

Inspection of iMap Centre

Unit 4a Barrowmore Estates, Barnhouse Lane, Great Barrow, Chester, Cheshire CH3 7JA

Inspection dates: 30 January to 1 February 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are warmly welcomed at iMap Centre. Parents and carers told inspectors that the school has made a positive difference to their children's lives.

Pupils enjoy nurturing relationships with staff. This is because the staff care deeply about pupils' well-being. This helps pupils to develop a positive sense of belonging to the school community. Pupils are happy in school and know that they are in safe hands.

The school has high expectations of pupils' learning. Pupils are taught by teachers who know them well. The thoughtfully designed curriculum prepares pupils, who all have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), well for the next steps in their education and on to adult life.

The school expects pupils to behave well. Staff notice when pupils experience distress. They are quick to anticipate conflict and respond sensitively to pupils' emotional needs. Staff are successful in helping pupils to manage their behaviour and their emotions.

Pupils enjoy the opportunities that the school offers them, to develop themselves personally and to ready themselves for adult life. For example, pupils, including students in the sixth form, learn to keep themselves healthy, go shopping and cook meals. These valuable activities equip them well for life outside school. They become increasingly confident and independent.

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

The school has designed an appropriate curriculum. This reflects a determination that every pupil should be well prepared for their next stage in education and for life in modern Britain. The curriculum is designed to give pupils the knowledge and understanding to be confident learners and to achieve success. The school has thought carefully about what pupils should learn and when they should learn it.

However, there are a few teachers who do not have the subject knowledge required to deliver the curriculum as well as they could. These teachers therefore lack confidence to carefully adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet pupils' individual needs. Some pupils therefore do not learn as well as they could. Nevertheless, most pupils, including students in the sixth form, achieve well over time.

Staff help pupils to remember and revisit learning through regular activities that repeat important learning. They are also adept at taking advantage of every chance to reinforce learning informally during the day.

Overall, staff use the school's assessment strategies appropriately. Staff use this information to devise lessons which they know will build on what pupils know and can do. Moreover, they design activities that capture the interests of pupils. This

helps pupils to engage well with their learning. They are motivated to complete the activities that teachers prepare for them.

All the pupils start the school with their additional needs having been recently identified and assessed. That said, a small number of teachers do not take sufficient account of the information that they have to meet pupils' particular needs. For example, these teachers do not break down the targets in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans into measurable small steps. When this is the case, it is not clear where pupils are up to in their learning. This hinders the planning of appropriate next steps for pupils.

An important part of the school's work is the focus on developing pupils' communication and language skills. Staff understand pupils' individual communication needs. They apply a wide range of strategies across the school successfully, to help develop pupils' ability to communicate.

The school recognises the importance of reading. When pupils are ready, they are taught early reading skills. Where appropriate, pupils who have fallen behind in developing their reading skills are helped to catch up. Pupils enjoy learning the foundations for reading, for example through listening and responding to sounds around school. Those who are confident readers have access to an appropriate range of challenging books.

The school is typically a calm place where pupils can learn without disruption. Staff are well attuned to how calm or anxious pupils are in lessons. They skilfully use this insight to judge when pupils need a break from learning. There are thorough systems in place to analyse behaviour in school and for individual pupils. Prior to joining the iMAP Centre, many pupils have had extended periods of time out of school. Some pupils struggle to re-engage with school life. The school is sensitive to the difficulties and barriers that pupils and their families face around attendance. It is successful in ensuring that pupils attend school more regularly.

Central to the work of the school is developing pupils' personal, social, emotional and life skills. The school offers a range of opportunities to increase pupils' awareness and enjoyment of the world around them. Pupils enjoy their regular participation in outdoor learning. Activities range from learning about horticulture and animal husbandry, to foraging and going for sensory walks in the countryside.

The school makes sure that pupils benefit from comprehensive careers advice and guidance. Students in the sixth form are offered work experience, work placements and other practical experiences. These experiences develop students' confidence, resilience and independence.

There were a few requirements of the independent school standards ('the standards') that were not met at the start of the inspection. The proprietor ensured that these issues were rectified quickly so that all the standards were met by the end of the inspection. The school's building is appropriately maintained, clean and is

suitably resourced. There is appropriate outdoor space for pupils to get some fresh air at breaktimes and to engage in physical education lessons.

