

Kisimul School

Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton, Surrey KT6 5HN

Inspection dates

9–10 February 2021

Overall outcome

The school does not meet all of the independent school standards that were checked during this inspection

Main inspection findings

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Paragraph 7–7(b)

- Although leaders and staff have every intention of keeping pupils safe, the culture to safeguard pupils is undermined by a lack of leaders' oversight of many aspects of safeguarding. As a consequence, systems and procedures to safeguard the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff are not strong enough.
- At the start of the inspection, the safeguarding policy published on the school's website had not been updated to reflect recent changes. Furthermore, the school's COVID-19 (coronavirus) addendum to the safeguarding policy was also out of date, not having been updated since April 2020, and it contained incorrect designated safeguarding lead details, for instance.
- The school's single central register of checks on adults is complete and compliant with current guidelines. However, the register does not support the acting headteacher, who is also the designated safeguarding lead, in her work to ensure that all adults on the school site have the correct checks in place.
- Described by an assistant director with oversight of the school as a 'behemoth', the single central register contains the details of many of the proprietor's staff who do not actually work at the school. This makes it difficult for the acting headteacher to be sure that all the correct checks have been carried out on staff from the proprietor's other local provision who sometimes support pupils in school. During this inspection, the acting headteacher reflected that she was certain about the 'education' staff on the register, but was not 'responsible' for checks on the non-education staff on the school site and that this 'worries' her.

Paragraph 9–11

- The school has a written behaviour policy, but systems and written records to support leaders' oversight of pupils' behaviour are not fit for purpose. Leaders know this and are currently introducing new procedures, including the introduction of two different electronic systems to monitor behaviour and safeguarding concerns. At the time of the

inspection, these were not fully operational, and nor had all staff been trained to use them.

- Behaviour records are incomplete. Until recently, paper records of poor behaviour were sent directly to the school's therapy team, with a delay before eventually reaching the acting headteacher. These records were not available when asked for during the inspection. However, records of physical interventions carried out by staff on pupils were. Many of these were incomplete. Some were difficult to comprehend because of the very poor levels of written English contained in them. It was not clear what purpose the documents served because the information in them was so inconsistent and poorly recorded. It was not clear that leaders had completed any meaningful analysis of what these records might reveal.
- The acting headteacher was able to share the three recorded incidents of bullying since September 2019. The information contained in each was minimal. In discussions, she reflected that proper records had not been kept in the past, and that despite the school having an anti-bullying policy, much more needed to be done to ensure that any incidents of bullying were identified and addressed.
- Although the school has a written health and safety policy, too many aspects of Part 3 are found to be not met to judge that the proprietor has implemented the policy effectively. Problems with risks assessments and lack of staff training in de-escalation and physical intervention are of particular concern, as well as levels of supervision of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).

Paragraph 12–13

- The proprietor's site team is responsible for the maintenance of buildings and aspects such as fire safety. Appropriate fire risk assessments have been carried out across the school site. Maintenance schedules for equipment and fire evacuation records are in place.
- The school has a suitable first-aid policy. A dedicated medical room is available for the care of pupils. A number of staff have completed first-aid training, including some who have completed three-day enhanced training with a suitable provider.

Paragraph 14

- The school has suffered from high levels of staff mobility in recent times. A significant proportion of teaching staff are short- or long-term supply agency staff. Leaders also shared their concerns that high rates of staff absence are the norm and have been a constant problem over time.
- At the time of the inspection, most pupils were restricted to attending school 60% of the time because leaders are concerned about levels of pupil supervision due to inexperienced staff. In particular, supply agency staff had not yet completed the school's own four-day de-escalation and physical intervention programme at the time of the inspection. Leaders shared that this was having a negative impact on their confidence in providing appropriate levels of staffing to supervise pupils effectively in school.

Paragraph 15

- The school maintains appropriate admissions and attendance records.

Paragraph 16

- The school uses a wide range of risk assessments underpinned by a written risk assessment policy. While some risk assessments appear to be suitable, for instance fire risk assessments, some are not.
- Not all staff have had the appropriate additional training to enable them to complete the school's own physical intervention records or risk assessments accurately. Additionally, scrutiny of assessments put in place to mitigate the risks associated with supply agency staff intervening physically showed that these lack clarity. Described by the acting headteacher as 'awful', they do not fully recognise the reality of the risks staff and pupils alike face in their day-to-day interactions; nor do they fully identify or mitigate risk, and they are not fit for purpose.
- Because many aspects of the standards required to protect the welfare, health and safety of pupils are a cause for concern, Part 3 is not met.

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

Paragraph 18(2)–18(2)(e), 18(3)–19(2)(d), 19(3)–20(6)(c), 21(1)–21(7)(b)

- The proprietor carries out all the checks required on school staff, members of the proprietor body and supply agency staff. These are completed by the proprietor's recruitment and compliance team, which also facilitates the proprietor's recruitment process in partnership with school leaders. This includes completing all appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of all adults who come into contact with pupils at the school.
- All standards contained in Part 4 are met.

Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

Paragraph 23(1)–24(1)(b), 24(2)–29(1)(b)

- The school is situated in well-appointed, landscaped grounds. It is maintained by the proprietor's site team and provides pupils with a wide range of classroom, communal and recreational facilities, including an indoor heated swimming pool and a sports hall.
- Each of the three main school buildings is equipped with suitable toilet and washing facilities. Shower facilities are available for the swimming pool and sports hall changing facilities. A dedicated medical room is suitably equipped to cater for the medical examination and treatment of pupils.
- All buildings are well maintained. Aspects such as acoustics, insulation and lighting, including external lighting, are fit for purpose. Toilets and washing facilities have adequate supplies of hot and cold water. Suitable drinking water facilities are provided.
- There are ample resources and well-designed spaces for pupils to play outdoors. Suitable facilities are also available for pupils' physical education.
- All standards contained in Part 5 are met.

Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

Paragraph 33–33(k)

- The school has a suitable complaints policy, which is published on the school's website. The acting headteacher is aware of the requirements of Part 7, including the need to keep correspondence, statements and records of complaints confidential.
- At the time of this inspection, there were no recorded complaints that had been made in accordance with the school's complaints policy.
- All standards contained in Part 7 are met.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

Paragraph 34(1)–34(1)(c)

- School leaders and the proprietor have not fulfilled their responsibilities to ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently. In particular, the well-being of pupils is not assured, and nor have aspects of the welfare, health and safety of pupils been protected as strongly as they need to be.
- Leaders and directors recognise that much needs to be done to improve the school. Some progress has been made in areas such as commissioning an independent safeguarding audit, which is planned to take place in the near future. While some aspects such as premises, accommodation and classroom resources appear to be managed well, other aspects are problematic. These include excessive staff absence and outward mobility, including mobility in the school's leadership team. This has left the school vulnerable, not least with a lack of cohesion in monitoring the systems and procedures to ensure that pupils and staff are safe in school.
- The acting headteacher has put together a school development plan since taking on her role. However, she readily admitted that most staff would be unaware of what was in it.
- The temporary nature of senior leaders in the school is also concerning. Vacancies for a substantive headteacher and at least one assistant headteacher remain unfilled at the time of this emergency inspection. The proprietor's oversight of the quality of provision has also been affected by changes at director level over the last year. Notwithstanding the good intentions of current leaders, it is difficult to be positive about the future of the school unless urgent actions are taken to stabilise teaching staff and leadership and management alike.
- There were occasions during this emergency inspection when it was difficult to identify which leaders are responsible for which key aspects of the school. This includes areas such as the operational oversight of the school's single central register, which although compliant with current guidelines, is not as effective a tool for leaders to safeguard pupils as it might be. Partly resulting from the legacy of changing leadership over time, this situation is not helped by the seemingly disjointed nature of the roles and relationships between leaders in the school and those in the proprietor's other linked on-site provision. As an acting director reflected, the school lacks direction, both strategically and operationally, because there are too many leaders and

managers on site without any appearing to have clear authority and responsibility for maintaining the quality of provision overall.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements that were checked during this inspection, as set out in the annex of this report. Not all of the standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.

School details

Unique reference number	135577
DfE registration number	936/6593
Inspection number	10178834

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 status	Independent special 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	46
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	30
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Kisimul Group Limited
Chair	Christopher McSharry
Headteacher	Kim McConnell (Acting Headteacher)
Annual fees (day pupils)	£98,000 to £109,000
Telephone number	0208 335 2570
Website	www.kisimul.co.uk
Email address	enquiries@kisimul.co.uk
Date of previous standard inspection	21–23 November 2018

Information about this school

- Kisimul School (Woodstock House) is an independent special school. All pupils have severe learning difficulties. Most have very challenging behaviour and a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.

- The school is owned by Kisimul Group Ltd, which provides education and residential care homes for children and young people with autism spectrum disorder, learning disabilities and challenging behaviour.
- The acting headteacher took up her position in October 2020. A number of teaching staff have left relatively recently, including two assistant headteachers within the last year.
- The school's last standard inspection took place in November 2018, when the overall effectiveness was judged to be good and all the independent school standards were found to be met.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- This was an emergency inspection carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection was to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.
- The inspection was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) as a result of concerns raised about the welfare, health and safety of pupils. As an emergency inspection held during the COVID-19 pandemic, the inspection was carried out with 15 minutes' notice.
- Not all the independent school standards and associated requirements were checked during this inspection.
- I held a range of meetings with the school's acting headteacher, various directors including the chief operating officer and the chief executive officer, as well as other officers who work for the proprietor. Some of these meetings were held remotely. Some of the meetings were held jointly with a social care regulatory inspector and one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of social care, who were carrying out an aligned monitoring visit of one of the proprietor's children's homes at the time of this emergency inspection.
- I toured the school's premises and accommodation as part of my monitoring of Part 5 of the independent school standards.
- I assessed a wide range of policies, documents and monitoring records. This included checking the school's single central register of checks on adults.

Inspection team

Clive Close, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet the following independent school standards

Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 7(a) arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
 - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 9 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor promotes good behaviour amongst pupils by ensuring that–
 - 9(b) the policy is implemented effectively; and
 - 9(c) a record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour.
- 10 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that bullying at the school is prevented in so far as reasonably practicable, by the drawing up and implementation of an effective anti-bullying strategy.
- 11 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
- 14 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that pupils are properly supervised through the appropriate deployment of school staff.
- 16 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 16(a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
 - 16(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that–
 - 32(1)(c) particulars of the arrangements for meeting the standard contained in paragraph 7 are published on the school's internet website or, where no such website exists, are provided to parents on request.

Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school–
 - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently;

- 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
- 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.

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