking part in a range of challenging physical activities, and discussing their achievements with the accompanying staff.
- The school provides clear and comprehensive information about pupils' achievements for parents and carers. Almost all parents who responded to Parent View value the information which they receive.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils enter the school with considerable anxiety and very limited self-confidence. The school has piloted new integrated arrangements for the monitoring and assessment of pupils' personal development and behaviour. Initial results for the sample of pupils involved demonstrate exceptional improvements in pupils' ability to adjust to the expectations of the classroom and school environment.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their self-regulation and independence, often in a relatively short time. Staff continuously evaluate provision for individual pupils and make appropriate adjustments to ensure that their progress is maintained.

- Staff are skilled at supporting pupils from a wide range of differing starting points. Pupils' engagement in the creative and imaginative curriculum, together with outstanding therapeutic input, enables them to develop self-confidence and to trust the adults they work with.
- Staff implement excellent strategies for the management of crises, enabling pupils to refocus and return to effective learning. School records show that, over time, pupils make strong progress in their personal development.
- Pupils benefit from many opportunities to work in locations away from the school. They benefit enormously from visits to the shops and from recreational visits which bring them into contact with members of the wider community.
- The curriculum ensures that pupils know how to stay safe, including when using the internet and social media. Pupils learn how to eat healthily, to exercise regularly and to make safe and appropriate choices.
- Staff focus strongly on developing pupils' personal attributes in all learning activities across the full age range of the school. Displays around the school provide, for example, a vibrant record of pupils' participation in a harvest celebration at the local church and of the annual graduation ceremony.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding given the complexity of their emotional and sensory needs. The great majority of pupils make excellent progress with improvements to their behaviour and learn to self-regulate and develop alternative means of effective communication.
- The majority of pupils have previously experienced significant amounts of time out of school or have failed to adapt to expectations in their previous schools. Staff are trained very effectively to understand how pupils' challenging behaviours reflect their difficulties with effective communication.
- Pupils learn how to engage effectively in learning activities, sustain their concentration and meet their learning targets. Staff are supported by strong systems and procedures for managing any incidents of inappropriate behaviour. Any such incidents rarely distract from effective learning for others.
- Pupils' attendance is above the national average and there are no unauthorised absences.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress in their learning and personal development. Their progress is often in small steps which require considerable repetition and reinforcement.
- Over time, pupils develop excellent learning and communication skills. In lessons, they demonstrate concentration, persistence and the ability to sustain their focus. These skills enable pupils to make measurable progress with their learning.
- The proportions of pupils making or exceeding expected progress from their very low starting points in literacy and numeracy are high compared with national figures. The progress of disadvantaged pupils and those with severe learning difficulties or autistic spectrum conditions matches that of other pupils with similar starting points.
- The school's accurate analysis of pupils' progress shows that they make similar progress regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or varied learning difficulties. The school's excellent provision enables all pupils to succeed.
- Staff place a strong and effective emphasis on the development of pupils' communication skills. This results in strong progress with emerging reading and writing skills at levels appropriate to individual pupils' starting points. For a number of pupils, success is represented by the achievement of independent communication skills which enable them to function successfully in a range of community settings.
- Pupils achieve an excellent range of awards across a wide range of areas of learning. The qualifications achieved by pupils include awards authorised by national accreditation organisations, and entry-level certificates from a national examinations body.
- Pupils' successes include excellent individual and group achievements in art, music, cooking, spoken French, sports and outdoor activities.
- The majority of pupils move on successfully to the school's post-16 provision at Acacia Hall.