The proprietor has ensured that it adheres to health and safety requirements, including complying with fire regulations. There are systems in place to ensure that leaders are held to account for the quality of education that the school provides. Policies are available to parents on the school's website and upon request. The school's complaints policy is fully compliant.

The school meets the requirements of schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010. It has an accessibility plan that sets out its plans to ensure that disabled pupils can participate fully in the school's curriculum.

The school has been through a period of turbulence in the last year. Leaders and staff report that the school briefly lost direction and staff morale dipped. However, the proprietor and those persons responsible for governance acted swiftly and effectively to address the situation. There is an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to improve.

The new school leadership team has wasted no time in listening to staff. In a short space of time, staff morale has greatly improved. Staff are proud to work at the school. They are optimistic and already feel well supported. The school takes account of staff's workload and well-being when making decisions. For example, staff appreciate being listened to and included in any plans to improve the school. Most parents were happy with the communication that they receive from school about their child. Parents felt that the school supports their child's education well.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- A few teachers lack the subject-specific knowledge and confidence to deliver the curriculum as leaders intend. This means that the delivery of the curriculum is not always adapted well enough to meet pupils' individual needs. Leaders should ensure that staff are fully equipped to implement the curriculum effectively and confidently.
- A small number of teachers do not use the information available well to meet pupils' individual needs. Additionally, they do not break pupils' learning down into small enough steps. This sometimes hinders pupils' learning. The school should ensure that teachers have a clear understanding of exactly where pupils are up to in their learning and determine appropriate, clear and manageable next steps for pupils.

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	131792
DfE registration number	896/6028
Local authority	Cheshire West and Chester
Inspection number	10299182
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent special school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	14
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	6
Number of part-time pupils	None
Proprietor	iMap Centre Limited
Chair	Martin McKeivitt
Headteacher	Andrea Nelson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£70,500 to £101,312
Telephone number	01829 741869
Website	www.imapcentre.co.uk
Email address	Andrea.Nelson@imapcentre.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	25 to 27 June 2019

Information about this school

- The previous standard inspection took place from 25 to 27 June 2019.
- The school operates from one site. The school is located at Unit 4a Barrowmore Estates, Barnhouse Lane, Great Barrow, Chester, Cheshire CH3 7JA.
- All pupils who attend this school have SEND. All have an EHC plan. The school caters for pupils with autism.
- At the time of this inspection, the new headteacher had been in post for two weeks.
- The proprietor and chief executive director for the iMap group provide governance for the school.
- There are 14 pupils on roll at the school. The school has an agreed capacity with the Department of Education (DfE) for 20 pupils.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.
- The school does not use 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.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- 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.
- The DfE commissioned Ofsted to carry out this standard inspection earlier in the cycle than previously planned because of concerns about the school.
- During the inspection, inspectors spoke with the headteacher, senior leaders and staff. This included those responsible for careers education in school, the designated safeguarding leader and SEND coordinator.
- Inspectors held discussions with members of staff, which focused on the well-being and safeguarding of pupils.

- An inspector met with the chair of the proprietor body and spoke to the chief executive officer of the wider iMap group of companies who provides governance for the school. She also met with the clinical director from the company and spoke on the telephone to a representative of Cheshire West and Chester local authority’s safeguarding team.
- Inspectors spoke to the education consultant who has been supporting the school in the transition from the previous to the present headteacher.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and language, including aspects of early reading; mathematics; and personal, social, health and economic education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with curriculum leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, looked at samples of pupils’ work and, where appropriate, spoke to some pupils about their learning. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- 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.
- The lead inspector made a tour of the premises. Inspectors also reviewed documentation and other information to check the school’s compliance with the standards.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View. Inspectors also considered the responses to Ofsted’s staff survey.
- There were no responses to Ofsted’s pupil survey. However, inspectors spoke with some pupils about their work and school life. Some of these conversations were held in the presence of a member of staff to support and reassure these pupils.

Inspection team

Sue Eastwood, lead inspector

His Majesty’s Inspector

Lindy Griffiths

Ofsted Inspector

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