

Cruckton Hall School

Cruckton, Shrewsbury, Shropshire SY5 8PR

Inspection dates

14–16 May 2019

Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Requires improvement
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Requires improvement
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders and managers have ensured that the independent school standards are fully met. However, the progress that pupils make is not yet consistently strong across the curriculum.
- Senior leaders have made many difficult decisions and are very committed people. However, their oversight of the curriculum and additional funding requires greater rigour.
- There has been a significant amount of change within the school and the Kisimul Group over time. A number of staff are absent from school. Overall, the quality of teaching and the impact it has on learning is variable.
- Assessment systems require development. Assessment criteria do not fully align to teachers' plans and sequences of learning are sometimes muddled. It is difficult to ascertain how well some pupils are progressing.
- The teaching of mathematics is weaker than that found in other areas of the curriculum. Some of the curriculum goals established in mathematics are not challenging enough.
- Middle leaders have greater responsibility than in the past and are dedicated. However, they require further training and support to ensure that their evaluation of the school's effectiveness is accurate.

The school has the following strengths

- A range of improvements have been secured since the additional inspection in September 2018. Despite the level of change, the quality of education is better and staff morale is improved.
- Kisimul Group have appointed further leaders who have considerable expertise and experience in this sector. They are reflective and want to get things right.
- Staff are positive and committed. Staff build strong relationships with pupils and have developed some exceptional strengths in subjects such as English and the arts.
- Staff work effectively to bring about improvements in pupils' behaviour and personal development. Pupils want to come to school and attendance is rising.

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?

- Improve leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - senior leaders' oversight of the curriculum, including its design, implementation and impact on standards, has greater rigour
 - the impact of any additional funding is fully evaluated
 - middle leaders receive further training to help them accurately evaluate the quality of education and quickly address any shortcomings.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and thereby pupils' outcomes, by making sure that:
 - teachers receive further training and support to ensure that schemes of work, and the sequences of learning within these schemes, are planned with thought and care
 - assessment systems align to schemes of work, and curricular goals, so that teachers' judgements about pupils' progress are accurate and can be quality assured
 - the mathematics curriculum is reviewed and provides pupils with a more appropriate level of challenge.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- At the last full standard inspection in May 2017, Cruckton Hall was judged to be good. An additional inspection was conducted in September 2018, which identified a number of unmet standards. Leaders and managers had not adequately addressed areas identified for improvement and the quality of education was declining. Much effective work has taken place since last September to address the key areas for development relating to the quality of education. As a result, the independent school standards are now fully met. Teachers have received valuable training to improve their planning and schemes of work. However, there is more work to do as pupils are not yet making consistently strong progress across the curriculum. The school therefore requires improvement.
- The school has undergone, and continues to experience, a significant level of change. The Kisimul Group took the decision to close the school's satellite sixth-form site at the start of the year. This decision, coupled with other changes at a wider group level, has caused considerable disruption to pupils' education. The group are currently consulting on further changes to the school's designation. Though Cruckton Hall's age range remains from eight to 19, there is no longer a designated sixth form.
- A number of staff have been absent for some time and several have left the school. This has caused some instability. Though current staff are developing familiarity with a range of new systems, more time is required to ensure that these are fully developed, refined and embedded.
- The Kisimul Group have appointed new senior leaders to bring greater capacity to the organisation. These leaders have significant experience in the independent special school sector. Their evaluation of the school's overall effectiveness is accurate. School improvement plans are in place but do not yet include the detail that is required to ensure that the curriculum improves quickly and provides pupils with adequate challenge.
- The school's curriculum has been redesigned. Leaders have established long-term plans for a curriculum that provide pupils with a wide range of experiences. Schemes of work have also been reviewed so that teaching takes greater account of the desired outcomes set out in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans. Pupils' specific special educational needs are therefore being addressed more fully. As a result, the progress that pupils make is beginning to improve. However, much of this work is very new and senior leaders have not monitored the development of the curriculum closely enough.
- Middle leaders have much greater responsibility. They have attended training to support their development and have begun to work alongside their colleagues to improve practice across the school. Middle leaders speak with greater confidence about the specific key issues they are tackling. However, some of the judgements that they make about the school's effectiveness are overgenerous. It is too early to see the impact of some improvement work and, at this stage, staff lack a common understanding of how to use and interpret some systems.
- Leaders have introduced a carefully planned programme of assemblies and special events to support the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Over recent months pupils have explored the foods and festivals of different parts of the world, such as Greece and Japan. Pupils' engagement in and understanding of these events is

carefully assessed by staff. School records show that pupils very much enjoy learning about different cultures. However, this effective work is at an early stage and is not fully integrated into the wider curriculum.

