

Kisimul School

Woodstock Lane North, Long Ditton, Surrey KT6 5HN

Inspection dates

4–6 October 2016

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher’s inspirational belief in what pupils and staff can achieve together underpins the steady improvements in pupils’ learning and behaviour since the school’s last inspection.
- Pupils’ outcomes are good. Pupils progress well in their learning because any barriers are identified accurately and the multi-disciplinary staff work very effectively together.
- Staff have high expectations of pupils. They foster positive and respectful relationships with pupils which ensure that pupils feel safe and supported well.
- Pupils are helped to manage their behaviour extremely well. They take pride in the school and value greatly events such as the end of school graduation ceremony.
- Good teaching, informed by well-judged training for staff, ensures that pupils are kept safe. Furthermore, most pupils meet or exceed their challenging learning targets.
- Leaders, including those with governance accountabilities, know the school’s strengths well, including what still needs to improve.
- Students aged 16 and over benefit from personalised study programmes and work experience opportunities that help them develop life and workplace skills well.
- Teachers access a wide range of resources to help them support pupils’ learning effectively. However, pupils’ access to personal computers is limited and the most able pupils are not always challenged fully in their learning.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (‘the independent school standards’) and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the impact of teaching and therapies on pupils' learning, so that outcomes are consistently good or better by ensuring that:
 - the school's most able pupils are flagged up to all staff
 - teachers consistently identify small steps and tasks that build on pupils' prior learning effectively
 - plans to increase pupils' access to personal computers or tablets are implemented fully and swiftly.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher provides firm, uncompromising leadership which ensures that pupils' needs are met well. She is supported by an able team of dedicated leaders who demonstrate a very accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for improvement.
- Since her appointment, the headteacher has ensured that pupils are set challenging aspirational targets and their progress towards them is checked routinely. She has high expectations of everyone and is a visible, supportive presence around the school. Staff have embraced her ambition for the school's pupils, as evidenced in their positive responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire for staff.
- Pupils' targets are set against a backdrop of careful assessment of their needs when they join the school. Almost all pupils enter the school with a record of extremely challenging behaviour, many having been excluded from maintained special schools elsewhere.
- The multi-disciplinary approach to assessing pupils' needs when they arrive and the assessment of associated risks are significant strengths of the school. Comprehensive individual plans for each pupil contain medical and care plans, learning targets and personalised behaviour profiles, to support staff in their planning.
- Performance management is robust. Staff are set targets annually, with individual support provided by members of the senior team. Staff who met with the inspector valued the process of appraisal and felt it was helping them raise their game. This was especially true for new staff going through induction who feel supported well by more experienced staff who act as mentors to those new in post.
- Communication with parents is a growing strength. One parent singled out the regular contact from her child's tutor alongside the weekly photographic diary of her child's achievements for particular praise. Nevertheless, leaders recognise a need to reach out to parents who are not local to the area or hard to contact. To this end, coffee mornings have been introduced and progress meetings have been extended across a week to improve accessibility for parents.
- Leaders' self-evaluation is accurate. Consequently, leaders can channel their energies effectively at the areas of top priority such as training and professional development. For example, a recent initiative to develop the skills of a small pool of agency staff has proved highly successful in managing occasional staff absence.
- A strong feature of the training programme for staff is a focus on researching and continually developing staff members' understanding of autism. This approach enables staff to welcome pupils with autism effectively, building pupils' confidence and self-worth.
- The curriculum is adapted effectively to meet the needs of all pupils. A good range of subjects, including music, science, expressive arts and humanities, provides a broad balance. Complementary approaches such as music, aromatherapy, speech, language and occupational therapies, enable pupils to access their learning across subjects well.
- During the inspection, visits to lessons, meetings with pupils and case study analyses provided impressive examples of the school's success in enabling pupils to access the curriculum successfully. In many instances, pupils succeed at Kisimul for the very first time, for example, without further need for medication or protective head gear.

