

Cambian Wisbech School

Old Session House, 32 Somers Road, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE13 1JF

Inspection dates

29–31 January 2019

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
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The proprietor and leaders know their school well and plan appropriate opportunities for improvement. They ensure that the school meets all of the independent school standards. The headteacher has worked well with other leaders to improve standards rapidly since the time of the previous inspection.
- Many pupils' attitudes to learning improve dramatically during their time at the school because of the effective care, support and teaching that they receive. Typically, pupils make good progress academically and in their social and emotional development as a result.
- Pupils receive useful advice and guidance about their future career and education options. This, together with the range of vocational opportunities, helps pupils to make informed choices and prepare well for the next stage in their education or employment.
- Pupils' manners and conduct are typically good. Staff help pupils to overcome often significant social, emotional and mental health issues. Most pupils work hard and behave well. Although overall attendance has improved significantly since the previous inspection, a few pupils do not attend school regularly enough.
- Safeguarding is a strength of the school. Staff are well trained and vigilant. Effective systems ensure that pupils are safe and that risks are minimised. Leaders are tenacious in ensuring that individual pupils receive the help they need.
- Teaching is good. Teachers plan activities carefully to capture pupils' interests and promote their understanding. This promotes pupils' progress. Teachers have high expectations and often ask questions that encourage pupils to think deeply.
- Leaders make careful checks on what pupils know and can do when they join the school. This helps identify any previous gaps in individuals' learning. Leaders frequently check pupils' progress, but arrangements to confirm the accuracy of teachers' judgements about key stage 4 pupils' work are underdeveloped.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It enables pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding well. However, plans provide pupils with too few opportunities to write at length. This limits their ability to fully develop their ideas and their subject-specific skills, particularly within the humanities subjects.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2015 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders and managers:
 - refine the curriculum plans further, so that they provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to develop their ideas, responses and subject-specific skills by writing at length, particularly within the humanities subjects
 - make systematic checks upon the accuracy of teachers' judgements about the progress pupils are making at key stage 4
 - continue to increase pupils' attendance.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- The headteacher and other leaders are determined to ensure that pupils who join the school receive the best possible care and support so that their barriers to learning can be overcome. This commitment, along with high expectations for pupils' success, is shared by all staff, most of whom have joined the school since the previous inspection. Staff are proud to work at the school, feel valued and appreciate leaders' regard for their welfare.
- Most pupils join the school with considerable social, emotional and mental health issues to overcome. Leaders treat pupils with respect and work to help them challenge negative perceptions about themselves and their abilities. At the same time, they insist that pupils work hard, and promote their social and emotional development, as well as their resilience. As a result, pupils develop positive relationships and a willingness both to reflect upon their conduct and to change it when necessary.
- Pupils who spoke with inspectors demonstrated an understanding of the importance of their education and a determination to engage in learning at school. They recognise that leaders establish what the gaps in their prior learning are, and that teachers work to close them. Many older pupils gain accredited qualifications before they leave the school.
- Leaders ensure that teachers receive support and challenge that help them to develop aspects of their practice. Teachers appreciate the ongoing and considerable investment in training that is closely tailored to individuals' needs, as determined at induction or through leaders' regular monitoring as part of the robust performance review process. All staff have received up-to-date training in safeguarding and safe ways to restrain a pupil to ensure their own and others' safety.
- Leaders strongly promote fundamental British values. Pupils develop good spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. They learn about a range of faiths and cultures, including through visits to different places of worship, and develop a tolerance of and respect for people with different views and lifestyles.
- The curriculum helps pupils to understand the importance of the rule of law, as well as why people commit crimes, the workings of Britain's criminal justice system and the use of punishment within different cultures and countries.
- Pupils consider each other's views respectfully when debating key issues, such as whether young people who become involved in 'county lines' drug-related activity should be criminalised. They develop an understanding of the importance of democracy through participating in elections to the school council.
- Leaders do not receive additional pupil premium or special educational needs funding from local authorities that place pupils in the school. This funding is part of the fee charged to local authorities. It is used to provide for pupils' academic, social and welfare needs appropriately.
- Leaders' careful monitoring ensures that they have a secure understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Frequent observations of teaching and checking of pupils' work in books keep leaders well informed about pupils' progress. Records in this

and in all other respects are kept meticulously. Leaders ensure that teachers use this information to plan appropriate tasks for pupils.

