

The Island Project School

Independent school standard inspection report

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| Reporting inspector | David Muir HMI |

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Island Project is a special independent special day school. It relocated to a large country house and grounds in Solihull in the West Midlands in 2009. The school currently makes provision for 14 pupils, aged between eight and 14 years, although it is registered for pupils between the ages of six to 19 years. The school admits pupils who have diagnoses of autistic spectrum disorder and/or associated communication difficulties. The school opened in 2007 and was previously inspected by Ofsted in 2008. The school also provides outreach for pupils in the community who are unable to attend school so that they are able to maintain their education. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs. The school draws pupils from five local authorities within the region.

The school is broadly based on the principles of Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA). It aims to 'teach children the knowledge and skills to give confidence that will enable them to reach their full potential and lead a more independent life' and 'to foster the ability to make relationships, to better communicate with a wide range of people and to encourage the ability to make personal choices.'

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education is outstanding and all regulations are met. The school is successful in meeting its aims of developing pupils' confidence, communication and knowledge. As a result of outstanding teaching and assessment, pupils increasingly engage in their education, make good or better academic progress and develop personal and communication skills outstandingly well. The school's use of multi-disciplinary staff to support learning, so that all areas of the pupil's development are targeted, is a fundamental aspect of its impressive work. Since the previous inspection, the school has settled well into its new premises and the quality of education has continued to improve. Systems for self-evaluation continue to be strong and are being developed further. Arrangements for safeguarding are robust.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It is extremely well tailored to meet the individual needs of all pupils. It is based on the National Curriculum with additional strong foci on communication skills and personal development. As a result, pupils make

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

outstanding progress, particularly in areas related to their personal development, communication and confidence. Staff know the pupils very well and a daily review of progress towards targets is well-established, so that the school can react rapidly if there are any signs of underperformance. Planning is effective for all subjects and allows an accurate evaluation of the learning taking place in all lessons. There is a good emphasis on the development of cross-curricular skills. Pupils have regular access to the local community, in which they are well regarded. They are well supported and welcomed by members of the local community, when they undertake activities and visits in local shops and facilities. This allows them to improve their communication skills with a wider range of people. They also use the swimming facilities at the local primary school to further enhance the curriculum.

Highly personalised timetables ensure that provision is very effectively matched to pupils' needs, interests and abilities. They support the curriculum well and show opportunities for extra-curricular activities such as horse riding. There is a wide range of educational visits to the local community, and further afield, to enrich learning and enhance pupils' personal development. Work experience is also provided so that pupils can engage in their interests outside the normal school curriculum and gain an understanding of the world of work. This helps them to improve their socialisation and communication skills in environments which are not familiar to them, as well as to start to plan for their futures. Pupils undertake a range of OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations) accreditation in life and living skills.

The plans for individual pupils are very carefully crafted so that all of the pupils' needs and interests are taken into account when planning for their next stages of development. The plans are drawn up by the behaviour analyst, and head of education, with input and evaluation of progress also being provided by the speech and language therapist, occupational therapist, as well as the classroom staff. This extremely cohesive and effective multi-professional approach, in which expertise is shared by all disciplines, is an important strength of the school and has a significant impact on the progress made by all pupils. All input is systematically monitored and evaluated for effectiveness over time. This allows rapid responses to any changes in pupils' circumstances, so that they can continue to have their needs met as effectively as possible. Morning teaching sessions focus on developing skills related to targets within pupils' individual education plans (IEPs) – these cover a range of areas of pupils' development, including academic, communication, personal and social skills. Afternoon sessions are more formally taught in class groups, where cross-curricular topic work is used to build on the skills which are being developed through the IEP work.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. No teaching seen during the inspection was judged less than good. This leads to good learning in National Curriculum subjects and outstanding progress in communication, social and personal development. Observations during the inspection showed that the finely detailed plans help to engage pupils throughout the school day. Appropriate links are made between prior and future learning, so that sessions are continually reinforcing and extending all of the targets set and making them relevant and accessible to pupils so

that they learn at a good or better rate. Although staff already thoroughly monitor the progress that pupils make in different areas of their development, they are starting to devise systems to use this data even more effectively. This is so that patterns and trends in different aspects of pupils' performance can be more easily compared and contrasted, to allow for fine-tuning of interventions.

Pupils make outstanding progress. Information from the extremely detailed assessments and the analysis of pupils' progress is used outstandingly well to identify individual patterns and trends in achievement, communication, social and personal development and to pinpoint where support needs to be targeted or adapted, to improve the progress made in each of these areas. As the data is analysed on a daily basis, the school is able to respond rapidly and make changes immediately. This is also due to the high staffing level. Where some pupils have had periods of less progress, this has been due to changes in circumstances, such as instability outside the school or due to medical issues. When this has happened the school has been proactive in providing support for the pupil and their family as appropriate.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A major strength is encouraging pupils to be more independent and to develop an understanding of the consequences of their behaviour. Pupils greatly enjoy their learning, as teaching is very effective and engages their interests at all times. As a result, pupils rapidly improve their attitudes to learning and work. The school nurtures pupils outstandingly well, so that those who initially have negative attitudes to school, thoroughly enjoy their time in school once their transition is complete. This is shown by the impressive data showing that attendance is currently over 96%. They also show remarkable improvements in their sociability and confidence.

