

The Forum School

Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0QS

Inspection dates

6–8 March 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations of pupils' academic progress are too low. Targets for pupils' next step are not sufficiently challenging and so they do not reach the standards they should, particularly in writing.
- Teachers do not plan or adapt their teaching to challenge pupils fully. Teaching staff do not expect or insist on the highest standards, including in some pupils' speech and language development.
- Careers advice and guidance are not of the quality that they should be. Teachers do not plan learning that provides pupils with the knowledge or experiences they need to understand the world of work.
- Systems for managing staff performance do not identify the training or support that teachers and teaching assistants need to plan and adapt learning to meet pupils' needs fully.
- Governors are not yet providing adequate challenge or high enough expectations for the progress pupils make in their studies. They place too great a focus on ensuring basic compliance.
- 16 to 19 study programmes do not fully prepare students for further education, training or employment when they leave the school.

The school has the following strengths

- The principal leads the school with drive and determination. Leaders have been highly effective in ensuring that pupils are safe and behave well.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that the independent school standards are met and safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- Pupils' social and emotional development needs are met well. Therapies are used effectively to help pupils express themselves and understand their feelings.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are good.

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?

- Strengthen leadership and management by ensuring that:
 - teaching staff have the highest expectation of pupils' academic progress
 - the governance group has sufficient focus on pupils' academic outcomes and the quality of teaching and learning
 - staff provide comprehensive careers advice and guidance to pupils from an early stage
 - teaching staff have the training and support they need to develop their own teaching skills
 - leaders use the school's system for managing staff performance effectively to bring about improvements in outcomes for pupils.
- Raise the quality of teaching, learning and assessment by:
 - ensuring that teaching staff challenge pupils' thinking and deepen their understanding
 - teaching staff insisting on the highest standards of work by pupils
 - developing the skills and expertise of teaching assistants more fully and deploying these staff members effectively.
- Improve outcomes for pupils by:
 - building on the effective work that has improved pupils' functional communication, to develop pupils' speech and written communication
 - ensuring that students in the sixth form are prepared well for further education, training or employment when they leave the school.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The principal, supported by her senior leaders, is bringing about significant improvements. These are most clearly seen in the school's efforts to ensure that pupils are safe and they behave well. In these areas, expectations are high, procedures clear and staff are united in their common approach.
- Leaders have ensured that the independent school standards are met in full.
- Senior leaders are clear and accurate in their evaluation of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. They recognise that standards are not high enough yet and take decisive action to improve pupils' experiences.
- Staff are universally positive about the improvements that have been made since the previous inspection. Every member of staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire is proud to work at The Forum School and is committed to improving their own practice further.
- Leaders have made strategic appointments, such as an activities coordinator and behaviour coordinator. Staff in these posts are having a positive impact on the range of opportunities pupils can take part in. Such activities are carefully planned to help pupils develop socially and physically. Pupils were effusive about visits, for example to Poole Quay, and on-site activities such as climbing and swimming.
- The strong work of the speech and language therapy team has demonstrable success in improving pupils' functional communication across the school. Teaching staff have embraced this approach and so there is consistency in its application across the school. Leaders recognise the considerable talents in the team and the need to build on this very positive start to extend pupils' communication skills further.
- Leaders have improved significantly the pre-admission and initial assessments. They use the initial assessment period, typically three months long, effectively to evaluate whether the school is right for the pupil or not in some cases.
- Leaders have developed the school's curriculum, ensuring that pupils encounter a wide range of subjects and experiences. Although the curriculum meets requirements, it is not sufficiently matched to pupils' specific needs and interests. This is especially the case where older pupils need help to prepare for life when they leave the school.
- Through the school's 'STARS' curriculum, there are many opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Staff seize these opportunities when they arise. Some pupils enjoyed working with neighbouring householders to clear snow. Others are keen to look after and ride the horses and ponies that live on the school site.
- Systems for assessing, monitoring and evaluating pupils' progress across the curriculum are strengthening. Staff moderate assessments effectively with other schools locally to ensure that information is accurate and reliable.
- All the required policies, including those relating to pupils' health, safety and welfare, are in place. Inspection evidence shows that these are followed closely. Leaders have tightened the complaints system and ensure that it is followed. Parents are now able to attend complaint hearing panels and receive information about the outcomes of any

investigations.

- The school's website contains all of the information required by the independent school standards. However, it is difficult to find some information. The details about the curriculum are not sufficiently clear for parents and carers to understand what their child is learning.
- Leaders have concentrated on training staff about pupils' safety and improving the way in which staff manage pupils' behaviour. They have given insufficient consideration to the training teaching staff need to improve the quality of teaching and planning learning to meet pupils' needs. The school's system for managing staff performance is not linked sufficiently to the development needs of teaching staff.
- Leaders have not ensured that staff use courses effectively to structure learning and provide challenge at the right level for pupils across the curriculum. Teaching staff are not sufficiently trained to lead these courses, and other providers have not been commissioned. Where courses have been introduced since the previous inspection, for example in art, these are providing a clear structure and greater challenge for pupils.
- Leaders have not given adequate thought to the careers advice and guidance that are provided for pupils. Staff do not routinely monitor leavers' destinations to evaluate the longer-term effectiveness of the school's work.
- Some resources are not well matched to pupils' age and ability. Often texts are not appealing to pupils or do not help pupils to improve their communication skills.