- Leaders keep well-organised and very detailed records of incidents of bullying, serious misbehaviour and the use of physical restraint. Staff use these records to identify any trends, and then take actions as appropriate to meet the needs of individual pupils and thus reduce the incidence of unacceptable behaviour.
- Leaders evaluate the other information that they collect during their monitoring activities and use this to inform their judgements about the effectiveness of teaching and other aspects of the school's work. In turn, this analysis helps to identify and prioritise necessary improvements. Leaders report the findings of their self-evaluation to the Cambian group on a monthly basis. This helps senior managers to monitor standards.
- Leaders have worked very effectively to improve the attendance of a number of pupils, in some cases considerably so. Overall, attendance has risen sharply since the previous inspection, but remains too low. Some parents and carers remain insufficiently aware of the impact of low attendance upon their children's progress.
- At key stage 2, leaders have well-established procedures by which to check the accuracy of the judgements that teachers make about pupils' progress in English and mathematics. However, the arrangements in this respect insofar as key stage 4 is concerned are less systematic.
- The school's curriculum is broad and balanced. It engages pupils and provides well for their individual interests and aspirations. Leaders have ensured that the school's schemes of work reflect the most recent version of the national curriculum. They ensure that teaching plans are put in place so that the gaps in pupils' knowledge on entry to the school are closed over time. However, curriculum plans do not ensure that pupils have sufficient opportunities to write at length. This limits pupils' ability to fully develop or explain their ideas or provide evidence for their arguments. This is particularly the case within the humanities subjects, where pupils' subject-specific skills are less well developed than they might be, as a result.

Governance

- The governance of the school is effective and has helped to ensure that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Senior managers from the Cambian group work closely with the school's leaders and develop a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Senior managers hold the school's senior leadership to account through their monthly visits and the information that leaders provide in between these.
- Any identified weaknesses are addressed quickly. Senior managers provide leaders with the support that they need to meet the often complex needs of individual pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Leaders and governors have created a culture in which safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.

- Leaders complete and regularly review risk assessments for each pupil. They ensure that staff are very well aware of individual pupils' needs and know what to do in order to make sure that they are met. Pupils feel safe and secure at school.
- Guidance within the school's behaviour and safeguarding policies is clear. Leaders make sure that they review the reasons for and responses to any significant incident of misconduct so that they can plan the right support for pupils who find it difficult to manage their behaviour. This helps minimise the risk that pupils present to their own or to others' safety.
- The school's detailed safeguarding policy takes into account the most recent statutory guidance. It is published on the school's section of the Cambian group's website.
- Leaders ensure that all of the appropriate checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of individuals before they start working at the school. The sites on which the school operates are safe and secure. All of the necessary precautions are taken on trips and visits to ensure that any risks to pupils' safety are anticipated and minimised.
- Leaders have put in place efficient systems for the reporting of concerns about pupils, and staff know what to look out for because they are well trained. Staff know individual pupils very well, and so are alert to any changes in their attendance, appearance or behaviour that might suggest they are vulnerable.
- Records are detailed and well organised, enabling leaders to gain a clear overview of all of the information about a pupil and to make referrals to external agencies quickly. Leaders ensure that they work closely and tenaciously with other professionals to ensure that pupils receive the help that they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers' high expectations and secure subject knowledge typically contribute well to the planning of activities that promote pupils' progress. Teachers plan tasks that capture pupils' interest and maintain their focus. Staff do all that they can to enable pupils to find things out for themselves and to be resilient when they find work difficult. As a result, pupils usually keep trying even if they find a task challenging. During a key stage 2 art lesson, pupils practised their colour mixing and brush technique patiently, enabling them to paint in the style of Kandinsky, for example.
- Pupils, nearly all of whom have an education, health and care plan, develop their confidence and communication skills well because teachers prioritise discussion and debate. Pupils learn to listen to each other, consider different points of view respectfully and adapt their own thinking.
- Trips, visits, vocational training and work experience placements provide pupils with additional opportunities to apply their communications skills, including when speaking with people that they do not know well. Many pupils were able to speak confidently and articulately with inspectors about the subjects that they enjoy at school and the things teachers do that help them to learn.
- Teachers and teaching assistants know individual pupils very well and respond quickly to their changing moods or challenging behaviours. They quickly and insistently refocus pupils on their learning and promote a calm but productive working environment.