- The school keeps a record of how additional funding for disadvantaged pupils is spent. Records show that funding has been used to enhance pupils' learning and social interaction. For example, some pupils have attended theatre trips and sporting events to enrich their studies and undertake activities they might not ordinarily participate in. This has resulted in improved levels of self-esteem and engagement. However, leaders' oversight of this expenditure is limited. Impact measures are quite broad and the overall quality of evaluation is limited.
- Despite the challenge presented by the change experienced in recent months, the vast majority of respondents to the staff survey think that the school has improved since the last inspection. Over 80% of staff feel that the school has a culture that encourages calm and orderly conduct and is aspirational for all pupils. Several staff submitted written comments to the survey. While some express concerns about the level of change and the resulting impact on pupils, others state that recent training and development has instilled a new sense of confidence in the workforce.
- The views of parents are mixed. Some identify the strong relationships that staff have with pupils and the positive impact of changes in recent months. However, some parents are concerned about the level of cover staff in some key subjects and pupils' lack of preparedness for GCSEs.

Governance

- The school has a proprietorial board that oversees school performance. Directors responded quickly to the unmet standards identified at the last inspection and have appointed experienced leaders and consultants to address shortcomings. Improvements have been secured but leaders fully acknowledge that there is more work to do.
Directors:
 - understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well
 - offer school leaders a strong level of support and challenge
 - have established a wide range of training and support so that staff can successfully address unmet standards.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school has made changes to its safeguarding policy to ensure that it complies fully with guidance issued by the Secretary of State. The policy is available on the school's website. Designated safeguarding leads have appropriate training and understand their duties. Staff understand the procedures that they must follow if they have any concerns for a pupil's welfare or safety.
- Since the last additional inspection, the quality and suitability of risk assessments for pupils have been reviewed. Risk assessments now more fully capture any key events so that staff can consider if it is necessary to make any changes or introduce new control measures.

- Records of any physical intervention contain an appropriate level of information and are analysed by leaders for any trends or patterns. However, due to the way the proforma for recording incidents has been designed, it can sometimes be difficult to ascertain which member of staff has made which entry. Leaders acknowledge that this aspect of their practice could be enhanced and have plans to address it immediately.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment varies across the school. The strongest teaching is in the arts across the school and English in key stages 3 and 4. Teaching is weakest in mathematics. Some aspects of the teaching of English in key stage 2 are poorer than that found in the rest of the school.
- The school's curriculum and assessment system do not align. Staff lack confidence in describing how the assessment system works and what it tells them about pupils' progress. This is because the criteria within the assessment system lack precision. The criteria do not always match to the objectives and goals established in teachers' planning and schemes of work. As a result, sequences of learning are sometimes muddled.
- Middle leaders have worked with staff to develop the quality of schemes of work. Despite the mismatch with the overall assessment criteria, schemes do now better reflect the aptitudes and needs of pupils. For example, pupils' targets from EHC plans and 'learning intervention plans' are built into daily lesson plans so that teachers can keep better track of pupils' academic and personal development.
- The mathematics curriculum and its delivery are not strong. There is a lack of leadership in this subject and staff who are specialists in other curriculum areas have offered cover. Though pupils have continued to practise their basic skills, they are not being adequately challenged.
- The sequence of learning in English in key stage 2 does not allow pupils to consolidate their skills or practise writing at length. New learning objectives are introduced before it is clear if pupils have fully grasped the skills they have been taught previously. As a result, it is difficult to establish what progress is being made or how the curricular goals match to the agreed assessment criteria.
- Learning in the arts and English in key stages 3 and 4 is strong. Pupils' work in art is of a very high standard. Examples of recent projects include 'time' and 'metamorphosis'. Pupils' skills are carefully developed over time so that they are able to create incredible works of art. This art work is displayed around the school and is striking. In English, teachers instil a love of reading by sharing whole novels with pupils. Older pupils talk with confidence about a range of texts, including 'Animal Farm', 'Frankenstein' and 'Macbeth'.
- In most lessons teachers' questioning is strong. During the inspection this was particularly the case in drama. In this subject, teachers typically begin lessons by encouraging pupils to recall prior learning. Targeted questions are then used to help pupils structure what they will do next. During the inspection pupils were filming scenes from a range of scripts including 'Harry Potter' and 'King Arthur'. Pupils were highly engaged, keen to get their lines right, and ready for challenge.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and develop very positive relationships with pupils.

