

# Isambard Community School

## Inspection report

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<b>Unique Reference Number</b>	131196
<b>Local Authority</b>	Swindon
<b>Inspection number</b>	328563
<b>Inspection dates</b>	17–18 March 2009
<b>Reporting inspector</b>	Paul Scott HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

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<b>Type of school</b>	Comprehensive
<b>School category</b>	Community
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–16
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number on roll</b>	
School (total)	476
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair</b>	Helen Miah
<b>Headteacher</b>	Rachel Matthey
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	Not previously inspected
<b>School address</b>	The Learning Campus Redhouse Way Swindon SN25 2ND
<b>Telephone number</b>	01793 705400
<b>Fax number</b>	01793 707596

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## Introduction

The inspection was carried out by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors and two Additional Inspectors.

## Description of the school

Isambard Community School is a newly-established school and has recently moved into purpose-built accommodation. The school is oversubscribed and has a significant proportion of in-year admissions. Year 7 and 8 students currently attend the school. The school is increasing in size with a further cohort of 240 students from the surrounding area each year. The number of students eligible for free school meals is low. The proportion of students of ethnic minority heritage is lower than average. Numbers of students with statements of special educational needs are average, with some going through the statementing process at present. The school shares the campus with a number of other schools, including a primary school, a special primary school and a special secondary school. There is also a separately managed early years day care nursery on the campus and a school-centred initial teacher training centre temporarily located in the school. The school is undergoing a large degree of change as it is becoming established with a full complement of staff and students.

## Key for inspection grades

Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Satisfactory
Grade 4	Inadequate

## Overall effectiveness of the school

### Grade: 2

Isambard Community School is a good school. It has developed rapidly with a strong team of staff who are passionate and committed to students' learning. The school is establishing an inclusive ethos and a creative approach to learning.

Students are very well motivated by the challenging targets set in the school. They are eager to excel and they achieve well, reaching standards that are above average overall. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because their needs are clearly identified and appropriate support is provided. This includes a very effective home room for students who are benefiting from more personalised provision. Most students take advantage of the many learning opportunities beyond lessons. Students, particularly the gifted and talented, enjoy the additional challenge and independent styles available in the extended activities and produce some outstanding work, for example in the art club. This challenge is not yet consistently high enough in lessons.

The personal development and well-being of students is good. Students' attendance is outstanding, as is their understanding and adoption of safe and healthy lifestyles. Behaviour around the school and in lessons is good and, when given opportunities to work independently and take on responsibilities, students rise to the challenge with confidence and a reliable determination. The 'Isambard Documentors' (IDs) are an outstanding example of how students have developed their role in recording and evaluating the succession of 'Arts Blast' and other school events.

Students speak highly of their teachers and good relationships are obvious in classrooms between students and most teachers. Teachers have good subject knowledge and many students said teachers explained things well and helped them to learn. Marking does not yet identify strengths and areas for development sufficiently and does not give students feedback to enable them to work on short-term targets more independently. Students feel safe in school and trust teachers to organise and teach appropriate lessons. This often leads to students being over-reliant on the teachers and not developing greater independence or a personal understanding of the importance of learning generally or of specific subjects. The 'Arts Blast' programme does give students opportunities to develop this independence and this is beginning to help them make connections between subjects and develop an intrinsic valuing of learning. The creative ethos in the school, explained in the specialist college application, is already having a positive influence across all learning areas. The monitoring of lessons has ensured progress and support of teaching and learning but is not yet systematic or frequent enough at all levels for teachers to benefit from the outstanding practice in the school and to move teaching and learning forward still further. Teachers do not make sufficient use of assessment data to plan to meet the needs of students of all abilities effectively, particularly those who find the work easy.

The senior leadership team provides very strong leadership and, with the able and committed governing body, has established a growing and positive school with an ethos encompassing outstanding equality of opportunity. Leadership at all levels is having increasing impact on learning as staff put in place and start to evaluate the many aspects needed for a successful school. The school has effective self-evaluation and has prioritised well the implementation of many policies. This means that some are at a more advanced stage, while others, such as the plans to promote community cohesion, are still being refined and developed. The school has

demonstrated a good capacity for improvement and is working hard to ensure its motto of 'No End of Possibilities' is fulfilled.

### **What the school should do to improve further**

- Ensure teaching is consistently as good as the best through: ?systematic monitoring and sharing of good practice ?analysis of data to inform classroom practice ?meeting the needs of students more effectively, challenging all, but particularly the more able students.
- Develop teaching and learning to give appropriate challenge and feedback that enables all students to take more responsibility for their own learning through a more independent approach.
- Develop and refine further plans to promote community cohesion.