Governance

- Since the previous inspection in 2016, the proprietor has established a governance group at The Forum School. The new arrangements for governance are improving the accountability with which the principal and leaders are being managed. However, there is insufficient attention on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and the rigour of target-setting and progress monitoring.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Teaching staff carefully and sensitively teach pupils about the risks they may face. Staff take into account the individual needs of each pupil. Pupils respond well. They are suitably cautious when they meet new people, visit new places and attempt new activities.
- Leaders ensure that staff complete risk assessments for activities, the site and for individual pupils. Some risk assessments do not contain enough detail on the controls that are to be used and are vague about the additional specialist provision that pupils need.
- The school's safeguarding policy is published on the school's website. It takes into account the latest guidance from the Secretary of State. Leaders with specific responsibility ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- The leader with responsibility for safeguarding is suitably trained and keeps in regular contact with safeguarding staff at the local authority. This ensures that actions taken are appropriate and timely. Records are maintained to a high standard.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Requires improvement

- Teachers' expectations are not high enough. Leaders do not set targets for pupils that are suitably challenging. Monitoring processes are not sufficiently rigorous or demanding. As a result, pupils typically progress at a slow pace.
- There is inconsistency in the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across classes. In a range of subjects, teachers do not plan with sufficient consideration of pupils' prior learning to meet their academic needs. Teachers do not consistently use questioning to explore pupils' understanding or deepen their learning.
- Teachers do not routinely challenge the quality of pupils' work sufficiently or insist on the highest standard of work. They pay too little attention to improving pupils' skills and knowledge when writing. As a result, pupils' progress in writing is not strong.
- In many classes, learning does not have clear enough purpose. As a result, pupils cannot relate their classroom learning to how they might use this in practice.
- Staff do not consistently help pupils to see where they can improve. Too often, staff do not pick up on errors in pupils' work.
- Teaching staff often intervene prematurely. Too often, they do not give pupils enough time to process their thinking and articulate their understanding. The impact of teaching assistants is highly variable. Some are able to help learning progress well, but this is not routinely the case.
- Although teachers evaluate episodes of learning, there is limited evidence that they use the detailed information they record when planning future learning. Similarly, teachers do not consider the age or needs of pupils when selecting resources. Consequently, pupils often use resources that are not clear or are intended for much younger pupils.
- Relationships between teaching staff and pupils are very positive. Pupils trust the adults they work with and are eager to please. As a result, pupils work with positive attitudes and focus well on the tasks they are given.
- Teaching develops pupils' personal and social development effectively. Pupils are increasingly independent in their work and show a good understanding of British values. Teachers are careful in their planning to proactively challenge stereotypical views.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Since the previous inspection, leaders' focus on pupils' safety has been highly effective. Pupils are generally calm, and staff have the skills and expertise to defuse situations as and when necessary. Staff are sensitive to pupils' emotions and intervene considerately to ensure that pupils are supported well.
- All pupils are treated equally. Staff are sensitive to pupils' needs and know each child and their family well. Pupils can identify an adult they can communicate with when they are worried. They are confident that staff will help them.
- Pupils' attitudes towards their work are positive. They talk positively about some of the

subjects they study and about the therapy they receive. Therapy is planned carefully and is effective in helping pupils to express their emotions and feelings.

- Parents are delighted with their children’s welfare and the progress they make. Very few find the need to complain, and when they do, the procedures are followed fully.
- Leaders have effective plans to protect pupils from extreme views.
- Risk assessments do not always have the level of detail of control measures needed to reduce the risk of harm to pupils.
- The school’s work on careers advice and guidance is underdeveloped. Consequently, pupils are not as well prepared for the next steps in their learning as they should be.
- Pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their understanding of British values are embedded in a wide range of learning opportunities. Pupils in one class particularly enjoyed voting to choose the activities they would take part in during the day.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils attend school regularly. Their attendance is in line with the national average and higher than that seen typically in special schools. Leaders are aware of the barriers that prevent some pupils from attending school regularly and use a range of strategies, including outreach work, to help pupils overcome such barriers.
- Pupils conduct themselves well during the school day, including at breaktime and lunchtime. They make good use of the fitness equipment in the playground, and many enjoy cycling on the newly installed road track.
- The school is an orderly environment. Pupils respond quickly to the requests of staff. Pupils greet visitors with warmth and show good manners. Those who talked with the inspector were clear and articulate about their likes and dislikes.
- Pupils, parents and staff agree that behaviour around school is good. The use of restraint is reducing. When it is used, procedures are appropriately followed. When pupils are distressed, staff demonstrate the school’s new approach. They give pupils time and space to regulate their own behaviour and use de-escalation strategies effectively.

