

The Island Free School

Leeson Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1PR

Inspection dates

20–21 June 2017

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The dedicated headmaster provides strong and effective leadership to this growing school. Supported by governors and senior leaders, he leads with a determination that all pupils can achieve highly in a happy and caring environment.
- Pupils are proud of their school. They work hard and behave exceptionally well. They are respectful and friendly.
- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress across the curriculum.
- Safeguarding is effective. Pupils know what to do if they need any help. Adults know how to keep children safe and seek additional help when needed.
- Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is effective and helps them to make good progress from their starting points.
- Leaders make sure that pupils' reading skills are developed especially well. However, there are not enough opportunities for pupils to develop their writing skills in key stage 4.
- The broad and balanced academic curriculum promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. A wide range of extra-curricular activities contribute very well to pupils' personal and social development.
- Additional funding is used effectively to support disadvantaged pupils' needs well. Most make similar progress to other pupils nationally.
- Pupils are prepared very well for life in modern Britain. They are encouraged to develop as confident young people who are enthusiastic about life and learning. However, guidance on careers is not yet given a high enough profile.
- Teaching is good overall. Leaders have high expectations of their staff. Minor inconsistencies in the quality of teaching are being tackled effectively and supportively.
- Leaders and governors have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities. They are fully aware of the need to refine their vision for the quality of teaching and to extend their skills as the school grows.
- Parents are very supportive of the school. They particularly praise its values and ethos.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Those responsible for governance and leadership should:
 - provide development opportunities for leaders so that they can have a greater impact on improving teaching and raising standards as the school grows
 - continue to make sure governors have the appropriate skills to be able to challenge and support leaders' work effectively.
- Further develop the quality of teaching and learning, by:
 - further developing the vision and strategy about expectations for teaching at this school
 - ensuring that teachers plan activities that provide sustained challenge for pupils from their different starting points and help those who are in danger of falling behind to keep up
 - providing pupils with more opportunities to develop their writing skills as they move into key stage 4.
- Further develop the quality of careers information, advice and guidance that pupils receive as they progress through the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headmaster, governors and leaders have worked with dedication to set up this school. Together, as the school grows, they have developed well their vision of creating a learning environment where all pupils are known as individuals, feel valued and can achieve highly. As one pupil said, 'It's my perfect school.'
- Senior leaders have a clear understanding of the school's strengths and areas for further improvement. Their accurate use of assessment information allows them to plan clearly to improve and develop aspects of the school as it grows.
- Leaders methodically scrutinise the quality of teaching and learning. They have high expectations of their staff and of what pupils can achieve. Leaders have managed the performance of staff effectively, tackling any underperformance efficiently and supportively. Leaders identify whole-school and individual training needs accurately. They provide good-quality support which helps teachers and teaching assistants to refine their skills well.
- Disadvantaged pupils make good progress to overcome any barriers to learning because additional funds are allocated carefully. Similarly, additional funding for pupils in Year 7 who need to improve their literacy and numeracy, and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, is used very effectively.
- Support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities is particularly strong. Leaders make sure these pupils receive carefully tailored extra help which helps most pupils to make good progress. Leaders track pupils' progress very well, adjusting how the funding is spent so that it matches pupils' changing needs well.
- Pupils follow a purposefully academic curriculum which increases their knowledge and understanding of a broad range of subjects well. The curriculum develops pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding effectively. For example, bearing in mind the recent tragedy, pupils sensitively discussed the pros and cons of living in high rise blocks, showing a keen empathy for others. All pupils also use time after school to deepen their academic understanding by completing homework or receiving extra help to aid their learning.
- All pupils participate in a variety of extra-curricular activities. They choose from an extensive range of enrichment courses including playing in the school orchestra, practising with local sporting groups or joining the debating club. Pupils demonstrate fundamental British values; they raise money for local charities and many pupils volunteer at a local care home, collecting stories of residents' earlier lives. Such activities add to pupils' sense of belonging and enjoyment in the school and contribute very well to their personal and social development. As one parent said, 'The opportunities that pupils have are exceptional.'
- The curriculum and extra-curricular activities together ensure that pupils develop high aspirations for their future achievement and are well-prepared for life in modern Britain. Leaders make sure that pupils consider how they will progress on to their next stage of education, employment or training by arranging visits to local sixth-form colleges both on the island and the mainland. However, leaders' plans to broaden

opportunities for pupils to consider future careers are in their early stages.