### **Achievement and standards**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students enter the school with standards of attainment above average. Their achievement is good and they do particularly well in physical education, science, art and humanities. Students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities also make good progress because of the clear identification of needs and appropriate interventions from the school. The home room is a particularly good example of the needs of students being met effectively. The challenging targets set are motivating students but the use of data to inform planning is at an early stage.

### **Personal development and well-being**

#### **Grade: 2**

Students feel safe and view the school's positive atmosphere and the support they receive as the main reasons why they enjoy school. They in turn make a positive contribution to their school and local community, for example, as Young Leaders, members of interview panels and peer mediators, and in doing so increase their own confidence and self-esteem. Students behave well, both in classrooms and around the school, but particularly in lessons such as science, art and humanities, where there are high expectations and they feel inspired and challenged. The positive ethos of the school is reflected in high attendance, low levels of unauthorised absence and low rates of exclusion. At lunchtime and after school, large numbers of students actively participate in a wide range of enrichment activities, including animal club, information and communication technology (ICT), art, digital media and sport. Students at all levels are happy to take on responsibilities and they appreciate the way their views are taken into account through the school council on issues such as charity fundraising, uniform and behaviour points. The school is doing much to promote healthy lifestyles and many students cycle to school and choose healthy eating options from the school canteen. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. They understand right from wrong and show a keen concern for fairness and developing self-respect and consideration towards others. The arts dimension of the school exposes students to a wide variety of cultural experiences but opportunities for reflection in lessons are limited. Students make good progress in developing literacy, numeracy and ICT skills which prepare them well for working life.

## Quality of provision

### Teaching and learning

#### Grade: 2

Good teaching and learning enable the majority of students to achieve well. In the most effective classes, students enjoy their work because lessons are crisp, stimulating, well organised and delivered with pace and energy. These lessons involve challenging and varied activities, whilst allowing possibilities for reflection, consolidation and thought. Teachers have good subject knowledge and use a wide variety of resources, including interactive whiteboards, to stimulate students' interest and to support their learning. Lesson objectives are invariably shared with students, although sessions at the end of lessons do not always reflect well on how those objectives have been achieved. The best lessons consolidate learning with closing sessions that are thought provoking and delivered with the same vigour as the rest of the lesson. Well-focused professional development for teachers and other staff, derived from the school's good self-evaluation, has contributed to the progress made in strengthening the quality of teaching and learning. Lessons are monitored but the frequency of monitoring does not yet allow the outstanding practice to be shared enough with colleagues. Marking of students' work does not yet give students sufficient feedback to work more independently but students appreciate the encouragement and help they do get from their teachers.

### Curriculum and other activities

#### Grade: 2

The curriculum condenses Key Stage 3 into two years of study. It is well planned on the basis of the new national frameworks and meets statutory requirements effectively. The curriculum provides good challenge for the majority of students, although the most able and gifted students are not consistently offered these opportunities and find less to stretch and engage them. Plans are in place for the Year 9 curriculum but students are not yet clear about the progression routes available to them. Building difficulties have affected specialist provision, especially in design and technology, but the school has managed these well and the curriculum has not been impeded in terms of either student entitlement or achievement so far. This has been largely due to the positive approach the school has taken to ensure these difficulties do not affect students. Students particularly enjoy learning where the curriculum coherently links different subjects in order to encourage a well-rounded understanding. For example, a project on 'The Restless Earth' moved, via building working models of volcanoes, into film making, animation and radio broadcasting to evaluate the impact of volcanic activity on different groups of people across the world. The whole process was enhanced by students working closely with professional media artists.

A rich and varied programme of extension activities takes place both after school and at lunchtimes. The programme makes a major contribution to students' enjoyment, achievement and personal development. Take-up is high and the school ensures equality of opportunity for all students in accessing this. Sporting opportunities are particularly impressive, but students also speak highly of creative and leisure provision, as well as the very good opportunities to revise and boost their learning.

## Care, guidance and support

### Grade: 2

Care, guidance and support are strong features of the school. Students say they feel safe and well supported. This starts before students join the school with excellent processes to ensure a smooth transition from partner primary schools. Child protection procedures meet government guidelines and staff are well trained and kept up to date and aware of their responsibilities in safeguarding students. Support for those who have a learning difficulty or disability is a strength of the school. Their needs are carefully identified and students are closely monitored and well supported in lessons and in the home room. Teaching assistants are well deployed to support individual needs. Vulnerable children and their families benefit from the school's good relationship with outside agencies. Students believe that unacceptable incidents, including cases of bullying or racism, are dealt with well and they feel confident to talk to a teacher or another adult if they need help. Students value the systems of rewards and particularly like the weekly celebration assemblies. Academic monitoring and guidance is a developing feature of the school. Parents receive regular assessments and are invited into school three times a year to meet with academic mentors for regular reviews of students' progress in relation to targets set. However, the guidance students receive to assist their progress in individual subject areas and the standard of marking and assessment of work are not uniform across all subjects.

