

The Unicorn School

30 November 2016

20 Marcham Road, Abingdon, Oxfordshire OX14 1AA

Overall outcome

The school meets the independent school standards relevant to the material change. The material change has already been implemented

Main inspection findings

Part 1. Quality of education provided

- All requirements are met.

Paragraph 2(1)(a), 2(1)(b), 2(2)(a), 2(2)(b), 2(2)(c), 2(2)(d), 2(2)(f)

- Leaders have reviewed all aspects of their policies relating to the curriculum, teaching, learning and assessment, in order to meet the needs of learners in the 14 to 16 age range. Through consultation with parents, staff and the pupils, they have developed a relevant curriculum that builds on the strengths of the pupils. This includes GCSEs in English, English literature, mathematics, combined science, food preparation and nutrition, and art and design. There is also a BTEC level 1 construction course as part of the qualification suite. In addition, the pupils are taught personal, social, health and economic education, citizenship, religious education, physical education and games.
- The personal, social, health and economic education schemes of work cover a wide-ranging programme, enabling pupils to develop skills to prepare them well for the future. The pupils are tolerant of each other's differences and understand fundamental British values. Teachers encourage pupils to be open and discuss their beliefs.
- The school has ensured that staff have received training for teaching examination courses. They collaborate with other schools to check plans and share resources. For example, the food preparation and nutrition course is team-taught at a local school that has more appropriate accommodation and resources.

Paragraph 2(2)(e)

- Leaders have developed careers education within the personal, social, health and economic education programme. Schemes of work enable age-appropriate impartial information and guidance. Younger pupils reflect on their interests, strengths and weaknesses. Older pupils receive more in-depth knowledge and develop skills, such as conducting interviews. A careers session observed in Year 9 was about building a curriculum vitae and pupils were sharing their initial drafts with each other.
- Leaders have organised work experience for pupils in Year 11. In Year 10, the pupils have researched relevant career options. Former pupils, including a veterinary surgeon, lawyer and sportsman, have been invited to talk to pupils about their careers. Photographs of inspirational famous people, with quotes about how they overcame their learning difficulties, raise the pupils' expectations for their future careers.

Paragraph 3(a), 3(b), 3(c), 3(d), 3(e), 3(f), 3(g), 3(h), 3(i), 3(j)

- Teaching is adapted well to meet the pupils' individual needs. Each pupil has an individual education plan that is shared with their teachers. Specialist teachers, with appropriate skills and qualifications, deliver the curriculum. The pupils also have one-to-one teaching, including daily tuition to follow up any misconceptions or to help develop skills. From observing lessons and scrutinising pupils' work, it could be seen that the teachers work together to ensure that pupils make the best progress possible. There are consistent strategies across the school, for example for how to tackle longer extended writing.
- Pupils enjoy their learning and appreciate the planning that takes place to meet their needs. Pupils take good care with their written work, despite writing skills being an area that many of them find difficult. Pupils have a sense of pride in their work.
- Pupils are responsible and are involved in reflection on their own strengths and weaknesses. They are confident that their views are taken into account. Parents are involved in curriculum information evenings with their children. Parents are highly supportive of the school and its unique setting. They are happy that their children are given the opportunity to achieve GCSE qualifications at the school.
- Teachers assess pupils' progress continually and use this information to plan future learning. The headteacher has strengthened systems for the collection of information about pupils' progress.

Part 2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- All requirements are met.

Paragraph 5(a), 5(b)(i), 5(b)(ii), 5(b)(iii), 5(b)(iv), 5(b)(vi), 5(b)(vii), 5(c), 5(d), 5(d)(i), 5d(ii), 5d(iii)

- Teachers have ensured that pupils have developed a sense of pride in their school. They are given opportunity to discuss their views and to share concerns. Relationships are strong between teachers and pupils and pupils support each other. Pupils reflect on their beliefs.
- Assemblies are used to celebrate learning and also to award achievements. In an assembly, Year 4 pupils were presenting to the school and Year 10 pupils positively engaged. There is a strong ethos of empathy and mutual support.
- Pupils explained that they understand differences between themselves and others, including paying regard to protected characteristics.
- Pupils have developed an understanding of democracy. In a recent activity, they researched a theme and then prepared a persuasive speech of a political party. This helped them understand the election process.
- Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including shooting, circus skills, sport, martial arts, cooking, art and music. There is opportunity to discuss homework in an after-school club and breakfast club.

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- All requirements are met.