- Leaders have rightly ensured that a strong emphasis on the promotion of personal development and communication skills, including using signs, symbols and pictures, permeates the school. However, although leaders have budgeted to increase pupils' access to personal computers, current provision is limited.
- The school provides well for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils through the taught curriculum and informal opportunities. For example, pupils' spiritual and cultural development are promoted through assemblies, visits to places of worship locally and celebrations of different religions and their festivals.
- Leaders are committed to the promotion of equality and diversity. Discrimination is not tolerated. Staff reflect this commitment in their daily interactions with pupils and the way they maintain pupils' dignity at all times. Pupils, in turn, display understanding towards each other. An enduring culture of mutual respect prepares pupils well for life in modern Britain.
- The school's grounds and premises are maintained to a high standard and comply with all aspects of health and safety requirements, including fire safety. Specialist classrooms, including food technology areas, kitchens and art rooms provide good spaces to develop life and work-related skills.
- Outdoors, a horticulture area and sensory garden, a woodland walk and exercise frames provide sensory experiences and safe spaces for pupils to enjoy. An on-site hydrotherapy pool is scheduled for 2017, until which time pupils access a pool off-site.
- Leaders ensure that all the regulations for independent schools are met, including those relating to information to parents and carers and complaints.

Governance

- Corporate governance is effective. Kisimul Group, through its chief executive and executive directors, have established clear lines of accountability which ensure that the school's staff know what they are accountable for and to whom.
- Responsibility for the educational performance of the school sits with the headteacher and the director of education. Performance management processes are thorough. Staff are supported well through training and development.
- Expectations of the school's leaders are high. Directors make frequent visits to the school and know its strengths and areas for improvement well. The director of education provides a good balance of challenge and support for the headteacher.
- Executive directors make good use of external advice through an independent school improvement partner, whose role is to challenge the work of the school, including the teaching and data on the school's performance.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Keeping pupils safe is central to the way in which all staff go about their business. Risk assessments and behaviour management procedures are robust and effectively executed.
- The school's comprehensive safeguarding and child protection policies are published on the school's website and are available to all parents and carers. The safeguarding policy works very effectively on the ground. It takes full account of the government's new statutory guidelines with which staff at all levels are already familiar.

