

Inspection of West Midlands Education and Skills

86 Watery Lane, Middleway, Bordesley, Birmingham, West Midlands B9 4HN

Inspection dates: 28–30 January 2020

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Sixth-form provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy being at this school. It is very different from other schools they have been in. The teachers and other staff really care about how they are getting on. Mostly, the pupils behave as they should. Pupils say that bullying is rare, but if there was bullying the staff would sort it out quickly. As well as the usual mathematics, English and other classroom lessons, pupils learn things like bricklaying and wallpapering. They get certificates for these. This is good because they can use the certificates to find places in college after leaving school. Some pupils do not work in classrooms at the school. They work with their individual tutors in a library, a bookshop, or sometimes a museum. This approach keeps pupils engaged in their learning. This was not the case for most of the pupils in their previous schools. They can come into the school with their tutors to learn work-related subjects. It is a friendly school. At breaktimes and lunchtimes, all the staff and pupils sit to eat and chat together. They also play board games, football games or have skipping competitions. Pupils enjoy physical education (PE) every Friday.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The headteacher and his leadership team have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards. Leaders have a wide experience of caring for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. This has enabled them to create a safe and caring environment in which their pupils can learn. They are strongly supported and challenged by the chair of the governing body and the two proprietors. Governors are highly experienced in the world of business and the world of education.

Leaders have created a close-knit, enthusiastic team of teachers and tutors. All staff who responded to the Ofsted staff questionnaire said that they feel well supported by leaders and that they are proud to work in this school. Tutors working in the community have an extremely valuable role. Without their commitment to their pupils, and without their skills, pupils would not be participating in education.

Pupils understand expectations for their behaviour. Pupils arrive in school with poor attitudes to learning and little respect for teachers. Attitudes change in a short period of time. Pupils told inspectors, 'If you give respect others, [they] will give it back to you.' They described how they noticed from their very first days that all staff treated them with respect. Pupils' attendance has improved dramatically. They now want to come to school, with one pupil saying, for example, that, 'I like getting up in the morning thinking I am going to learn something.' Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. For example, one parent said that, 'The school is fantastic! My child now has a future. He has opportunities he would never have had.'

The curriculum includes a broad range of subjects. Most subjects are well planned and implemented. Leaders have placed a strong focus on improving reading. All staff encourage reading in all subjects. It is seen as an essential skill. Pupils have

been extremely interested in the history topic of crime and punishment. Teachers' questioning gives pupils good opportunities to reflect on and relate these topics to their own lives. They write about what they think and what they believe. Teachers ensure that pupils' knowledge builds over time. They frequently re-cap what they have learned previously. However, the teaching of writing still needs further work. This is because teachers' plans do not always build purposefully towards a clear goal. Teachers and tutors have good subject knowledge for the subjects that they teach. However, they do not always challenge pupils to attempt harder work. Initial assessments, followed by termly assessments, ensure that leaders can monitor pupils' progress and fill gaps in learning.

Staff are skilled in building confidence, self-esteem and independence. For example, travel training supports pupils to undertake independent journeys by public transport that they would never have felt capable of previously. Training includes photo stories to help the pupils see and understand the locations. Careful thought is put into these to make them entirely personal and relevant to the pupils and their needs. 'Student of the month' awards, for pupils' particularly positive behaviours, give them confidence.

Pupils understand the need to maintain a healthy lifestyle and the dangers of drug misuse. This is because they have regular lessons about being healthy and the potential dangers of drugs and alcohol. They know that misuse of these substances can prevent them from doing well in life. Pupils know about future employment opportunities and the skills needed in applying for jobs because of the well-planned careers education. All Year 11 pupils have already applied for at least two placements. The curriculum for post-16 students is relevant to their needs and supports them to move on to future study or apprenticeships.

Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain. They know about different religions. They have visited a mosque, a church and Birmingham Cathedral. They know that this is important, and they say that this is 'Because we learn about other people and to respect them.' All pupils belong to the school council. This gives them good opportunities to discuss their ideas for improving the school. They learn to collaborate and listen to the views of others. They have opportunities to consider people in the wider world by raising money for charity. They have also volunteered to support a food bank. Workshops and theatre companies come to the school to teach the pupils. They teach them, for example, about the dangers of exploitation and about sexual relationships and establishing consent. Pupils have access to some extra-curricular activities like fishing and go-carting. However, the number of extra-curricular opportunities is limited.

