

Kisimul School

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

Inspection dates

25–27 June 2019

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Following a period of turbulence, new leaders have brought stability to the school and increased its capacity to improve further. The independent school standards are met in full.
- Leaders have a clear vision for improving the school and an accurate understanding of its strengths and weaknesses.
- Staff feel valued and listened to. They trust leaders to act on their concerns. Through a difficult time, they have shown commitment and resilience.
- Leaders and staff are highly reflective. They are determined to support pupils as well as they can.
- The curriculum enables pupils to develop their communication, emotional and social skills effectively. The input from the therapy teams blends very effectively with the academic curriculum and is a strength of the school's provision.
- Teachers know the pupils well and plan learning that meets pupils' social and emotional needs and develops their communication skills.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. They take obvious delight in their learning. Most behave well, but a few are struggling to regulate their behaviour.
- The sixth form is good. Pupils learn a range of skills that prepare them well for their next steps.
- Safeguarding is effective. Leaders work closely with external partners to ensure that pupils are kept safe.
- At times, staff do not allow pupils to develop fully their skills to carry out tasks independently.
- Not all staff have the skills and understanding to make an effective contribution to pupils' learning in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Leaders have not ensured that all staff have received the support and training they need to support pupils' learning.

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 the effectiveness of leadership and management by:
 - increasing the opportunities for staff to share and learn from best practice in the school and elsewhere, so that all staff have the skills to teach pupils well and make an effective contribution to their learning.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, and pupils' outcomes, by ensuring that:
 - all adults support pupils consistently well in the classroom and develop their literacy and numeracy skills
 - all adults have the same high expectations for what pupils are able to achieve and allow pupils to complete tasks independently when they are able to do so
 - developing the strategies and resources to teach phonics so that pupils are able to gain fluency in reading.
- Ensure that pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are of a consistently high standard across the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The school has undergone considerable change and turbulence since the previous inspection. After a period of difficulty, leaders and staff have rallied together to ensure that pupils continue to have access to high-quality learning and care.
- The new headteachers took up their posts in November 2018. They bring experience, commitment and a fresh perspective on the school's work. They understand the school's strengths and weaknesses well and have clear plans in place for its improvement.
- Leaders and proprietors share the same vision, commitment and high expectations. The headteachers work effectively with the assistant director and the director of education from the Kisimul Group to evaluate and continuously improve the school's work.
- Staff feel valued and motivated. They have faith in the school's leadership and recognise the role that leaders are playing in improving the school. Staff are confident that, if they raised concerns, leaders would take these seriously and act on them.
- Teachers, support staff and therapists work well together to understand pupils' needs and support them as well as they can. One summed up the views of many in saying, 'I am beyond proud of my colleagues and our pupils in what they achieve every day.'
- Leaders carry out regular observations of learning and have identified areas to develop in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They have begun to tackle these, for example by putting in place arrangements to coach and develop staff and forging links with a local teaching school alliance. However, to date, staff have had little opportunity to learn from each other and good practice elsewhere and a few lack the confidence and skills to make an effective contribution to pupils' learning.
- The curriculum builds successfully from pupils' starting points and complex needs. It is well planned to ensure that pupils have access to a wide range of experiences to develop their skills in communication and interaction with others. Pupils' social, emotional and mental health, as well as their sensory and physical needs, are well provided for. Therapy sessions and therapeutic input are very well integrated into pupils' learning experiences. Pupils make good progress across all aspects of their learning and development.
- Leaders have successfully created a culture where staff support each other and are not afraid to ask for help and check on the impact of their actions. Staff are highly reflective and committed to providing the best learning and care for pupils. They meet regularly with each other and with colleagues from the therapy and educational psychology teams to share information and reflect on what is working well and what may need adjustment.
- To date, there have been few opportunities for staff to observe each other's work or that of staff in similar settings. A few lack the skills and training to understand how they can fully support pupils' learning in English and mathematics. Leaders have established a link with a local teaching schools alliance, but the impact of this work cannot yet be seen.
- Leaders use a range of information to evaluate their effectiveness. They work closely with a school improvement partner to check their work, and act on any recommendations from external scrutiny of their work. For example, following a recommendation from their improvement partner, the two headteachers now meet regularly to discuss ideas and

compare progress. They are deeply committed to ensuring that all aspects of the school's work are as good as they can be.

