

# Inspection of a good school: The Island Free School

Newport Road, Ventnor, Isle of Wight PO38 1BG

---

Inspection dates: 14 and 15 June 2023

## **Outcome**

The Island Free School continues to be a good school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Pupils are extremely proud to attend this vibrant, inclusive and happy school. Leaders' vision is to inspire every pupil and to broaden their horizons. Leaders ensure that all pupils study an ambitious curriculum with a strong academic core and rich cultural elements. Pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), achieve well across most subjects. They are also well prepared for future learning.

Leaders' expectations of pupils' conduct in and outside the classroom are very high. Leaders have established strong pastoral systems. These nurture excellent relationships between pupils and staff. Staff know the pupils very well. Pupils' behaviour and manners are exemplary. Pupils get on well with each other and incidents of bullying are extremely rare. Staff deal with any bullying effectively. As a result, pupils feel safe in school.

Pupils benefit from an impressive enrichment programme. Leaders have developed a wide range of timetabled activities, which provide all pupils with a wealth of new and memorable experiences. These sessions contribute to the school's 'family' feel. They are led by teachers and support staff, and groups include pupils from different years. The programme ensures that each day ends with a hugely positive experience.

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

Leaders' vision is to raise aspirations and standards for all. They have made bold decisions about the curriculum so that all pupils take a broad combination of subjects. Reading and communication skills have a high status. Teachers use texts regularly and effectively to develop vocabulary and encourage discussion and debate. Most pupils receive effective additional support with reading if necessary. However, some pupils do not receive the support they need to catch up with their peers. This is because leaders do not always identify gaps in reading knowledge precisely enough when pupils are still in the early stages of reading.

Leaders have mapped out what pupils must learn in each subject. They have also carefully placed learning in the context of the Isle of Wight and modern Britain more broadly. In the strongest subjects, sequencing is clear and coherent. In these subjects, teachers select activities and materials that support pupils to learn well. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly and provide helpful feedback, which pupils use to improve their work. Most pupils can remember and apply what they have learned well. Leaders provide teachers with detailed information about the needs of pupils with SEND. Teachers use this information to support pupils with SEND or other additional needs effectively. However, in some subjects, especially in key stage 3, some pupils do not yet achieve as well as they could, in particular when writing at length or tackling more complex tasks.

The pastoral system is highly effective because it ensures that staff build very positive relationships with pupils and their parents. Consequently, any issues are picked up and addressed extremely quickly, including issues of behaviour. Pastoral staff work closely with staff responsible for pupils with SEND and those with oversight of safeguarding, to ensure that additional support is individually tailored and makes a real difference. Pupils, parents and carers value this caring approach.

The school's provision for pupils' wider development is a strength. Leaders nurture pupils' confidence, resilience and social awareness very well. Pupils learn how to keep themselves and others safe, including online. Through learning about the wider world, pupils develop a genuine interest in a broad range of cultures and faiths. Furthermore, a thorough careers programme introduces pupils to education providers and employers, on the island and further afield. This ensures that pupils are prepared very well for their next steps in life. In line with the school's ethos, leaders ensure that enrichment and careers activities are fully inclusive.

Governors strongly support leaders' mission to raise aspirations. They provide highly effective challenge and support for school leaders and fulfil their statutory duties diligently. Leaders and governors act effectively to reduce staff workload where possible and are very mindful of staff well-being. Consequently, staff are hugely proud to work at the school.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders and governors place a very high priority on safeguarding. They have instilled a strong culture of vigilance underpinned by rigorous systems and high-quality training. Leaders ensure that appropriate checks are made on adults working in school. Staff swiftly identify and refer pupils who may be at risk of harm. Leaders relentlessly pursue support from external partners where necessary. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe from harm, including online. They know who to go to if they have a problem and they trust staff in school to help them.

## What does the school need to do to improve?

### (Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The curriculum is not as highly ambitious and effective in some areas as it is in others. Consequently, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could, particularly in key stage 3. Leaders should continue to improve the quality of curriculum planning and implementation across all subjects, in line with the best examples in the school.
- The school's provision for some pupils who are at the early stages of learning to read is not as effective as it could be. As a result, a small number of pupils do not receive the precise support they need to catch up quickly with their peers. Leaders should ensure that provision for the weakest readers improves rapidly, including addressing any gaps in pupils' phonic knowledge.

### Background

When we have judged a school to be good, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains good. This is called an ungraded inspection, and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be good in June 2017.

### 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 information from Ofsted Parent View 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.

### Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	140691
<b>Local authority</b>	Isle of Wight
<b>Inspection number</b>	10240384
<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Academy free school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11 to 16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	622
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair governing body</b>	Gary Peace
<b>Headteacher</b>	Steph Boyd
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.theislandfreeschool.org">www.theislandfreeschool.org</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	20 and 21 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school currently uses one registered alternative provider.
- The school selects 10% of each year group based on musical aptitude. These pupils receive access to an instrument and additional tuition to help nurture their musical potential.
- The school's current provision meets the requirements of the provider access legislation. The legislation requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

## Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders of the school, members of staff and pupils. The lead inspector also met with representatives of the local governing body.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, science, languages and art. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work from key stages 3 and 4. Inspectors also looked at music sessions.
- To inspect safeguarding, inspectors reviewed a wide range of safeguarding documents and records, including the school's record of recruitment checks.
- Inspectors also talked to a range of staff and pupils about safeguarding.
- Inspectors spoke with staff and pupils to gather their views. They considered 184 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Ofsted Parent View, including 192 free-text comments. Inspectors also took account of 53 responses to the staff survey and 266 responses to the pupil survey.

### **Inspection team**

Mary Davies, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Mike Serridge

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/), write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: [psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk).

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates:  
<http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.gov.uk/ofsted](http://www.gov.uk/ofsted)

© Crown copyright 2023