Paragraph 7(a), 7(b), 11, 12, 16

- The comprehensive health and safety policy is implemented well. School leaders take appropriate actions to ensure that the arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are thorough and well documented.
- For example, the fire procedures check includes a log of all maintenance of fire appliances, records of the weekly alarm tests, records of any false alarms, termly evacuation drills and emergency lighting checks. A health and safety governor, in an annual audit, monitors these checks.
- Thorough procedures are in place to ensure that safeguarding is effective. The school has a compliant safeguarding policy on its website which takes account of 2016 national guidance and legislation.
- There is a culture where pupils feel safe and they are able to discuss any concerns with staff. Staff put the pupils' safety and welfare at the heart of the school.

Paragraph 14

- There are approximately three members of staff to every pupil. Staff are deployed in various activities to meet the pupils' needs, including one-to-one support, and small-group and larger class tuition. Break- and lunchtimes are well supervised with the pupils able to access outdoor areas.

Paragraph 16

- The risk assessment policy enables staff to understand the level of risk and the actions to take to minimise it. School trips, for example, are thoroughly examined as a source of risk in order to prepare staff. Staff are aware that the activity is assessed, including any risks associated with a particular pupil's needs.

Part 4. Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- All requirements are met.

Paragraph 17, 18(1), 18(2), 18(2)(a), 18(2)(b), 18(2)(c), 18(2)(c)(i), 18(2)(c)(ii), 18(2)(c)(iii), 18(2)(c)(iv), 18(2)(d), 18(2)(e), 18(3), 18(4), 18(4)(a), 18(4)(b), 18(4)(c), 19(1), 19(2), 19(2)(a), 19(2)(a)(i), 19(2)(a)(i)(aa), 19(2)(a)(i)(bb), 19(2)(a)(i)(cc), 19(2)(a)(ii), 19(2)(b), 19(2)(c), 19(2)(d), 19(2)(d)(i), 19(2)(d)(ii), 19(2)(e), 19(3), 19(4), 19(4)(a), 19(4)(b), 19(4)(c), 20(1), 20(2), 20(3), 20(3)(a), 20(3)(a)(i), 20(3)(a)(ii), 20(3)(b), 20(3)(b)(i), 20(3)(b)(ii), 20(3)(b)(iii), 20(4), 20(5), 20(5)(a)(i), 20(5)(a)(ii), 20(5)(b), 20(5)(b)(i), 20(5)(b)(ii), 20(5)(b)(iii), 20(6), 20(6)(a), 20(6)(a)(i), 20(6)(a)(ii), 20(6)(b), 20(6)(b)(i), 20(6)(b)(ii), 20(6)(b)(iii), 20(6)(c), 20(7), 20(7)(a), 20(7)(b), 20(8), 20(8)(a), 20(8)(b), 20(8)(c), 20(9), 21(1), 21(2), 21(3), 21(3)(a), 21(3)(a)(i), 21(3)(a)(ii), 21(3)(a)(iii), 21(3)(a)(iv), 21(3)(a)(v), 21(3)(a)(vi), 21(3)(a)(vii), 21(3)(a)(viii), 21(3)(b), 21(4), 21(5), 21(5)(a), 21(5)(a)(i), 21(5)(a)(ii), 21(5)(b), 21(5)(c), 21(6), 21(7), 21(7)(a), 21(7)(b), 21(8)

- Leaders carry out statutory checks to ensure that staff employed at the school are suitable to work with children. These checks are recorded in detail on the single central record.

- Currently there are no supply staff employed in the school. There are currently eight teachers assigned to class groups, three part-time specialist teachers and 12 teachers specialising in small-group work. Should a member of staff be absent, there is capacity to cover that member of staff within the school. Use of supply staff in the last academic year followed the statutory checks.
- The school has carried out the checks required regarding the chair of the governing body.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- All requirements are met.

Paragraph 22, 23(1), 23(1)(a), 23(1)(b), 23(1)(c), 24(1), 24(1)(a), 24(1)(b), 24(1)(c), 24(2), 24(3), 25, 26, 27, 27(a), 27(b), 28(1), 28(1)(a), 28(1)(b), 28(1)(c), 28(1)(d), 29(1), 29(1)(a), 29(2), 30, 31, 31(a), 31(b), 31(c)

- The increase in numbers proposed is adequately accommodated, with sufficient space and specialist rooms available. The school has ample outdoor space, including a sports pitch area. All outside areas, including the sports pitch, have artificial turf to enable usage throughout the year. Pupils use the outside area for recreation and also for physical education. Some physical education is taught off site, for example at the local swimming facility. Plans are in place to enlarge the science laboratory, although it adequately accommodates the numbers in the school at present.
- The school has a range of subject-specialist rooms, such as a food preparation area, an art room, an occupational therapy area, a music and arts room, a library and a hall.
- The school has three buildings in its grounds. They all provide teaching areas with access to adequate toilet facilities for the school's increase in numbers. The toilets have hot and cold running water at an appropriate temperature. Toilets are accessible to those who have physical disabilities. The school complies with all areas of premises requirements, such as providing showers and changing facilities, and a medical room with hot and cold water and bed. Suitable drinking-water sources are provided.
- Adult and visitor toilets are clearly labelled.
- The site is secure. A high fence surrounds the grounds to ensure that members of the public are unable to enter the grounds without reporting to reception. In addition, outside doors are locked from the outside, with emergency exit access available from the inside.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1), 33(10)(a), 34(1)(b), 34(1)(c), 34(2)