- Teachers have excellent relationships with pupils, about whom they care deeply. Teachers engage in ongoing dialogue with pupils that encourages them to keep trying and that quickly alerts teachers to learning misconceptions before pupils become frustrated by these. Teachers ask pupils questions so that they have to think their way through to correcting an error or solving a problem. This builds pupils' resilience and confidence.
- Pupils particularly enjoy their learning in mathematics. They develop a fluency with number and readily complete tasks that involve them using their mathematics skills to help solve real-world problems. Pupils understand that mathematics is important because it is, as one pupil put it, 'involved in pretty much everything'.
- Teachers help pupils to develop life skills so that they are able to do things independently with confidence, such as planning a journey to March and researching bus timetables, routes and ticket prices, before exploring a town that was new to them.
- Teachers help pupils to develop practical skills well, and to apply these confidently, particularly in subjects such as food technology. Pupils worked safely and with evident enjoyment during a cookery lesson, measuring and mixing ingredients together before baking a Victoria sponge cake.
- Teachers often ask pupils questions or set them tasks that require them to think hard. Very often, pupils rise to these challenges and do more than the minimum required of them; their conversation evidences a high level of understanding. Sometimes, pupils do not develop their thinking or their subject-specific skills as well as they could because they have insufficient opportunity to write at length.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- When pupils join the school, leaders use all of the information about them to create individual plans to promote their learning and personal development, maximise their attendance and minimise any avoidable risks to their safety and well-being. Leaders track pupils' progress towards these individualised objectives regularly. They share successes with pupils and parents and involve all in planning pupils' next steps.
- Pupils are safe and say that they feel safe at school, that bullying happens rarely and that it is dealt with effectively. Parents and staff agree. This is because leaders ensure that every incident of unacceptable behaviour is followed up swiftly, and that pupils who find it hard to manage their conduct commit to improving it and are supported in doing so.
- Pupils appreciate the relationships that they have with their key workers, and the fact that they each have a designated member of staff who knows them well and supports them. In the words of one parent, pupils 'are safe, confident and understood here'. Key workers meet with leaders regularly to share important information about pupils and plan help that is appropriate to their needs.
- This ongoing help and support encourages and enables pupils to commit to their learning and removes many of the barriers that might otherwise prevent them from doing so. A wide range of placements, opportunities and activities help pupils to develop the skills they need for employment, further education and later life. For example, local work in a

charity shop, a recording studio and with a motorbike mechanic helps to build pupils' confidence and communication skills.

- Pupils contribute to the school community by serving as elected prefects or as classroom or lunchtime monitors. These activities help to develop pupils' leadership skills and self-confidence.
- Advice from a visiting independent careers specialist is ensuring that pupils receive up-to-date information about employment, training and further education options. This, together with well-targeted work-related learning and placements, raises pupils' aspirations and their awareness of what they will need to do to realise them.
- Over time, pupils develop an ability to reflect on their conduct, the nature of their relationships with others and the ways in which they approach their work. They trust the adults who work with them, and in times of difficulty they often ask for the help they need to navigate life's challenges positively. Pupils commit to making the necessary changes.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Staff consistently demonstrate respect, consideration and good manners in their interactions with pupils. Typically, pupils respond in kind and have positive attitudes to learning. Pupils' conduct within lessons and around the school is typically good. Those who find it difficult to manage their behaviour generally work to meet their targets.
- When behaviour deteriorates because of pupils' social and emotional needs, staff manage this with subtlety and skill. They defuse situations and challenge pupils appropriately about their conduct after they are calm. This encourages pupils to reflect on the impact of their behaviour on themselves and others.
- Pupils say that they feel safe at school and that bullying is rare and tackled effectively by staff when it does occur. They respect people with different beliefs or lifestyles from their own. Pupils told inspectors that racism and homophobia are 'not issues here at all, because we wouldn't put up with anything like that'.
- Pupils' attendance is significantly higher than at the time of the previous inspection. Many pupils attend considerably more frequently than they did in previous schools. However, attendance remains below the national average because some pupils do not attend school regularly enough. Leaders have plans in place to make use of attendance contracts and make clear to parents the impact of low attendance upon progress. It is too soon to determine the impact of this work.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make strong progress from their typically low starting points in a wide variety of subjects, particularly English, mathematics and art. Pupils also develop their social and emotional skills well because of the teaching, care, guidance and support they receive.
- The work in pupils' books shows that, overall, pupils' progress since joining the school is rapid, particularly at key stage 2, where gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding are diminishing. The difference between pupils' attainment and that of others nationally is also reducing.