- Pupils benefit from a wide range of after-school clubs and extra-curricular activities. They enjoy adventurous pursuits, as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, such as sailing.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted well. The curriculum ensures that pupils learn about and contribute to the school's communities. Pupils enjoy learning about different cultures and learn to respect each other, the staff who teach and care for them, and the environment. The school council takes its responsibilities seriously. Elected members provide valuable feedback to leaders and take pride in choosing the theme for the school prom, for example.
- Leaders keep a careful track of the additional funding to support pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and ensure that placing authorities receive accurate information where appropriate. Staff carry out regular reviews of pupils' education, health and care plans to ensure that pupils' needs are met and adapt the learning and provision when necessary.

Governance

- The board of directors are well informed about the school's work and receive accurate information about its effectiveness.
- Governors receive termly updates from the headteachers that provide accurate information about the school's strengths and weaknesses.
- The headteachers receive an appropriate balance of support and challenge from the company's director of education and its assistant director of education, who hold leaders to account effectively.
- The board of directors invite additional scrutiny from external partners, such as local authorities and the school's improvement partner. In recent times, they have ensured that the school is outward-looking and open to new ideas.
- The board of directors has ensured that all safeguarding arrangements are fit for purpose.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders ensure that staff have all the information they need to keep pupils safe. Information in pupils' files is detailed and thorough and includes input from different staff including psychology and therapy teams. Risk assessments are detailed and updated regularly. They refer to relevant information in pupils' files and are updated when circumstances change.
- Leaders encourage a culture in which staff share information and respond to any changes in behaviour that may indicate a concern. Communications with the pupils' homes have improved with the introduction of electronic journals. The headteachers check these carefully each morning and ensure that they are well informed about any issues that have happened overnight.
- Staff ensure that information is shared with relevant professionals in a timely manner. They communicate regularly with parents to update them about any changes in behaviour

or well-being.

- Training for staff is regular and relevant. Staff are well versed in what to do if they have a concern about a pupil and know how to refer concerns themselves. They understand whistle-blowing procedures well. They are confident that leaders would listen to their concerns and act on them and speak positively about the 'open door' culture that leaders have established.
- Staff make detailed and appropriate records of any use of restraint.
- School leaders have carried out an audit of their safeguarding practices and have been subject to additional scrutiny through safeguarding checks carried out by the local authority.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have good subject knowledge and a well-developed understanding of pupils' needs and the barriers they face. They plan learning that meets their needs and engages their interests. Pupils enjoy their learning and take pride in their work and their achievements.
- Teachers use the school's assessment system effectively to measure and celebrate the small steps of progress that pupils make. In so doing, they ensure that pupils make secure progress across all areas of their learning. The 10 strands of progress and outcomes (the Kisimul Test) are now well embedded across all aspects of the curriculum and for all pupils.
- Staff know the pupils well. A strength of the teaching is the way that teachers and staff work closely with other professionals, including speech and language therapists, occupational therapists, and education psychologists, to ensure that they are meeting pupils' needs effectively. For example, the educational psychologist supports staff in understanding pupils' behavioural needs and observes classroom practice to provide feedback on how well strategies are working in practice. This highly integrated approach is successful in ensuring that staff reflect on and constantly tweak their practice.
- Teaching reinforces pupils' social and communication skills well through the use of pictures and symbols that enable pupils to respond to requests, make choices, answer questions and identify how they are feeling.
- Not all teachers and staff promote reading, writing and numeracy skills consistently well. On occasion, staff do not sound out phonemes correctly and pupils are not able to blend sounds themselves or recognise common spelling patterns. Teachers do not always use resources effectively to support pupils' numeracy.
- The use of the SMILE sensory room provides effective stimulation for pupils through the use of light, sound and an interactive floor mat. During the inspection, the room was set up to resemble a travel agent, allowing pupils to gain an understanding of how holidays are booked, and stimulating their imagination with holiday scenes.
- Teachers and other staff are skilled in regaining pupils' attention and keeping pupils focused on their learning. They gently but firmly reinforce their expectations through verbal and non-verbal communication, and pupils respond well.
- Not all adults make an effective contribution to pupils' learning. Some lessons are

supported with staff from the care home. These staff do not all have a secure understanding of how to support pupils' learning well.