- The school's staff work effectively with other agencies and local authorities to protect children. They attend meetings where necessary and are tenacious in their follow-up of referrals – keeping comprehensive records of agreed actions and by whom.
- Staff demonstrate a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities to protect pupils, including an awareness of the school's whistleblowing policy. Good-quality training has ensured that staff know exactly what to do if they suspect pupils might be coming to harm or if a child discloses information of a concerning nature.
- Feedback from parents and local authorities about this aspect of provision has been positive. Recruitment procedures are thorough. Staff references are scrutinised and checked before offers of appointment, including appropriate checks on disclosure and barring records. The single central record of staff employed is carefully maintained and meets requirements.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching at Kisimul is characterised by teachers' upbeat and invitational approach. Pupils, in turn, demonstrate enthusiasm for their learning. They form trusting relationships with the staff, recognising that staff are there to support them.
- Teaching is good and improving because teachers, support staff and other adults continually share and develop their significant expertise on how to support effectively the learning of pupils with autism.
- The generous ratio of staff-to-pupils is an important contributory factor to the success of the school. Teachers deliver a well-tailored curriculum carefully designed to meet pupils' academic and behavioural needs. The strong team approach developed with teaching assistants and other adults ensures that pupils' learning is maximised and no time is wasted.
- Teachers' plans reflect a consistent approach with identified tasks for individual pupils, informed by their learning targets. Teachers make good use of resources, using signs, pictures and audiovisual materials to develop pupils' curiosity. They take great care not to over stimulate or alienate pupils, to excellent effect.
- Pupils who struggle to learn or have specific learning barriers benefit significantly from the expertise of trained therapists. For example, in a music therapy session, non-verbal pupils made exceptional progress identifying and delivering complementary rhythms using a range of percussion and string instruments.
- Pupils' engagement with their learning is positive. They evidently enjoy being able to contribute and often show a strong willingness to challenge themselves to try something new. However, despite this, not all teachers exploit opportunities to challenge the school's most able pupils to the full.
- Teaching works best when pupils are challenged effectively at their individual levels, with small steps carefully identified in teachers' plans that move each pupil forward incrementally. In many instances, these steps are translated into consolidated learning that can be seen through pupils' work. However, this is not universally the case.
- The development of pupils' reading and writing is secure, with teachers and support staff exploiting fully opportunities in lessons to develop pupils' skills. However, a lack of portable tablets or computer access for very many pupils means that the potential for faster progress for some pupils is currently limited.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Pupils assert that they feel safe in school and know the staff will help them if they have any worries.
- Leaders ensure that the development of life skills and work-related learning are high priorities. Carefully vetted work experience opportunities including at a farm and a nearby garden centre ensure that older pupils develop their social skills. They are also able to develop an awareness of staying safe outside of the school environment.
- Instances of bullying are exceptionally rare. Pupils are taught well to recognise behaviours that are unacceptable or could place them or others at risk.
- Pupils value greatly the help that the school provides to enable them to develop an understanding of what citizenship means. This was echoed by parents who contacted the inspector. One parent remarked on the opportunities to vote. Another parent praised the formal graduation ceremony, which marks an important transition and provides pupils with an occasion to take pride in what they have achieved.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good. Excellent relationships, well-established routines and a consistently positive atmosphere ensure that pupils' needs are met well. As a result, over time and almost without exception, pupils' behaviour improves from very low starting points.
- Lessons get off to a good start because teachers and other adults have clear expectations of behaviour in class. Staff are very vigilant. If cues suggest that pupils are feeling anxious, actions identified in the pupils' behaviour profile are followed strictly and to excellent effect. The consistency of this approach helps pupils to learn effectively and self-manage.
- Staff at all levels demonstrate routinely their very secure knowledge of pupils' behaviour profiles. As a result, learning is rarely interrupted, potential incidents are usually foreseen and behaviour is managed seamlessly.
- Pupils' attendance is above average and for many pupils, absence from school is not a feature. The school's excellent attendance rates provide testimony to pupils' desire to be in school. Where absences occur they are invariably for medical reasons.
- Leaders do not exclude pupils. However, owing to pupils' complex needs, very challenging behaviour can arise occasionally. Where a need for sanctions arises, staff communicate with pupils to help them understand the impact of their behaviour on others and on themselves. Effective use of therapies, the sensory room and time-out mean that pupils grow in confidence and incidents of challenging behaviour significantly reduce over time.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils enter the school invariably with attainment that is significantly below age-related expectations nationally, because of the severity or complexity of their particular needs. However, as a result of good teaching, they typically progress well from their starting points.

- Outcomes are good because all groups of pupils make equally good progress from their starting points, including disadvantaged pupils and those looked after by local authorities. Highly effective teaching strategies encourage pupils to give of their best. Taking into account pupils' cognitive abilities, they make good gains, meeting and often exceeding their aspirational targets.
- Pupils of all ages and backgrounds, including those with the most complex needs, make good or better progress across all subjects, but particularly in their language and communication skills and in their personal and social development.
- Pupils make good progress in their ability to recognise symbols or to read simple words, phrases, instructions or books. This is because they are given many opportunities to try out these skills across all subject areas.
- Teachers' use of praise and positive reinforcement encourages pupils effectively. When they succeed, pupils are delighted, regardless of the tasks. This was evident in visits to a wide range of classes including cooking, English, mathematics, art and physical education.
- Pupils are prepared well for the next stages in their education or training. The school offers a range of recognised qualifications appropriate to pupils' needs and abilities. Pupils leave the school with accreditation related to their life skills alongside a range of qualifications up to diploma level.
- The most able pupils within the school make similarly good progress to their peers from their starting points. The headteacher and senior staff are very aware of who these pupils are. However, as a distinct group the most able pupils are not tracked or flagged up to all staff. Consequently, opportunities to move them forward rapidly in their learning are not always exploited fully.
- Teachers' plans identify activities for pupils which align broadly with one or two specific requirements for all pupils, followed by more individualised tasks. As a result, sometimes the most able pupils undertake tasks or repeat skills which are too easy or lack sufficient challenge.

