

Inspection of Orion School

1-39, Western Road, Hockley, Birmingham B18 7QD

Inspection dates: 29 June to 1 July 2021

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Good

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Not previously inspected

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school that successfully re-engages pupils in their learning. Staff are deeply committed to making a difference to pupils' lives. Most pupils who join the school have previously experienced difficulty and disruption to their education. Pupils say that they feel valued and accepted here. Most pupils enjoy school and attend well. They focus in lessons and work well together.

Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour. They work with pupils to create a calm environment where everyone is respected. Pupils learn about people who are different. They show empathy and understanding to others. Bullying is rare. If it does happen, it is dealt with quickly by staff.

Pupils do not achieve as well academically as they do socially and personally. Aspects of the curriculum lack ambition and can sometimes limit pupils' opportunities for academic success. Some subjects are not well planned or sequenced to help pupils build on what they already know. Leaders have plans to improve the curriculum. They know that there is more to do.

Leaders provide pupils with real-life experiences. Pupils enjoy practical work in the motor vehicle workshop, as well as sailing and cycling in local parks.

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

Since changing from an alternative provider to an independent school, leaders have worked hard to make sure that all of the independent school standards are met. They demonstrate a good understanding of the standards. They make sure that appropriate policies, such as those for health and safety, behaviour and complaints, are implemented effectively. Leaders are very organised and manage the school well.

Leaders are determined to make a difference for pupils who have previously experienced a turbulent education. They aim to help every pupil develop ambition, foster self-determination and achieve success. The staff are all committed to this vision.

Leaders place a high priority on personal, social and health education (PSHE). Staff plan PSHE as a single subject on the timetable, and also thread it through the wider curriculum. Through their PSHE work, pupils develop skills for life in modern Britain. They develop an understanding of the laws of the land and learn how to be tolerant of others. PSHE also helps them deal with some of the issues they may have faced previously both in and out of school.

Leaders have developed extensive curriculum plans and schemes of work. Not all plans have been fully implemented yet. Some, such as those for mathematics and motor vehicle maintenance, are more effective than others. They are carefully sequenced and structured. Teachers use them to plan lessons that build on pupils'

knowledge. These subjects are delivered by staff with relevant knowledge and expertise. This helps pupils to make strong progress and quickly secure new knowledge.

Other subjects are not so well structured. They are often delivered by staff with limited expertise. In these situations, pupils get confused about what they are learning to do, and progress slows. Some subject plans, such as history, and art and design, have not yet been fully implemented. Leaders have not ensured that staff have been given the time or the training to improve their teaching of these subjects. Leaders are in the process of reviewing these plans and how they develop staff expertise.

Leaders want every pupil to achieve academic success in order to access further training or employment when they leave this school. Currently, pupils successfully gain qualifications in motor vehicle maintenance and repair alongside English and mathematics. In other subjects, such as science and physical education, pupils complete work but do not gain any recognised accreditation for it. The number and range of qualifications pupils can acquire are limited.

A strength of the school's work is how well it supports pupils' personal development. Staff know individual pupils well. Pupils talk about the staff 'being real humans who listen and care about us'. Leaders plan a range of enriching activities, including visits to a music studio and physical activity sessions with a local boxing gym. Pupils take leadership roles in the school. For example, they help design the school lunch menu. An appropriate careers programme ensures that pupils get effective support when they apply for college places.

Most pupils join the school with competent reading skills. Those who struggle are quickly helped to secure their phonics and comprehension skills. Teachers make sure that pupils get regular opportunities to read. Pupils read aloud confidently in lessons such as English and science. Teachers read novels to pupils to try to develop a love of reading, as many pupils say that they do not enjoy reading books for pleasure.

Leaders ensure that pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) get appropriate help. Staff know pupils well and take account of individual needs. They provide sensitive encouragement and support. Targets set for pupils link closely to their education, health and care plans. The proprietor ensures that staff get advice and support from an external SEND specialist.

Relationships between pupils and staff are very positive. Expectations for behaviour are made clear. Pupils settle quickly to their work. Staff provide gentle reminders if there is any low-level disruption; this helps to keep pupils on task.

Governors know the school well and recognise that there is still work to do to develop and improve the quality of education. They want pupils to reach their potential and be well equipped for the future. Governors use their skills and expertise to provide regular support and challenge for leaders.

The proprietor has been instrumental in setting the ethos for the school and making sure that every pupil is valued. The buildings are well maintained and provide suitable spaces for learning and socialising. There are plans to further develop the building in order to support the delivery of subjects such as science and art and design. Appropriate resources are available to support learning. The proprietor has ensured that there is a plan in place to make access to the school as easy as possible for pupils with disabilities.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. They know exactly what to do when they have a concern about a pupil. Records show that leaders take action quickly to ensure pupils and their families get the support they need. Links with external agencies are strong. All staff have a deep understanding of local issues such as county lines, gang and knife crime. They help pupils learn how to manage the risks that they might face in their everyday lives. The school's safeguarding policy reflects current government guidance and is published on the school's website.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, the curriculum is not planned and sequenced as effectively as it could be. It does not build on what pupils already know and can do. Therefore, pupils do not secure new knowledge as quickly as they might. Leaders should ensure subject plans are appropriately sequenced so that they build on pupils' prior knowledge.
- Leaders have high expectations of what they want pupils to achieve in their personal development. However, this same ambition is not reflected in terms of pupils' academic achievement. At the moment, pupils can only study for a qualification in a small number of subjects. Leaders should ensure that pupils have the chance to study appropriate vocational and/or academic qualifications so that they can achieve their full potential.
- Leaders do not use staff training well enough to support teachers' professional development needs. Some staff lack the pedagogical and subject knowledge needed to teach the curriculum effectively. Leaders should review and improve staff training so that staff are well supported and confident about what to teach and how to teach it successfully.

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	147234
DfE registration number	330/6061
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10193306
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	10
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Georgina Mendez and Murett Mendez
Headteacher	Murett Mendez
Annual fees (day pupils)	£11,998 to £41,000
Telephone number	0121 2457200
Website	www.orionschool.co.uk
Email address	elizabeth.caldicott@orionschool.co.uk

Information about this school

- The school is located in the Hockley area of Birmingham. It is housed in the premises of a former alternative provider. There are three classrooms and a large motor vehicle workshop as well as a small careers room and social dining space.
- The school opened in September 2019. The school was registered with the Department for Education on 26 September 2019. This is the first standard inspection of a newly registered school.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- Ofsted conducted a pre-registration inspection on 22 August 2019.

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.

- Inspectors met with the proprietor and the headteacher. The lead inspector spoke with the acting chair of the governing body on the telephone.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in English, mathematics, science and PSHE. The deep dives consisted of visits to lessons, discussions with leaders and teachers, discussions with pupils and a scrutiny of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also talked to pupils more generally about their experiences in school. They observed pupils at break times, spoke to them in the dining room and saw them at work in the motor vehicle workshop.
- An inspector met with leaders to discuss provision for pupils with SEND. She looked at pupils' records, including individual education plans. She also looked at their work.
- Inspectors talked with staff to discuss how they are supported to develop their skills, knowledge and understanding.
- A range of documentation was scrutinised, for example school policies, curriculum documents and safeguarding information, including the checks that leaders make on staff prior to employment. The school website was also scrutinised.
- Checks were made relating to the independent school standards, including checks on the school's premises.
- Inspectors considered the five responses to the online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including four free-text comments.

Inspection team

Nicola Harwood, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Mary Maybank

Ofsted Inspector

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