Leaders have ensured that the requirements of paragraph 3 of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 are met. They have a well-thought-out accessibility plan for pupils who have different kinds of disabilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders care strongly about their pupils' safety and well-being. All staff are vigilant about child protection. They know the specific risks that their pupils face. They explicitly teach pupils about the dangers of exploitation, radicalisation and extremism. Leaders invite workshop leaders into the school so that they can teach the pupils about how to manage risk, for example from knife crime. The school's safeguarding policy is displayed on the school website and meets the latest government requirements.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The teaching of writing does not follow a logical progression. Leaders' expectations of what pupils should be able to do at the end of a writing course are not clear. This means that some pupils find writing lessons uninteresting and do not make enough progress. Leaders should make sure that the curriculum includes purposeful and well-sequenced units of work that build on pupils existing writing skills. Consequently, pupils should be able to write fluently, legibly and appropriately for different purposes and audiences.
- Tasks for some pupils are not demanding enough. This means that these pupils do not make as much progress as they should. Teachers should ensure that tasks are demanding enough so that pupils progressively develop their knowledge and understanding.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities for extra-curricular activities. This means that they do not have sufficient opportunities to learn about wider issues. Leaders should look to extend the curriculum beyond the academic to support pupils' wider knowledge of the world.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you are the provider and you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	146563
DfE registration number	330/6044
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10119234
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	2
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Paul Hodgetts and Sharon Saunders
Chair	Jim Ryan
Headteacher	Paul Hodgetts
Annual fees (day pupils)	£21,000–£28,000
Telephone number	07843712648
Website	westmidlandseducationandskills.org.uk
Email address	learning@westmidlandseducationandskills.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- This is the school's first inspection. It opened in September 2019.
- The school is located in a converted manufacturing unit on the outskirts of Birmingham City Centre.

- The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs who have previously had disruption to their education. All of the pupils have education, health and care plans.
- Some pupils are educated full-time in the school building. However, many of the pupils spend some or all of their time being educated by their tutors in 'designated learning venues'. These venues are located in local businesses and other organisations, such as museums and libraries. The proprietors visit pupils at these venues frequently and maintain oversight of the quality of education they receive from their tutors.
- The school provides alternative provision in construction for some pupils who are educated elsewhere and are dual registered.
- Pupils have PE lessons at the Nechells Wellbeing Centre in Birmingham.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- The inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the quality improvement officer, the two proprietors (one of whom is the headteacher, the other the business administration officer), and the chair of the governing body. They also held meetings with individual teachers and tutors.
- The inspectors completed deep dives in English, mathematics, construction and science. This means that in each of these subjects they interviewed the curriculum leader, teachers and pupils about that subject and considered pupils' work. They also visited lessons in that subject. Inspectors scrutinised pupils' work in history and geography.
- The lead inspector toured the premises with the headteacher to ensure that the school provides an appropriate environment for pupils. The lead inspector examined health and safety documentation with the headteacher.
- Inspectors examined several policies, schemes of work and plans, as well as documentation relating to health and safety and safeguarding.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the business administration officer and the quality improvement officer to discuss safeguarding procedures. Inspectors spoke to staff about safeguarding and looked at a variety of risk assessments.
- The lead inspector took into account findings from Ofsted's survey of staff's views and Ofsted's Parent View. She also spoke to several parents on the telephone and

to the deputy headteacher of a local academy who sends pupils to the school for alternative provision in construction.

- Inspectors visited pupils being taught by individual tutors at four venues in: Walsall, Willenhall, Sutton Coldfield and Birmingham.
- The school is registered to provide for pupils in the sixth form. There was a very small number of sixth-form students at the time of the inspection. It is also registered for both boys and girls. There were no girls on roll at the school at the time of the inspection.

Inspection team

Mary Maybank, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Alan Johnson

Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Harwood

Her Majesty's Inspector

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