## Leadership and management

### Grade: 2

The senior leadership team is strong and is supported well by an able group of subject leaders. The leadership of the school is developing quickly and has a clear view of priorities. Although students' achievement is good, the monitoring of lessons and sharing of outstanding practice is not yet systematic and so is not leading to consistent outcomes for all students, particularly the more able.

Challenging targets are set and students do exceed these. They are motivating for students but are not consistently used to inform planning in lessons. The school knows its strengths and areas for development well and is becoming increasingly analytical about outcomes for students. The school is outstanding in the way it promotes equality of opportunity and works to eliminate discrimination. Community cohesion is promoted by the school but plans need to be refined and developed to ensure a full range of appropriate outcomes. Prudent planning has effectively anticipated the financial needs of the growing school. Governors hold the school to account well with challenge and extensive involvement with school life. Governors are passionate about the school and have established an appropriate range of policies but have yet to assess fully the impact of these on learners and other stakeholders.

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## Annex A

**Inspection judgements**

Key to judgements: grade 1 is outstanding, grade 2 good, grade 3 satisfactory, and grade 4 inadequate	School Overall
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**Overall effectiveness**

<b>How effective, efficient and inclusive is the provision of education, integrated care and any extended services in meeting the needs of learners?</b>	2
Effective steps have been taken to promote improvement since the last inspection	NA
How well does the school work in partnership with others to promote learners' well being?	2
The capacity to make any necessary improvements	2

**Achievement and standards**

<b>How well do learners achieve?</b>	2
The standards <sup>1</sup> reached by learners	2
How well learners make progress, taking account of any significant variations between groups of learners	2
How well learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities make progress	2

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<sup>1</sup>Grade 1 - Exceptionally and consistently high; Grade 2 - Generally above average with none significantly below average; Grade 3 - Broadly average to below average; Grade 4 - Exceptionally low.

## Personal development and well-being

<b>How good are the overall personal development and well-being of the learners?</b>	2
The extent of learners' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	2
The extent to which learners adopt healthy lifestyles	1
The extent to which learners adopt safe practices	1
The extent to which learners enjoy their education	2
The attendance of learners	1
The behaviour of learners	2
The extent to which learners make a positive contribution to the community	2
How well learners develop workplace and other skills that will contribute to their future economic well-being	2

## The quality of provision

<b>How effective are teaching and learning in meeting the full range of learners' needs?</b>	2
How well do the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of learners?	2
How well are learners cared for, guided and supported?	2

## Leadership and management

<b>How effective are leadership and management in raising achievement and supporting all learners?</b>	2
How effectively leaders and managers at all levels set clear direction leading to improvement and promote high quality of care and education	2
How effectively leaders and managers use challenging targets to raise standards	2
The effectiveness of the school's self-evaluation	2
How well equality of opportunity is promoted and discrimination eliminated	1
How well does the school contribute to community cohesion?	3
How effectively and efficiently resources, including staff, are deployed to achieve value for money	2
The extent to which governors and other supervisory boards discharge their responsibilities	2
Do procedures for safeguarding learners meet current government requirements?	Yes
Does this school require special measures?	No
Does this school require a notice to improve?	No

**Annex B****Text from letter to pupils explaining the findings of the inspection**

Dear Students

Inspection of Isambard Community School, Swindon SN25 2ND

Thank you for the warm and friendly welcome you gave to us when we inspected your school. You were most helpful in explaining all of the good things. Isambard Community School is a good school with lots of exciting opportunities for you all. We felt that you appreciated being part of growing a new school. You are making good progress and are reaching above average standards.

You work well with your teachers and enjoy lessons that are challenging and give you a chance to work independently. We have asked the school to develop this more and to ensure that all lessons challenge all students, particularly those of you who find some of the work very easy. You have demonstrated that when you are given these opportunities, such as the 'Isambard Documentors', you show exceptional maturity and contribute at a higher level. We have also asked the school to develop plans further to promote community cohesion, particularly beyond your local community.

The school supports your personal development well but we would like you to have more information about how you can work on short-term targets in all subjects so that you have the opportunity to work more independently. You must take up these challenges and work with your teachers to ensure the school becomes even better.

I wish you all well on this exciting journey and hope you will take up the challenge from the school and understand that there really is 'No End of Possibilities' for you.

Good luck in all that you do,

Yours faithfully

Paul Scott

Her Majesty's Inspector