

Inspection of Orion School

14246, Western Road, Hockley, Birmingham B18 7QD

Inspection dates: 4 to 6 July 2023

Overall effectiveness

Good

The quality of education

Good

Behaviour and attitudes

Good

Personal development

Outstanding

Leadership and management

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards?

Yes

What is it like to attend this school?

School leaders have created a safe environment, based on family values. Pupils are well looked after. They say that they enjoy coming to school because everyone is respected as an individual. The school offers a fresh start to pupils who have missed a great deal of previous learning. For some, this is their first experience of feeling like they belong.

Pupils participate well in their learning because teachers understand their needs and make sure these are met. Pupils improve their skills in English and mathematics through an ambitious curriculum and supportive relationships. However, some areas of the curriculum are less well developed, and pupils do not retain knowledge as well. That being said, pupils are proud of their achievements.

Consistently high expectations mean that most pupils behave well. Cases of bullying are rare. If incidents do occur, they are resolved quickly. Pupils show respect for one another. The school celebrates diversity.

Work to develop pupils' character is exemplary. Pupils benefit from a wide set of rich experiences. Some pupils told inspectors that this was the first time they had been on school trips.

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

Leaders want the best for their pupils. They have developed a curriculum focused on re-engaging pupils who have had negative experiences of school in the past. They aim to give pupils a second chance to learn and achieve. Pupils do well in English and mathematics. Teachers are knowledgeable and understand what pupils need to learn. The curriculum content is engaging because it is linked well to pupils' interests, for example looking for symbolism in text using modern song lyrics. Teachers take into account pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities and that they have missed significant amounts of education when planning learning so that pupils can access the curriculum and engage well.

Vocational learning is strong. For example, pupils do well in motor vehicle studies because the curriculum is well planned with plenty of practical opportunities. Links with colleges provide pupils with the skills they need to access appropriate programmes. Careers education is relevant and linked to pupils' aspirations. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps.

Some other areas of the curriculum are less developed. Pupils do not do as well in history and physical education, for example, because their experiences are not connected well to previous learning. This means they are less able to remember and make links to what they already know. Leaders know this, and while there are convincing plans in place to develop the wider curriculum, this is not yet consistent across all subjects.

Most pupils arrive at the school as reluctant readers. Teachers work hard to encourage pupils to read, by linking books and extracts to interests and providing praise and encouragement. While some pupils are reading fluently and with confidence, this is not yet the case for all.

The curriculum for personal, social and health education is carefully planned. Leaders use their contextual knowledge and make sure that pupils learn about risks including gangs and drug and alcohol abuse. The relationships and sex education curriculum focuses on areas such as safe and appropriate relationships. Pupils know and understand how to develop healthy relationships.

Leaders set high expectations for behaviour. Staff model principles, including good manners, consistently. The majority of pupils respond well and display positive attitudes towards their learning and peers over time. Relationships between adults and pupils are supportive.

The school's work to support pupils' holistic development is exceptional. Leaders think carefully about enriching pupils' access to social and cultural events, which pupils enjoy. Many pupils have limited experiences and have not experienced school trips before. Visits are well planned and provide pupils with an appreciation of diversity, respect and tolerance. Learning is brought to life, for example when pupils visited the police museum to support learning about crime and punishment. Pupils also access recreational visits to parks and leisure facilities. Often these experiences reach into the community.

Staff speak highly of school leaders. They say leaders are considerate of well-being and recognise the challenges of their roles. Processes for quality assurance are effective. Staff are supported to continually improve their skills. Leaders ensure regular opportunities for professional development to support teaching practice and subject knowledge.

Through strong leadership, the ethos and values of the school are well established. The work of the proprietor is extensive, supporting the leadership team and the development of the school. The proprietor is aware of statutory responsibilities. There are robust systems in place to ensure consistent compliance with the independent school standards. The school is inclusive, the detailed accessibility plan ensures that the school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding policy is publicly available on the school's website. It is written with due regard to guidance from the Secretary of State.

Leaders know their pupils and are quick to take appropriate action when concerns arise. Records are clear and well maintained. Leaders have strong local links and signpost pupils and families to relevant external agencies. They are in tune with

localised risks and use these to inform the curriculum. Pupils learn about safety and know how to keep themselves safe online.

Staff follow the process for raising concerns about a pupil. They take swift and decisive action. Child protection and safety are central to the school's work.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Some areas of the curriculum are not as well developed as others. This means that teaching does not build on what pupils can already do. Pupils are unable to make connections in their learning, and therefore they do not retain as much content as they could. Leaders should ensure that the curriculum builds on pupils' existing knowledge so they can learn and remember more.
- Pupils are reluctant to read and, at times, display negative attitudes towards reading. They do not experience and enjoy a wide range of genres independently. Leaders should continually prioritise reading so that pupils engage with enthusiasm and develop their confidence, fluency and a love of reading.

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.

School details

Unique reference number	147234
DfE registration number	330/6061
Local authority	Birmingham
Inspection number	10267697
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	11
Number of part-time pupils	7
Proprietor	Georgina Mendez
Headteacher	Murett Mendez
Annual fees (day pupils)	£90.00 to £138.00 per day
Telephone number	0121 245 7200
Website	www.orionschool.co.uk
Email address	georgina.mendez@orionschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	29 June to 1 July 2021

Information about this school

- Orion School offers places to pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties. Places are commissioned by local authorities, including Birmingham and Warwickshire. Surrounding schools also refer pupils to Orion School.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors 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 discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Meetings were held with the headteacher and senior leaders. The inspectors also met with the proprietor and spoke with the chair of the governing body by telephone.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English, including reading, mathematics, personal, social and health education and vocational learning. Inspectors met with subject leaders, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- The lead inspector met with the designated safeguarding leads. Leaders' processes for identifying, reporting and managing concerns were examined. Inspectors spoke to all staff to check their knowledge of safeguarding and the school's procedures. Inspectors also met with pupils. The school's single central record was also checked.
- A number of documents and key policies were scrutinised, including risk assessments and policies relating to the curriculum, behaviour, anti-bullying, health and safety and complaints. Inspectors toured the premises to check for compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector Ofsted Inspector

Russell Hinton Ofsted Inspector

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