Sixth form provision

is outstanding

- All the post-16 students transfer into the sixth form from the school's key stage 4 classes. The school's post-16 provision enables students to extend and reinforce the outstanding progress they make in their time at Kisimul School.
- Students achieve excellent outcomes, including externally accredited qualifications, from a variety of starting points. Retention rates are high because staff monitor courses continuously and adapt them to students' changing needs.
- The curriculum includes a strong focus on the development of appropriate vocational skills and increasing independence, alongside continued development of literacy and numeracy skills.
- The farm at the post-16 site provides exceptional facilities for students to learn about animal husbandry, while enjoying a range of therapeutic and sensory experiences. Students develop their awareness of volume, measurement and costs, for example, as they prepare animal feeds or maintain the surfaces of the walkways around the farm. Students enjoy these activities, make excellent progress with their communication skills, and learn to cooperate with each other and with adults.
- Students also benefit considerably from outstanding music therapy, occupational therapy, and speech and language therapy. In a one-to-one music session, for example, the student tapped out the beat on a range of percussion instruments, varying the tempo, rhythm or volume of sounds in response to the therapist's tuneful use of keyboards and woodwind instruments. He also developed his communication skills successfully through the eye contact and oral responses required by the teacher.
- The curriculum available to students is broad and varied with an excellent emphasis on practical life skills. A number of students enjoyed painting t-shirts with a Euro 2016 football theme in art and they wore them proudly at sports day. Others were proud of their art and design work, constructing 2-D models of the Eiffel Tower.
- Staff provide excellent guidance for students related to their future studies or employment. Students enjoyed a 'careers fair' which helped them to recognise the range of jobs and services available in the wider community, including in the army and police service or through employment in the beauty, catering or fashion industries.
- Students take part in suitable work experience where this is suited to their needs and abilities. A group of students contributed, together with their art teacher, to the design of an excellent commemorative stained-glass window which is now part of the local church.
- Excellent displays around the post-16 centre demonstrate the range of resources and activities to which students have access. Photographs show students sailing, wall climbing and taking part in an adventurous expedition. Teachers display class targets in teaching rooms, together with visual timetables which provide security about the day's planned events. Plans are in place for a mobile library to start visiting the school shortly.
- The school's commendably broad provision is organised into clear and appropriate pathways which help to guide students into realistic levels of future independence.
- Students move on to positive destinations on leaving school. Many continue into sheltered or supported independent living in homes run by the company or other providers. A small number of recent leavers have taken up placements in colleges or employment.

School details

Unique reference number	120740
Inspection number	10006047
DfE registration number	925/6034

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	Special school and children's home
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8–19 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	39
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Kisimul Group Limited
Chair	Margaret Hill
Headteacher	Paul Routledge
Annual fees (day pupils)	£85,000–£100,042
Telephone number	01522 868279
Website	www.kisimul.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@kisimul.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	27–28 November 2012

Information about this school

- Kisimul School occupies two sites in Lincolnshire, at The Old Vicarage in Swinderby and Acacia Hall in Friesthorpe. The school provides residential accommodation for pupils at both sites.
- The main school site at Swinderby provides education for pupils between eight and 16 years of age. The school's post-16 provision at Acacia Hall provides for students between 16 and 19 years of age.
- The school is registered to admit up to 86 pupils with severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum conditions and associated challenging behaviour. All pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. A large majority of pupils and students are in the care of their placing local authorities.
- The school does not use the services of any alternative providers.
- The school's previous inspection was in November 2012. The residential provision was not included in this inspection.
- The school's primary aim is 'to improve the social and educational outcomes of the young people that we look after. We look after young people whose previous life experience, of severe learning difficulties and associated challenging behaviour has meant that they have not coped in school and/or at home'.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed teaching and learning, and looked at samples of pupils' work across the full age range of the school at both sites.
- The inspector held meetings with representatives of the proprietors, the headteacher, senior leaders and staff with management responsibilities. He considered responses to 86 inspection questionnaires completed by members of staff.
- The inspector took account of 11 responses to Parent View, together with a small number of written statements from parents.
- The inspector considered 60 responses to the pupils' point-in-time survey completed in November 2015.
- The inspector scrutinised a number of school policies, procedures and records in order to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards.
- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.

Inspection team

David Young, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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