- Teaching generally promotes pupils' ability to work independently. However, at times, staff intervene too quickly before pupils have the opportunity to try completing a task independently.
- Learning journals provide a detailed overview of pupils' learning and progress, although they are not of consistently high quality. Parents are kept well informed about their children's progress.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop strong and trusting relationships with their teachers and other staff. They grow in confidence and develop increasing independence during their time at the school.
- Staff help pupils to understand how their actions might make other people feel and the different forms that bullying might take. Pupils get on well together. There have been no incidents of bullying in the last year.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning is effective. Pupils enjoy a range of activities that develop their social skills. They become thoughtful and reflective and develop their understanding of appropriate behaviour. All pupils learn about and get involved with their local community, for example by doing work experience in a local restaurant.
- Staff make time to celebrate pupils' successes with them. Display boards highlight pupils' successes on accredited courses as well as the school's inclusive and caring ethos. For example, one such board is entitled, 'Let's set sail and take this journey together.'
- Pupils enjoy the many experiences and challenges that they have at the school. They learn to become independent for example by carrying out roles and responsibilities in school. Staff prepare them effectively for their next steps. On occasion, however, they hamper pupils' ability to carry out tasks independently in class.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils make good progress in learning to identify and communicate how they are feeling and therefore to manage their behaviour more successfully. A small number of pupils have struggled with recent changes and have shown some regression in terms of their behaviour. Behaviour at the Swinderby site is not as calm, generally, as at the Acacia site.
- The school provides a safe, vibrant and well-resourced environment. Pupils enjoy the space afforded by the outdoor area at both sites. For example, at the Acacia site, working with the animals on the farm helps some pupils to begin the day calmly and has led to improved behaviour over time.
- Pupils enjoy school and attend well. Their overall attendance is above the national

average for similar schools. During the inspection, pupils were observed making their way confidently and eagerly into school, ready to begin their learning.

- The morning gets off to a calm and purposeful start, setting the tone for the rest of the day. Pupils communicate with staff how they are feeling and settle to their tasks quickly.
- Pupils learn to reflect on their behaviour and how it might affect others. For example, they considered how doing the wrong thing might make other people worry.
- The school's records show improvements in behaviour for the vast majority of pupils. However, a few who have been affected by the recent changes have regressed into previous behaviour patterns.
- The use of restraint is reducing over time and is appropriate to pupils' needs. Leaders have developed a new behaviour system that will seek to minimise the use of restraint still further. However, it is too soon to judge the impact of this initiative.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils typically enter the school with extreme and complex SEND and communication difficulties. They gain in confidence and in their ability to communicate, interact and socialise with others. For many this represents significant progress from their starting points and their previous experiences of school.
- Staff help pupils to express and understand their emotions, so that pupils learn over time to manage their behaviour more successfully.
- These improvements mean that pupils are able to have a better quality of life. One parent summed up the experiences of others in describing the difference as 'immeasurable'. For example, pupils' improved communication and social skills and behaviour mean that they are able to enjoy trips and experiences that were previously not possible. This has included accessing facilities in the local community, going on a shopping trip and enjoying restaurant visits with their families.
- All key stage 4 and 5 pupils have the opportunity to take accredited courses, according to their needs and circumstances. This enables them to gain qualifications in vocational and community-based courses and develop independent living skills.
- Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. Most pupils continue into the school's post-16 provision or into adult services in the Kisimul group.
- In addition to the qualifications they achieve, pupils gain awards in a range of skills and activities, from trampolining to outdoor education and adventure activities. The range of experiences that pupils enjoy at the school enables them to develop their skills and confidence and prepares them well for independent living. All pupils have the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, many successfully gaining their bronze award.
- Teachers track pupils' progress carefully using the school's '10 strands' approach. This approach measures the impact of therapy intervention as well as pupils' learning in class and enables staff to measure pupils' progress across a range of areas, including communication, flexibility of thought, emotional regulation and social interaction.
- The information shows that almost all pupils make the progress which the school expects,

and sometimes exceed these measures. They are making good progress towards meeting the outcomes in their education, health and care plans. While progress in English and mathematics is good, it is not quite as strong as in other areas of their learning and development.