Sixth form provision

Good

- Sixth form students make good progress from their starting points. There is a strong focus on work-related activity and preparation for the next steps in students' education. Work experience opportunities support the development of students' social, mathematical and communication skills effectively.
- Students do not attain in line with their peers nationally because of the complex nature of their particular needs. However, their progress is tracked carefully and thought is given to providing them with additional opportunities to take on responsibility or work independently.
- For example, tasks such as accompanied shopping trips, cooking meals and using public transport help develop students' skills to cope outside of the school environment. Equally, the identification of peer Makaton trainers to support younger pupils with signing has proved a popular initiative with sixth form students and younger pupils alike.
- All students undertake external accreditation, covering skills such as handling money, reading a text and communicating with others. In 2016 almost all students achieved accreditation at entry level.

- Most students move on to adult provision within the Kisimul Group or other providers. Planning for this transition is carefully managed and discussed with students and their parents or carers. Difficulties in resourcing an external careers adviser have meant that, until recently, careers information, advice and guidance have been provided internally. However, an external adviser has now been identified to support the current cohort of students.
- Teaching in the sixth form is effective. Students feel supported well and are able to demonstrate good social skills. They behave well, engage positively with staff and take a keen interest in events such as a recent opportunity to vote on new planting in the extensive grounds of the school.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form provision are shared effectively by members of the senior leadership team. Furthermore, there are sound plans to develop further the provision, including changing the curriculum offer to broaden the range of vocational opportunities and accreditation.

School details

Unique reference number	135577
DfE registration number	936/6593
Inspection number	10006049

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	8 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	51
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	32
Number of part-time pupils	n/a
Proprietor	Kisimul Group Ltd
Chair	Danny Carter
Headteacher	Sandra Langdon
Annual fees (day pupils)	£80,000–£85000
Telephone number	020 83352570
Website	www.kisimul.co.uk
Email address	admissions@kisimul.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	November 2012

Information about this school

- Kisimul School (Woodstock House) is an independent special school for pupils aged from eight to 19 years of age.
- There are 51 pupils on roll, 32 of whom are beyond the age of 16 years.

- All of the pupils have severe learning difficulties and very challenging behaviour, and the large majority have a diagnosis of autism. All pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- The school is owned by the Kisimul Group Limited.
- The school uses no alternative providers.
- The last full inspection of the school's education provision was in November 2012. The quality of provision was judged to be good and all the regulations for independent schools were met.
- In October 2013, following an anonymous complaint received by Ofsted concerning low staff–pupil ratios, resulting in staff receiving injuries, the Department for Education (DfE) requested an emergency inspection of the educational provision. All the regulations were found to be met.
- In March 2015, following a complaint received about the leadership and management, staffing ratios, safeguarding and the behaviour and safety of pupils, the DfE requested an emergency inspection of the educational provision. All regulations were found to be met.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed a range of lessons including one-to-one lessons. The headteacher or members of the senior team accompanied the inspector during all observations.
- The inspector listened to pupils reading to a teacher.
- The inspector met with a small group of pupils to gather views about the school.
- The inspector met with a parent and a local authority officer. She also considered the 20 responses to staff questionnaires and responses to a recent parent questionnaire in the absence of sufficient responses to the Ofsted survey, Parent View.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, the director and assistant director of education, and the operations director for Kisimul group as well as members of the senior team. The inspector also interviewed middle leaders and other staff and teachers, some of whom were new to the school.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of school policies and other relevant monitoring and management documentation.
- The inspector reviewed the single central record and checks on staff members' suitability to work with children.

Inspection team

Lesley Farmer, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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