Pupil's behaviour is outstanding and no disruption to learning was seen during the inspection. Although pupils enter school, often with challenging behaviour, they are quickly given respect for what they bring to the school community and clearly established routines and strategies rapidly encourage positive behaviour. Staff are very skilful at following the highly individualised behaviour plans so that any initial signs of discontent are identified and pupils are not distracted, or their behaviours de-escalated, before any learning is lost. Parents and carers also agree overwhelmingly that improvements in behaviour have a significant impact on the lives of their families and how they are now able to accept and manage their children's needs more effectively.

Relationships are extremely strong and there are good links between the different teaching groups, which helps to promote socialisation and communication within the school community. Pupils have very positive views about how the school has supported them in their time there. Some pupils were able to talk about their previously negative experiences of education and how they were now being supported to manage their needs and control their behaviour more independently. Pupils' develop cultural understanding extremely well through specifically taught cross-curricular themes such as 'identity and cultural diversity' and through visits into the wider community where pupils meet people who come from different cultures

and backgrounds from themselves. Such experiences help pupils gain an appreciation and respect for cultural diversity that promotes tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. All of the required health and safety policies, including guidance for child protection are in place and are implemented extremely well. Policies are robust, comprehensive and clear, and provide all of the necessary guidance for staff. The school's behaviour policy is short but effective in bringing about improvement in behaviour. Appropriate reference is made within it to the use and abuse of new technologies and cyber bullying. Individual behaviour plans are very well devised, consistently applied by all staff, and meet the needs of all pupils extremely effectively. Provision has a significant impact on improving pupils' behaviour.

Robust risk assessments are in place and they accurately identify any risks associated with pupils, the accommodation or classroom activities. Procedures to ensure that the school is safe are also robust. Staff meet every day to discuss any issues which have arisen. This can include issues of health and safety around individual pupils or the site. Some examples were seen during the inspection of staff raising concerns about pupils' health, which showed that the most vulnerable are closely monitored to identify any health problems so that they can be quickly rectified. The school carries out frequent checks on portable electrical appliances to ensure equipment is in good condition. Very good attention is paid to fire safety. For example, smoke alarms are tested regularly and clear records are kept of fire alarm tests and checks. All fire fighting equipment is serviced regularly so that it is fully operational. All staff receive training, as a part of their induction programme, in many aspects of risk assessment and other areas of health and safety such as first aid. All staff, including the designated person for child protection, have been trained at the appropriate level.

All pupils, who responded to questionnaires or were involved in discussions with the inspector, confirmed that they feel safe in the school. There is no evidence of bullying and the school has clear procedures in place should it occur. Pupils lead healthy lifestyles. They participate in a wide range of sporting and physical activities that keep them fit and ensure that they get enough exercise. Pupils bring their own lunch to school, so that parents and carers can ensure that individual's preferences and dietary needs are met effectively. The school has suitable plans in place to improve access to the curriculum, information and accessibility of the site as required by the Equality Act 2010, and regular audits are undertaken to inform planning.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the required checks on staff and others are carried out and are recorded appropriately in the single central register. All requirements are met.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises and accommodation are adequate. Provision enables pupils to learn safely and effectively. Classrooms are generally spacious and there are suitable areas which are used very effectively to provide individualised learning. There is also a good range of additional facilities which meet pupils' particular needs. These include outside areas, recreation rooms, soft play, cooking facilities and areas to promote the use of information and communication technology.

Provision of information

The school's prospectus provides, or makes available, to parents, carers and others all of the required information. Information supplied is clear, accurate and up-to-date. Parents and carers are provided with suitable annual reports about the attainment and progress made by their children.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a clearly written complaints procedure that meets requirements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following point for development:

- refine data collection systems, so that teachers are able to use the data available, to show how different aspects of pupils' development impact on each other, to provide an even sharper focus on how interventions can support pupils' overall development.

Inspection judgements

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| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
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The quality of education

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| Overall quality of education | ✓ | | | |
| How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils | ✓ | | | |
| How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs | ✓ | | | |
| How well pupils make progress in their learning | ✓ | | | |

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development | ✓ | | | |
| The behaviour of pupils | ✓ | | | |

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils | ✓ | | | |
|--|---|--|--|--|

School details

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| School status | Independent | | |
| Type of school | Special | | |
| Date school opened | January 2007 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 6–19 years | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 10 | Girls: 4 | Total: 14 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs | Boys: 10 | Girls: 4 | Total: 14 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 1 | Girls: 0 | Total: 1 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £42,500 (Primary); £47,000 (Secondary) | | |
| Address of school | Diddington Hall Diddington Lane Meriden CV7 7HQ | | |
| Telephone number | 01675 442588 | | |
| Email address | admin@theislandproject.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Jacqui Walters-Hutton | | |
| Proprietor | The Island Project | | |

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



20 January 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Island Project School, Meriden, CV7 7HQ

Thank you for making me so welcome when I visited your school this week. I really enjoyed meeting and talking to you and seeing you working in your lessons.

I found that your school is outstanding in all areas. Your teachers and other staff know you very well and plan lessons which help you to make good progress in your subjects and outstanding progress in your personal and communication developments. The curriculum that you have meets your needs extremely well to support your learning.

The school looks after you exceptionally well. You all feel safe and you all say that you enjoy school and you have been helped to manage your own behaviour better than before. You are given a lot of opportunities to participate in activities and lessons that you enjoy. I was particularly impressed by the way that you were all so engaged in your learning in all your lessons and about how your behaviour improves in the school because of the support you receive.

I have asked the school to improve further how they use the information that they collect about your improvements, so that they can support you even more effectively.

Yours sincerely

David Muir
Her Majesty's Inspector