

Inspection of The Forum School

Shillingstone, Blandford Forum, Dorset DT11 0QS

Inspection dates: 3–5 December 2019

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Sixth-form provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Requires improvement

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a well-led school, full of hope and optimism. Staff form a strong team. They say that they work here because they are determined to make a difference to pupils' lives. Staff across the school go above and beyond to help pupils to gain confidence and move forward, no matter what challenges they face.

Because learning is about real experiences, pupils learn real life skills. They learn to plan, shop for and prepare their meals. They learn to make the school environment attractive by planting pots and hanging baskets. They help with jobs such as giving out the registers each day, maintaining the bicycles and caring for the horses. Learning is relevant and meaningful. As a result, pupils gain confidence and learn more about how they can live as independently as they are able.

Pupils learn to respect one another and to behave well. Staff work out how to get the very best out of every pupil. They adapt their communication methods. They are flexible about where and when learning takes place. This helps pupils to get the best out of every day. As a parent reflected: 'For the first time in a school, my son is thriving.'

Following some changes to leadership, the school is now more settled. Leaders know that it is important to embed the leadership roles so that everyone is clear about their responsibilities and the school continues to improve.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The principal and his senior team have been thinking hard about the curriculum. They want to make sure that learning helps to prepare pupils well for their next steps after school. The curriculum is carefully structured so that staff know what pupils need to learn in the different subjects. There are clear pathways towards further education, supported living and employment.

Staff help pupils to try things out and learn new skills within the safe environment of the school before venturing further. For example, in school, pupils learn how to get themselves ready for swimming and how to behave appropriately during gym sessions. When ready, they are supported to go to the local swimming pool or gym. This helps to develop pupils' confidence in their ability to live and participate in their local community.

The clear approach to the curriculum helps staff to plan activities and experiences that help pupils learn more every day. No minute is wasted in doing everything possible to prepare pupils for their futures. Staff work alongside pupils with care and patience. They make learning meaningful, using all that the school has to offer to show pupils how to do more. Then they gradually withdraw so that pupils can do more for themselves. As a result, pupils grow in confidence and really enjoy their time here.

The therapy team contributes well to how learning happens. They work alongside staff to ensure that pupils' special educational needs are met. Staff use many ways to communicate, depending on what works for each pupil. Throughout the curriculum, symbols are used to support pupils' reading and pupils are encouraged to learn new words and grow their vocabulary. This helps to prepare pupils for their lives beyond school. Leaders want to continue to develop curriculum plans so that there is even more clarity about exactly which words pupils need to know and remember.

The sixth form is a vibrant, exciting base where students learn to make their own decisions. At its heart is the popular school cafe and shop. Here, students enjoy the real roles provided in making goods to sell, for example using recycled paper to make logs to sell in the shop or making cakes for the cafe. They enjoy using their social, mathematical and communication skills to serve customers.

Staff encourage pupils to think about important events that happen around the world. They help pupils to express their opinions and to get involved with decisions that affect them. No opportunity is lost to involve them in the life of the school. For example, pupils are currently planning the design of their new common room. Pupils are also helped to see how they can help others in their community. They get involved in supporting local and national charities as well as exploring ways of helping others, such as visiting local food banks to appreciate how these help people.

Staff get to know pupils very well indeed, and use their knowledge to adapt learning and how it is organised. The strong relationships formed between staff and pupils are key to the positive attitudes that pupils develop towards their learning. Detailed individual behaviour plans outline the exact strategies that work. These are consistently revisited and revised.

The regional leader of education is highly ambitious for the school and supports and challenges effectively. He ensures that leaders have a strong awareness of the independent school standards (ISS). There are careful checks during frequent visits to the school to make sure that all of the ISS are met consistently.

The leadership team has a clear picture of what the school does well and what it needs to do next. The team members want to have better systems for checking all aspects of the school's work. For example, they are aware that there needs to be better use of the detailed information they have about pupils' behaviours and attitudes. They want to look more closely at patterns and what these tell them, so that they can continue to improve pupils' behaviour.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

There is a strong culture of safeguarding. The regional leader checks, through regular audits, that safeguarding arrangements are secure. The designated

safeguarding lead takes a rigorous approach to make sure that all staff have the safeguarding training and information that they need to keep pupils safe. Daily briefings for staff help to keep safeguarding themes alive. Staff have a strong understanding of what to look out for and what to do if they have any concerns. Pupils told us that they feel safe because of the caring adults who support them in school.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders' recent emphasis on the curriculum has led to a clear, well-organised plan which includes all subject areas. This development of the curriculum needs to continue so that there is even greater clarity. For example, in reading, there needs to be clarity about exactly which words pupils will learn, and when. This will also help to develop clear next steps for pupils so that they have a more precise idea about what they need to do next to improve.
- The principal has reorganised the leadership team. The leaders' roles now need to be embedded so that all leaders understand their individual responsibilities. Leaders need to know exactly how and when to make checks on the actions outlined in the school's development plan.
- Leaders need to make sure that the information they gather helps them to understand what works well and what can be improved further. For example, by understanding key themes and patterns regarding incidents, they can make sure that everything possible is done to support pupils' behaviour and attitudes.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use Ofsted Parent View information when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

If you're not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

School details

Unique reference number	116593
DfE registration number	838/6033
Local authority	Dorset
Inspection number	10107528
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	25
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	13
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Cambian Education
Chair	Chris Strong
Principal	Greg Regan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£72,000–£82,258
Telephone number	01258 860 295
Website	www.cambianguroup.com/specialist-education/our-schools/autism-schools/the-forum-school
Email address	forum.admin@cambianguroup.com
Date of previous inspection	6–8 March 2018

Information about this school

- The Forum School is an independent, co-educational school for pupils who have autism spectrum disorders and/or severe learning difficulties. In addition, they may have attention deficit hyperactivity conditions, attachment disorder or other medical needs. Most pupils have severe communication difficulties. All have an education, health and care plan.
- The last standard inspection took place in March 2018. At this time, the school was judged requires improvement. All of the independent school standards were met.
- The school is owned by the Cambian Group, which provides specialist education and behavioural health services for children.
- The school does not use alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

We carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspectors met with the regional lead for education, who also represented the proprietor. There were several meetings with the principal and the head of education. Inspectors also met other senior leaders, including the lead for behaviour and the designated safeguarding lead.
- Inspectors focused on reading, mathematics, physical education and personal, social and health education as part of this inspection. Inspectors discussed the design of the curriculum with teaching staff, reviewed schemes of work in these subjects, spoke to teachers and pupils, looked at pupils' work and visited lessons.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation provided by the school. They looked at the school's website and school policies and documents relating to health and safety. To check the independent school standards relating to the health and safety of the premises, inspectors toured the school and met with the leader of the premises team.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of safeguarding information, including the checks that leaders make prior to employment. They checked the school's safeguarding policy and spoke to staff about the school's safeguarding procedures.
- Inspectors spoke to some parents on the telephone and took the comments made in Parent View texts into account. Inspectors also met with a wide group of staff to gather their views about the school.

Inspection team

Tonwen Empson, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Carol Hannaford

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2020