- Pupils develop work-related learning and enterprise skills well.

Sixth form provision

Good

- The sixth form provision enables students to continue the good progress they make at the school.
- The curriculum has been well developed to adapt to pupils' individual needs and interests and ensures that they are well prepared for the challenges of independent living. Students enjoy their learning and thrive as a result of the activities they undertake, including in animal husbandry and horticulture.
- Students learn about the environment and their role in improving it. Just prior to the inspection, they had recently taken part in a garden competition. They worked successfully to create different types of gardens, including one that used upcycled plastic containers as plant pots. Their pride in their work was well deserved.
- Teachers use students' individual learning targets to set work that is well matched to their needs. Literacy and numeracy skills are taught discretely and are built into their learning in different contexts. However, not all adults support students' literacy and numeracy development equally effectively.
- Routines are well embedded and ensure that students settle well to their learning and know what is expected of them. Students enjoy very positive relationships with their teachers and behave well.
- Staff know the students well and ensure that they take their interests into account when planning learning. For example, in one lesson, the teacher used pupils' interest in dinosaurs and aliens to stimulate pupils' imaginations and encourage them to write their own mystery stories. Students were excited to discover 'footprints' in the gymnasium and eagerly wondered where the culprit might be hiding.
- Teachers and staff ensure that learning is meaningful and that students are able to apply it in real-life contexts. The majority of students undertake some of their learning in the community, for example. Almost all students take part in work experience and work-related learning.
- Students in the sixth form enjoy the additional responsibilities they have, such as looking after the animals and running the school's shop. They are good role models for the younger pupils.
- The majority of students achieve qualifications, according to their abilities and interests. This includes for adventurous learning activities. Pupils grow in confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem and are well prepared for their next steps.
- Students feel safe and well cared for in the sixth form. They told the inspectors that there is always someone to turn to 'when things get hard'.

School details

Unique reference number	120740
DfE registration number	925/6034
Inspection number	10092889

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	72
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	38
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	The Kisimul Group
Chair	Margaret Hill
Headteacher	Toni Woods and Dawn Coombes
Annual fees (day pupils)	£95,000 to £117,000
Telephone number	01522 868279
Website	www.kisimul.co.uk
Email address	admissions@kisimul.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	15–17 June 2016

Information about this school

- Kisimul School occupies two sites in Lincolnshire, at The Old Vicarage in Swinderby and Acacia Hall in Friesthorpe. The main school site at Swinderby provides education for pupils between eight and 19 years of age. The school's post-16 provision at Acacia Hall provides for students between 16 and 19 years of age.
- Residential provision is available at both sites. The residential provision was not included

in this inspection.

- The school is registered to admit up to 102 pupils with severe learning difficulties, autistic spectrum conditions and associated challenging behaviour. All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The 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 June 2016.
- The school's aim is to 'continuously strive for excellence in the care and education of our pupils. We provide a caring and homely environment at all times, where pupils can grow and develop their skills, individuality and independence.'

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning in all key stages at both school sites and looked at learning in pupils' learning journals. Observations were carried out jointly with leaders.
- Inspectors met with the school's two headteachers and with senior and middle leaders. A number of meetings were held with school staff. The lead inspector met with the director of education from the Kisimul Group, and spoke with the designated officer from the local authority by telephone.
- A range of documentation was considered, including: the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans; records of behaviour, attendance and safeguarding; information about pupils' achievements and external reports on the school's effectiveness.
- Inspectors spoke with two groups of pupils and with a few parents. There were very few responses to Parent View and none to the pupil survey. Inspectors took account of the 26 responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

Deirdre Duignan, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Heather Hawkes

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
M1 2WD

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