Outcomes for pupils

Requires improvement

- Expectations of pupils’ academic progress are not sufficiently aspirational. Against the school’s targets, pupils are making strong progress. However, these targets are not sufficiently challenging to enable pupils to reach the highest standards.
- Over time, pupils’ progress in writing is weak. Staff do not give sufficient thought when planning learning to develop pupils’ writing. Pupils are not helped to improve their posture, pencil grip or the structure of their writing.
- Pupils’ speech is underdeveloped. The speech and language therapy team has supported pupils to make good progress in functional communication effectively. However, for those who have the ability to speak, skills are not improving sufficiently. Teaching staff do not insist on precision or audibility when pupils are speaking. As a result, there is little improvement in the quality of their speech.

- Progress in mathematics is strong. Teaching staff ensure that pupils have secure understanding of number concepts, and pupils are increasingly fluent in addition and subtraction. Some pupils are able to apply their understanding when using money to pay for goods.
- Pupils' personal and social development is strong. Following the introduction of a school-wide approach to functional communication, pupils are increasingly able to use symbols or verbalise their feelings and understanding about their work.
- Personal learning plans give significant weight to pupils' personal and social development. However, they are not sufficiently detailed about pupils' academic development.
- There are no discernible differences in outcomes between children looked after and other pupils.
- Homework is increasingly used to check that pupils have understood their learning in school and has a clear rationale.

Sixth form provision

Requires improvement

- The quality of teaching and learning in the sixth form, like the rest of the school, is inconsistent. Teachers give insufficient consideration to students' career interests and so this rarely features in their planning.
- All students continue to study English and mathematics. They continue to make stronger progress in mathematics, although too few pupils attempt to obtain qualifications in this subject. The teaching of English is weak. Students do not make the progress they are capable of.
- The careers advice and guidance that students receive require improvement as they have limited impact. Students do not have the full range of experiences or the best information they need to explore future employment opportunities and make fully informed choices.
- When students leave school at the end of Year 14, an increasing number now continue in education or training. Very few continue to employment. Leaders are aware of the need to do more, and earlier, in order to increase the likelihood of a student maintaining gainful employment.
- Students have a well-developed understanding of risk, such as when using sharp knives when cooking. They are well prepared for life in modern British society and there are strong links between the school and home.
- The partnership with Clayesmore School is particularly effective in helping students develop their independent living skills. Working with sixth-form pupils from Clayesmore, students are able to prepare and cook meals. Students also develop strong social interaction skills and work well with their peers.

School details

Unique reference number	116593
DfE registration number	835/6033
Inspection number	10045468

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	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	Nil
Proprietor	Cambian Education
Chair	Tommy MacDonald-Milner
Principal	Jo Galloway
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,474
Annual fees (residential pupils: 38 weeks)	£150,858
Annual fees (residential pupils: 52 weeks)	£211,099
Telephone number	01258 860295
Website	www.cambiagroup.com/ourservices/service/home/tabid/106/id/49/s/14/xmps/1816/default.aspx
Email address	forum.admin@cambiagroup.com
Date of previous inspection	29 November – 1 December 2016

Information about this school

- The Forum School is an independent, co-educational school for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions and severe learning difficulties. In addition, they may have attention

deficit hyperactivity conditions, attachment disorder or other medical needs. The vast majority of pupils have severe communication difficulties.

- The school is owned by the Cambian Group, which provides specialist education and behavioural health services for children. The company aims 'to actively enable each and every one of the people in our care to achieve their personal best, however it is defined by them or for them'.
- The majority of pupils are White British. There are more boys than girls.
- The school does not use alternative providers.
- The school's previous standard inspection was undertaken from 29 November to 1 December 2016, when the school was judged to be inadequate.
- The school is overseen by the principal, who took up post in April 2017.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed all pupils learning in a range of subjects. In addition, the inspector looked at pupils' work and information kept by the school about pupils' learning and progress.
- The inspector spoke with pupils and staff throughout the inspection.
- The inspector held meetings with the chair of the governance group, the principal, senior leaders, two therapists and some teaching staff. He scrutinised the curriculum plan and other resources provided by the school.
- The inspector observed some pupils learning during their weekly independent living skills lesson at Clayesmore School.
- The inspector scrutinised records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. School policies and documentation, including risk assessments, were also examined. In addition, the inspector undertook a tour of the premises.
- The inspector took into account the views of 33 members of staff who completed Ofsted's questionnaire for staff and considered the views of six parents.

Inspection team

Iain Freeland, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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