

Inspection of The Island Project School

Diddington Hall, Diddington Lane, Meriden, West Midlands CV7 7HQ

Inspection dates: 23 to 25 January 2024

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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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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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 are very well cared for at this school. Adults are well trained and treat pupils kindly. They know how to support them with both their learning and behaviour.

Some pupils have had a difficult time in previous schools. Some have been out of education for a while before they arrive. The Island Project gives them a fresh start and helps them make future plans. Pupils' behaviour can be challenging, but staff manage it calmly. There are high levels of staff supervision. This means any unkind behaviour does not go unchecked, and pupils are kept safe. Pupils enjoy coming to school and make progress.

As well as classroom learning, staff take pupils out and about to different places. This helps to build their confidence. It also gets them used to everyday situations and different people. There is a healthy culture of putting pupils first. Leaders and staff have high expectations. They are committed to giving pupils a voice and supporting them to make the most of life.

Parents and carers describe the school's work as life-changing. They praise the way staff understand their children's needs and keep them informed about what is happening. Inspection evidence supports these views.

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

This school meets pupils' needs, some of which are complex and challenging. Informed leadership, expert input and high staffing levels enable pupils to engage in education and make progress. Pupils face many difficulties, but staff are patient, kind and clear in their expectations. Behaviour is managed well and pupils respond positively to staff. The school's analysis and learning from any incidents is efficient and effective.

The curriculum is based around a core offer of English, mathematics and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. These subjects are taught daily and the content is tailored to the individual's needs. The teaching of early reading is supported by a validated phonics scheme, with the aim of building functional skills. In addition, there is a significant and effective focus on speech, language and communication. Staff use a range of techniques and devices to ensure that pupils can make themselves understood and understand the school's expectations of them. Across the curriculum, staff are supported by professional experts, such as speech and language and occupational therapists.

On top of the core offer, the curriculum provides learning in creative, scientific and physical subjects. For younger pupils, this is done through a topic-based approach, which is often supported with trips to places of interest. Older pupils also visit different places, both to get them used to being out in the community and to provide work-related experiences. For example, older pupils regularly work in a nearby cookery school. This requires them to interact with new people, handle

equipment safely and learn valuable life skills. Indeed, for older pupils, this attention to building independent living skills is a significant focus.

When possible, pupils work towards qualifications that will help them with further study or work. Since the previous inspection, the school has increased the qualifications on offer, including in English and mathematics. If pupils are not able to gain qualifications, the school provides accreditation pathways. In short, the school supports pupils to follow pathways that are right for them. Local community links are strong. However, the school's links with employers and colleges to support pupils' work placements and future pathways are more limited.

Staff say they feel supported in their work and that leaders are mindful of the particular challenges of their jobs. Each day starts with staff briefings. These meetings are used to discuss individual pupil's needs, circumstances and the day ahead. This regular and informed communication between staff means that they are well prepared to teach and care for pupils. That said, for those older pupils on academic pathways, staff expertise in education is not as strong as the therapeutic and behavioural support offered.

The school's classrooms and social areas are spacious and adequately maintained. There is a lot of indoor and outdoor space, which is used well to support the curriculum and for exercise and play. There is plenty of room for pupils to be taught and supported in quiet spaces where they feel safe and comfortable.

Through the school's PSHE education programme, staff teach pupils about how people are different, for example because of their race, sex or religion, and how to respect themselves and others. Pupils learn what healthy relationships look like and the difference between right and wrong. Staff are very alert to the risks that pupils might face. They are informed about warning signs and teach pupils how to make themselves understood and stay safe. The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Engagement with parents is an exceptionally strong feature of the school. In their comments to inspectors, parents praised the level of communication and the school's work to go 'above and beyond' for the pupils in their care.

The proprietor, principal and other leaders have a significant positive impact on the education and care provided. This oversight is also apparent in the systems they have for checking on and steering the school to improve. They have ensured that the independent school standards (the standards) continue to be met.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's links with employers and colleges have reduced post-pandemic. This has narrowed the range of extra opportunities open to older pupils. The school should find ways to link with more employers and colleges to increase opportunities for pupils' work placements and future pathways.
- The level of expertise in education, particularly for the older pupils, is not as strong as that seen in therapeutic and behavioural support. This means that educational input is not as consistently strong. The school should continue to strengthen the level of staff teaching expertise so that it is as consistent as therapeutic and behavioural support.

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	135453
DfE registration number	334/6010
Local authority	Solihull
Inspection number	10299202
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent day school
Age range of pupils	5 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jacqueline Walters-Hutton & Carol Howe
Principal	Sarah Gallagher
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,000 to £73,000
Telephone number	01675 442588
Website	www.theislandproject.co.uk
Email address	admin@ipschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	29 June to 1 July 2021

Information about this school

- The school caters for pupils who have a diagnosis of autism and additional complex needs. All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school admits pupils from several local authorities.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school currently operates from one site in Solihull. It is due to relocate to a new site near Shirley in the West Midlands. This is due to the impact of the High Speed 2 rail project. The relocation is scheduled to take place in the 2023/24 academic year.
- The school's last full inspection was in July 2021, when it was judged to be a good school.

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.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

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.
- Inspectors met with the proprietors, the principal, other senior leaders and school staff.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: English and reading, mathematics, science and PSHE education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, communicated with pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered other subjects in less depth.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors observed staff's interactions and pupils' behaviour in class, outside and on a work-experience placement.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's surveys of staff's and parents' views. The school changed the format of the Ofsted questionnaire for

pupils to make it more accessible. Inspectors considered pupils' responses to this amended questionnaire.

- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation to check the school's compliance with the standards. An inspector checked the current and proposed premises.

The school's proposed change to its premises and the maximum number of pupils.

The school has applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to make a 'material change' to its registration. At the DfE's request, we checked whether the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the DfE decides to approve the change. This part of the inspection was carried out under section 162(4) of the Education Act 2002.

- The outcome of this part of the inspection is: **the school is likely to meet the relevant independent school standards if the material change relating to the school provision is implemented.**
- The school's new premises are well designed for their intended purpose and the proposed number of pupils. There are specialist rooms for technology and cooking and plenty of rooms for one-to-one work. Outdoor space is available for exercise and recreation. The new site provides classrooms in several different buildings. This has considerably increased the number of external doors. Because of this, school leaders plan to install a specialised door security system to manage this increased risk.

Inspection team

Martin Pye, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Nicola Harwood

Ofsted Inspector

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