- Leaders have ensured that the school is fully compliant with the independent school standards. In addition, the headteacher has strengthened the curriculum. The quality of teaching in the school meets the requirements of 14–16-year-olds in preparation for external examinations.
- School leaders have responded to parents' and pupils' comments and feedback. They have already implemented the change to provide for 14–16-year-olds as otherwise it would have meant that pupils who had benefited from years of specialist teaching would have to leave and continue their studies elsewhere. Leaders have implemented thorough curriculum plans and schemes of work and ensured that teachers are skilled and qualified.

- The school's leaders have ensured that a culture of safeguarding pervades the school. The school's safeguarding policies and practice meet requirements.

Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010

- All requirements are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school is likely meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that are relevant to the material change.

School details

Unique reference number	123322
DfE registration number	931/6109
Inspection number	10022035

This inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's compliance with the independent school standards relevant to the material change that the school has applied to make.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School status	Independent special school
Chair	Mark Chambers
Headteacher	Andrew Day
Annual fees (day pupils)	£18,960
Telephone number	01235 530 222
Website	www.unicornoxford.co.uk
Email address	info@unicornoxford.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	28 April 2015

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal	Inspector's recommendation
Age range of pupils	6 to 14	6 to 16	6 to 16
Number of pupils on the school roll	69	96	96

Pupils

	School's current position	School's proposal
Gender of pupils	Mixed	Mixed
Number of full-time pupils of compulsory school age	69	96
Number of part-time pupils	0	0
Number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities	69	96

Of which, number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	11	30
Of which, number of pupils paid for by a local authority with a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan	7	30

Staff

	School's current position	School's proposal
Number of full-time equivalent teaching staff	16	18
Number of part-time teaching staff	12	12
Number of staff in the welfare provision	2	3

Information about this school

- The Unicorn School, located near central Abingdon, is a co-educational special school registered for 80 pupils aged six to 14 years who have specific learning difficulties. These include pupils with dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia, while others have speech and language difficulties. There are currently six pupils in Year 10.
- The school opened in 1991 and moved to the current premises in 2008. Currently, there are 69 pupils on roll and they all have special educational needs. 11 pupils have education, health and care plans. The school draws pupils from Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire.
- In the past, pupils have spent two or three years at the school. The school is now wishing to provide longer term education for pupils, for those that require it. The school does not use any alternative provision for off-site training.
- The present headteacher took up post in April 2015, six days prior to the previous inspection.

- The last full inspection took place in April 2015, when the school's overall effectiveness was judged to require improvement. A number of the independent school standards were not met: the school did not provide careers information to the secondary-aged pupils; the information made available for parents, carers and others did not provide the name and address of the proprietors; the school did not routinely provide the required financial information to the local authorities that pay for pupils' places at the school; the school's arrangements for the medical treatment and care of pupils who are unwell did not meet the standards required; and secondary-aged pupils did not have access to changing facilities and showers for their games and physical education lessons.
- In August 2015, a material change inspection was carried out. The material change requested was to provide education for pupils aged six to 14, where previously the age range had been six to 13. All standards identified in the April 2015 inspection as not being met were found to have been compliant in the August inspection. The Department for Education subsequently recommended the change.
- The school has partially implemented the change as otherwise the Year 9 pupils in 2015/16 would have needed to leave the school and find alternative education. Currently six pupils are in Year 10.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was requested to check aspects of the independent school standards relevant to the material change to provide education for 100 pupils aged six to 16.
- The inspector carried out interviews with the headteacher, chair of the governing body, deputy headteacher and special educational needs and/or disabilities coordinator.
- Pupils' views were sought through discussion with a group of six pupils.
- A parent of a Year 10 pupil was telephoned and their view considered.
- The inspector undertook a learning walk of the school to review facilities and visited eight lessons. A further two lessons were observed jointly with the headteacher. Small groups and one-to-one sessions were observed. An assembly was visited. Pupils attending an extra-curricular club were observed.
- Pupils were observed during breaks and when moving around the building.
- Pupils' work from Year 10 was scrutinised.

Inspection team

Sue Child, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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