- Talented senior, subject and pastoral leaders are strongly committed to the school. Many are relatively new to their leadership positions. Most leaders have a good understanding of their roles and carry out their duties effectively. However, senior leaders and governors know that further training is needed to make sure that all leaders have the leadership and management skills they need to run the school strategically as it increases in size.
- The vast majority of parents praise the school. As one parent commented: 'This school gives children a sense of pride and determination to try their best to achieve. We feel very lucky our children attend this school.' Another highlighted the school's 'clearly defined values and strong leadership' for particular praise.

Governance of the school

- Governors show a strong commitment to ensuring that the school provides a good education and strong welfare support for local children. They have overseen the running of the school effectively in its first three years. They know the school well and visit regularly to check how well it is performing. Governors assure themselves that safeguarding and other statutory requirements are met.
- Governors have a reasonably broad range of skills which they use suitably to hold leaders and staff to account for the school's development. However, sometimes governors do not drill down well enough when asking leaders questions about the school's work. Leaders have successfully sought additional expertise where they have identified a need to add to their skills. Governors know that they need to continue to ensure that they have appropriate expertise and training to support and challenge leaders as the school increases in size.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors work diligently to make sure that pupils are safe. Staff know pupils very well and are able to tailor their support accordingly when pupils face difficulties. Work with outside agencies is effective for pupils who need additional help.
- Leaders have made sure that pupils understand the importance of maintaining good mental health. Pupils appreciate the counselling available for any of them who want to talk.
- Pupils feel very safe in school. They know how to stay safe online and in their community, including a strong understanding of the dangers of 'sexting'. Pupils know who to go to if they have a concern and are confident that they will be listened to and helped. Parents confirm that pupils are safe and well cared for.
- All staff are well-trained in safeguarding procedures and fully understand their responsibilities towards keeping pupils safe. They know how to respond to a wide range of situations, such as knowing the signs of radicalisation and following the correct procedures when children are missing from education.
- Leaders adhere to safer recruitment procedures effectively. Employment checks are

thorough and the single central record is accurate and up to date. Governors have a clear understanding of their specific safeguarding duties and carry them out well.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching is typically good. This is because regular monitoring by leaders accurately identifies strengths and any areas to improve in teaching. Individuals are supported well to refine their teaching skills.
- Constructive relationships between pupils and staff mean that classrooms are places of purposeful learning. Adults know pupils' individual needs well and pupils trust adults to help them with their learning. Pupils respond positively to teachers' enthusiasm and strong subject knowledge.
- Reading is taught very effectively. Pupils read every day, with those who need it getting extra help to develop their fluency, confidence and understanding. Some pupils read to an adult on their own, while others discuss what they have read in groups. Leaders have made sure that pupils have access to books which interest teenagers and challenge their thinking while developing their literacy skills.
- Teaching in mathematics is especially strong. Teachers ensure that pupils develop their problem-solving, fluency and reasoning skills very well, so they make very strong progress. For example, Year 9 pupils practised expanding algebraic equations at speed, with the most able enthusiastically attempting more complicated calculations.
- In most cases, assessment information is used well to plan activities which carefully build on what pupils can already do. Teachers pose questions which skilfully develop pupils' understanding. They give pupils confidence when attempting new and difficult work. Teachers check how well pupils are doing during lessons. They make tasks harder or give additional support if needed. In dance, for example, pupils led their peers in learning a new routine. When they became unsure about how to progress, the teacher quietly supported the dance leaders so that they could continue leading the group effectively.
- Teachers understand the need to stretch pupils, including the most able. In English, pupils were encouraged to use more challenging vocabulary to describe a dystopian environment. The most able pupils could explain eloquently why they had chosen particular words.
- Pupils appreciate feedback and say that it helps them to understand what to do to improve their work. Teachers in history and English follow the school's policy for feedback especially well. Pupils find it helpful in giving them a clear understanding of how to improve their writing. Pupils edit their work carefully and offer each other advice on improvements. However, in some subjects, for example in science, pupils are less clear about how to move their learning on.
- Leaders have not yet fully defined their vision and strategy for teaching across the school. This has resulted in a few inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. A small minority of teaching does not help pupils to make good progress where teaching does not stretch pupils' understanding, when tasks are not well-matched to pupils' starting points or when feedback does not help pupils to improve.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Adults know pupils and their families very well. The most vulnerable pupils, including those who are disadvantaged and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, are especially well cared for. Pupils value opportunities to discuss any issues they might have with the school's counsellor or their mentors.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are particularly strong. Several told inspectors that they chose this school because they want to work hard and the school's academic curriculum supports their aspirations. Pupils gain confidence in their abilities as a result of teachers' careful attention to their learning and welfare.
- Pupils are very proud of being a part of the school. They participate regularly in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, many of which they run themselves. They especially benefit from these opportunities to interact safely outside of the classroom. As one pupil said, 'It's like a family here.'
- The school promotes healthy lifestyles very well. All pupils take part in outdoor activities, such as the whole-school hiking and orienteering day at the start of Year 7. Pupils take part in several team sports, with one group of boys saying, 'Rugby is great here.'
- Bullying is very rare. However, pupils know what to do should it happen. They know how to stay safe online, and to report any concerns that they have. They are confident that any issues they encounter are dealt with quickly and sensitively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct throughout the school is exemplary and their behaviour is excellent. They move around the school sensibly and take care of their environment. They are friendly and welcoming.
- Poor behaviour is very rare, and none was seen during the inspection. Pupils told inspectors that disruption to learning hardly ever happens, because they like being able to get on with their work at this school.
- Attendance is above average and improving. This is because of leaders' effective work to promote the importance of good attendance. Leaders react swiftly and supportively when an individual's attendance dips. In addition, pupils say they want to come to school regularly because they enjoy being there.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils, including disadvantaged pupils and those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities, make good progress and attain well across all curriculum areas. Leaders use the information they collect about pupils' progress to give extra help to any pupil who appears to be falling behind. Consequently, all pupils gain knowledge and skills quickly.
- Disadvantaged pupils' progress is accelerated because of teachers' high expectations of what they can achieve. Leaders use additional funding well to address the identified barrier of low literacy levels. They provide extra support for disadvantaged pupils in lessons and make sure that they have access to books to read. Similarly, pupils identified in Year 7 as needing additional help to catch up with their peers in literacy and numeracy make very good progress.
- Pupils develop strong skills across the whole curriculum, particularly in music. All pupils in Years 7 and 8 learn a musical instrument with approximately half choosing to continue music lessons into Year 9. Inspectors were delighted to hear pupils performing high-quality music at numerous occasions throughout the inspection.
- Most pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make good progress. Teachers and teaching assistants meet their needs well, both in the classroom and during targeted extra sessions. Consequently, most of these pupils make similar progress to pupils nationally, particularly those in Years 7 and 8.
- In some subjects, pupils develop their writing skills very effectively. In history, pupils evaluate different opinions and write using precise language. In geology, Year 9 pupils unpick the language of questions so that they know how to write full and accurate answers. However, pupils do not have enough opportunity to write at length across the whole curriculum, especially during key stage 4.
- Leaders recognise that as pupils enter key stage 4 some teaching needs to be further improved to ensure that all groups of pupils, particularly the most able and the most able disadvantaged pupils, make strong progress by the end of the key stage 3 and achieve highly in key stage 4.