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and self-assured. This confidence is born from the very strong relationships that pupils have with staff. Staff work hard to engage pupils and take account of their needs.
- Leaders have devised a thoughtful programme of personal, social, health and economic education. Pupils learn how to stay safe online and develop increasing independence. For example, some pupils are supported to travel independently. Pupils develop confidence making journeys by bus to local shops with the help and close support of staff.
- The school undertakes a range of anti-bullying work and records show that there have been no incidents of bullying in the last year.
- Pupils also receive appropriate careers education and guidance. The school employs a careers adviser who supports pupils to explore their skills and consider what education, employment or training they may wish to undertake in the future. Leaders have audited their careers provision using the government's recent guidance. Findings from the audit have been used to establish an action plan. This effective work is bringing about a much stronger strategy and approach to careers guidance. However, some parents have expressed concerns about how well they are kept informed of this aspect of the school's provision.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Given pupils' starting points and complex needs, they make good progress in developing their conduct and self-discipline. Records show that incidents of poor behaviour have declined considerably over time. Pupils learn how to self-regulate their feelings.
- Leaders have developed new systems to track and monitor any incidents of poor behaviour. Incidents are discussed in regular multi-disciplinary meetings. During these meetings, staff agree any necessary changes to pupils' plans and support programmes. Staff use a 'catch-up' strategy to help pupils reflect on any poor choices and ensure that any missed learning is completed. During 'catch-up' sessions, pupils meet with the school's behaviour lead to talk about their conduct and think about alternative behaviours. These sessions are designed in such a way as to try and ensure that pupils finish the school day on a positive note.
- The school environment is clean and well managed. The school grounds are well kept, and resources are respected by pupils. Cruckton Hall has a generous level of space in which pupils can learn, exercise and socialise.
- Some pupils attend learning off-site with alternative providers. Learning with alternative providers is well coordinated and quality assured by leaders. Pupils' portfolios evidence a wide range of academic and pastoral skills that are developed during visits to the alternative providers.

- Levels of attendance have improved since the last standard inspection. Persistent absence has also fallen.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Many pupils gain qualifications in a wide range of subjects. In 2018, pupils left school with GCSEs in English, biology, chemistry, physics, design technology and physical education. Qualifications at other levels include functional skills in English and mathematics, and BTEC National Diplomas in the arts and home cooking skills.
- Pupils make strong progress in the arts. Older pupils make strong progress in English. However, overall, pupils' progress varies due to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. For example, pupils' progress is not as notable in mathematics because the level of challenge provided for pupils has fallen in recent months.
- There are marked differences between the progress made by pupils in different key stages. For example, in key stage 2 English pupils' books show that progress is inconsistent, and the teaching and acquisition of basic skills lacks coherence.
- In some aspects of the curriculum, pupils are capable of making more progress and could be better prepared for the next stage of their education, training and employment.
- Pupils do make strong gains socially and emotionally. Many pupils join the school after periods of absence from school or following significant change in their lives. Staff support pupils effectively to help them manage their emotions and re-engage with learning. This re-engagement is particularly noticeable in the arts, where outcomes are strong.

School details

Unique reference number	123619
DfE registration number	893/6017
Inspection number	10102791

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	Independent residential special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Boys
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Kisimul Group Ltd
Chair	Margaret Hill
Headteacher	Kim McConnell
Annual fees (day pupils)	£90,143
Telephone number	01743 860206
Website	www.kisimul.co.uk
Email address	kim.mcconnell@kisimul.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	9–12 May 2017

Information about this school

- The school was judged to be good at its last standard inspection in May 2017. An additional emergency inspection took place in September 2018, which identified a number of unmet standards.
- The school is owned by the Kisimul Group.
- A new headteacher was appointed on 10 May 2019.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. Almost all have a history of severely challenging behaviours and many have not attended school regularly for some time.

- All pupils have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder and associated conditions. Pupils have diagnoses which include Asperger syndrome, attachment disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, oppositional defiant disorder and pathological demand avoidance.
- The school uses two alternative providers: Crowsmill and Project Farm.
- Since the last additional inspection, the group have closed the sixth form satellite site at Harlescott House.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector undertook a range of activities to ascertain the school's overall effectiveness. These activities included: discussions with leaders and directors about the school's curriculum; meetings with middle leaders about the subjects they lead and schemes of work they devise; visits to classrooms to focus on specific aspects of the curriculum such as mathematics, English and the arts; scrutiny of a range of work in various subjects, including work from lessons visited; and discussions with staff about the impact that teaching is having on learning. Almost all of these activities were undertaken jointly with leaders.
- A range of documentation relating to safeguarding was reviewed. This included: the single central record, pupils' files, risk assessments, first aid records and physical restraint logs.
- Telephone conversations were held with: the chief executive officer, placing local authorities and parents.
- The inspector talked to pupils throughout the inspection. There were no responses to the pupil questionnaire.
- There were insufficient responses on Parent View to generate a response. The inspector reviewed four free-text comments from parents and 20 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Jonathan Keay, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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