- Teachers read to pupils every day and encourage them to read themselves. They provide effective support for those who find reading difficult. This is promoting pupils' enjoyment of reading, including for many who have previously been reluctant readers. The school's monitoring information indicates that pupils' reading ages increase markedly during their time at the school. Pupils often read aloud in class, which develops their confidence in speaking in front of an audience.
- Pupils make good progress in vocational and practical subjects such as cookery, art and information and communication technology (ICT) because effective teaching helps pupils to master the techniques that allow them to produce work of a high standard. Almost invariably, pupils take as much pride in what they make, draw or create as they do in what they write.
- Pupils do not complete the national tests at the end of key stage 2, but work in their books indicates that they make good progress across a wide range of subjects, and particularly in mathematics. Their written work is well presented, and older pupils typically spell and use punctuation and grammar with a good degree of accuracy.
- Pupils currently in key stages 3 and 4 are completing appropriate accredited foundation-level qualifications in a wide range of subjects, including English, mathematics and science. In addition, some pupils are working to achieve more-advanced qualifications, including GCSEs in English, mathematics and science. Most are making good progress from their typically low starting points.
- In 2018, by the end of key stage 4, all pupils achieved external accreditation for their studies in art, English, ICT, mathematics and science. Pupils achieved an average of five qualifications, and all who left the school went on to further education, employment or training.
- Sometimes pupils, including the most able, make less progress than they should because the curriculum does not provide them with sufficient opportunity to write at length. This limits their ability to respond fully to the challenging questions that they are often asked to consider and to develop their subject-specific skills, particularly in the humanities subjects.

School details

Unique reference number	134179
DfE registration number	873/6033
Inspection number	10056564

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 17
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	25
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Group
Chair	Anne-Marie Carrie
Headteacher	Clare Gammons
Annual fees (day pupils)	£41,500
Telephone number	01945 427276
Website	www.cambiangroup.com
Email address	admin_wisbechschool@cambiangroup.com
Date of previous inspection	10–12 January 2017

Information about this school

- This is an independent day school for up to 40 pupils aged 7 to 17 who have social, emotional, behavioural and mental health difficulties. The school is a member of the Cambian Group, which provides a wide range of services for children nationally.
- The school is situated in both a listed building in the centre of Wisbech and another local site. Vocational studies and opportunities to engage in activities such as farm work and physical education are provided off site. No pupils currently attend alternative provision.
- There are currently 25 pupils on roll.
- Pupils are placed by a number of different local authorities. Almost all pupils have

education, health and care plans. Some live in a children's home.

- All pupils are unable to attend mainstream education. Many have missed significant periods of education prior to joining the school. Most pupils travel by taxi, some from long distances, to get to school and back each day.
- The school aims to provide a caring and safe environment in which pupils can develop positive attitudes to learning, achieve well and develop the social skills and resilience that will equip them for the next stage in their education, employment or training.
- A significant proportion of staff have joined the school since the previous inspection. The current headteacher took up her position in April 2017.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors held meetings with senior leaders and other staff, pupils, the national school director for the Cambian group and the regional director who is responsible for the school's governance. Inspectors considered the views of parents, including through free-text responses to Ofsted's Parent View survey, and the school's monitoring information about parental perspectives. Twenty-two staff returned Ofsted's questionnaire and the results were analysed.
- Teaching and learning for all age groups were observed across a range of subjects, sometimes with the headteacher. Inspectors reviewed work in pupils' books across a wide range of subjects and the school's most recent information about pupils' attendance, progress and attainment.
- Inspectors considered a range of the school's documentation, including policies, schemes of work and records relating to safeguarding, behaviour and attendance. Electronic versions of the school's admissions and attendance registers were seen. The school's single central record was checked.
- The school's self-evaluation and plans for future improvements were evaluated.

Inspection team

Jason Howard, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Rachael Judd

Ofsted Inspector

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