School details

Unique reference number	140691
Local authority	Isle of Wight
Inspection number	10032500

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

Type of school	Secondary comprehensive
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 14 at present, 11 to 16 in the future
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	375
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Warren Riches
Headteacher	Steph Boyd
Telephone number	01983 857641
Website	www.theislandfreeschool.org
Email address	admin@theislandfreeschool.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- The Island Free School is smaller than the average-sized secondary school. Pupils follow an academic curriculum with compulsory enrichment activities delivered during an extended school day.
- The school opened in September 2014 and is growing each year. Typically, 125 pupils join the school each year in Year 7. Approximately 10% of pupils are offered places based on an aptitude for music. The school currently has 375 pupils in Year 7 through to Year 9, but should reach a capacity of 640 pupils in Year 7 through to Year 11 in September 2018.
- Most pupils are of White British heritage. The proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language is much smaller than that found in schools nationally.
- Broadly average proportions of pupils receive support for having special educational needs and/or disabilities.
- The proportion of disadvantaged pupils is just below the national average.

- The school meets requirements on the publication of specified information on its website.
- The school complies with Department for Education guidance on what academies should publish.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in 25 lessons, including several jointly with senior leaders. Learning was observed in all areas of the curriculum and most subjects.
- Inspectors held meetings with governors, the headteacher, other school leaders and a mixture of staff including newly qualified teachers.
- Inspectors scrutinised a selection of pupils' workbooks with school leaders.
- Inspectors considered the views of parents who responded to the online Parent View questionnaire, along with the 208 free-text comments they wrote.
- To gain their views of the school, inspectors spoke informally with pupils in lessons and around the school, met with a group of pupils more formally and considered the 36 responses to the online pupil survey. Inspectors also heard some pupils read.
- Inspectors considered the 44 responses to the confidential staff survey.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of school documentation, including documents related to safeguarding, attendance, school self-evaluation and governance.

Inspection team

Catherine Old, lead inspector	Her Majesty's Inspector
Colin Lankester	Ofsted Inspector
Richard Carlyle	Ofsted Inspector

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In the report, 'disadvantaged pupils' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route. www.gov.uk/pupil-premium-information-for-schools-and-alternative-provision-settings.

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