

Flexible Learning Centre

23 All Saints Road, Hockley, Birmingham B18 5QB

Inspection dates

28–30 November 2017

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the last inspection, the proprietor has made significant improvements to the leadership of the school. This has had a positive effect on teaching and learning and the pupils' progress.
- Safeguarding is highly effective. Staff complete appropriate training and are confident in recognising the signs of abuse or neglect. Reporting systems are comprehensive. Pupils feel safe and secure.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers use information from previous schools and their own assessments of pupils to plan engaging and challenging lessons.
- The majority of teachers provide guidance that is in line with the school's assessment policy. This is not yet consistent across the whole curriculum.
- Outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils arrive at the school having experienced significant gaps in formal learning. Their starting points are low. Some pupils also arrive extremely late into the school year. The school helps pupils to catch up quickly. As a result, pupils leave the school with good, relevant qualifications and move on to further education or training.
- Personal development and behaviour is outstanding. Staff implement the school's highly effective behaviour policy consistently. Pupils understand the policy and know what staff expect of them. Relationships between pupils and staff and are exemplary. Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning have a positive impact on their progress.
- For some pupils, attendance is low. However, the school works effectively with parents and external agencies to support pupils and their families. This has had a positive impact over time and attendance patterns have improved.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn about and appreciate different cultures. They mix well in diverse social groups and their achievements are regularly celebrated.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils can study a range of GCSEs, including English, mathematics and science. The school has also developed specialist BTEC National Diploma routes in health and social care, business studies and sports science.

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 quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that all teachers consistently implement the school's assessment policy.
- Continue to improve the attendance and punctuality of pupils, by:
 - working with parents and pupils to identify and overcome barriers to low attendance and punctuality.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor has ensured that all of the independent school standards are met.
- Since the last inspection, the proprietor has strengthened the leadership team significantly. A senior team has been established and roles and responsibilities are clear. Leaders are highly ambitious for all pupils and staff. As a result, systems are well embedded and have had a significant impact upon the way pupils behave and the progress they make. Leaders have created a culture of high expectations. Teachers say they are proud to be staff members. Pupils enjoy coming to the school. Parents say the school has given 'life-changing' opportunities to their children.
- Leaders have embedded highly effective systems for the monitoring of teaching and learning, through observing lessons and checking the quality of work in books. Leaders provide feedback to teachers to help them improve their practice. Leaders also run a highly effective teacher training programme. The majority of the school staff have become qualified teachers through this route and appreciate the continual professional development provided by the school. All staff say that leaders use professional development to encourage, challenge and support teachers' improvement.
- There is an assessment policy in place. However, all staff do not consistently apply it. Leaders have worked hard to establish and embed high expectations. Their work on developing feedback and target-setting has been effective across most of the curriculum. Leaders have an accurate understanding of where further improvements are needed. They have high expectations and are not afraid to tackle underperformance, when necessary.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils learn about and appreciate different cultures, they mix well in diverse social groups and their achievements are regularly celebrated. The school has recently introduced a multi-faith room that pupils can access for quiet reflective time. Displays in the room celebrate the major religions and it contains religious artefacts as well as an area to record thoughts, feelings and prayers. Pupils learn right from wrong and there is a strong emphasis on respect and treating others fairly. Pupils also learn about and raise money for charities, including charities which support cerebral palsy and cancer research. These opportunities are well established, even though staff often have little time with their pupils due to the majority arriving late in the academic year.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils can study a range of GCSEs including English, mathematics and science. The school has also developed specialist BTEC National Diploma routes in health and social care, business studies and sports science. Leaders have considered the range of subjects needed by pupils to be successful in the next stage of their education or training. Pupils are happy with the subjects they are able to study. They say they have achieved more than they had in their previous schools. Parents are satisfied with the variety of subjects available and say their children make good progress across the curriculum. The school exceeds its statutory requirement to report on pupils' progress annually. Parents receive monthly reports on the progress their children are making.

- Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The school has developed a highly effective online system to track and monitor pupils' attendance, punctuality, their achievements across the curriculum, and progress towards their targets. As a result, they are able to monitor individual pupils' progress with precision. Leaders use the school's monitoring system to produce highly detailed monthly reports for pupils and parents. These regular reports help pupils to remain focused on their learning through precise target-setting and effective feedback. This system enables them to monitor precisely the performance of pupils and make rapid adjustments to learning if pupils start to fall behind. Parents and stakeholders are able to access the information electronically, via an app system.
- The school has a safeguarding policy based on current government guidance. This is published on the school's website.

Governance

- A school improvement partner who provides appropriate support and challenge to the leadership team supports the school. The school improvement partner has worked with the school since the last inspection and has a clear and accurate view of the improvements made by the school's leadership.
- There has been a clear focus on improving teaching and learning through staff development and rigorous monitoring of the quality of teaching. There is evidence of improvement over time, which is reflected in pupils' achievements.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- There is a culture of vigilance through high levels of support and supervision. The staff know pupils well and recognise the signs of abuse and neglect because of highly effective training. Staff are quick to act and leave nothing to chance when making sure pupils are safe.
- All of the pupils are vulnerable. Staff are aware of the challenges experienced by pupils and recognise the risks in the local communities.
- Staff are highly skilled and vigilant and have awareness of child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and identifying children at risk of becoming radicalised. The school does well to make pupils aware of relevant risks and the curriculum has opportunities for pupils to learn about how to keep themselves safe.
- Three designated safeguarding leads work across all school sites.
- The school operates on three separate sites in different areas of Birmingham. All of the sites are well maintained and meet health and safety requirements. Security arrangements are appropriate with relevant risk assessments in place.
- Reporting systems are highly effective. Staff record concerns quickly and accurately. The designated lead for safeguarding acts upon all reports with urgency. All staff say that the school is safe. They say the school is a caring environment where pupils and staff come first. Parents have no concerns about the safety of their children.

- The school has a safeguarding policy based on current government guidance. This is published on the school's website.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teaching, learning and assessment is good.
- Teachers use information from pupils' previous schools and their own assessments of pupils' abilities to plan lessons that meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers are highly ambitious for pupils. The majority of pupils arrive late into the school year, leaving little time to prepare for examinations. However, teachers use effective planning to ensure that pupils are able to catch up and consolidate their learning. Teaching is precise and focused and pupils make good progress from their starting points.
- Because of well-established routines, pupils know what is expected of them. The vast majority arrive on time and settle quickly into lessons. They are well prepared for learning and want to do well. Where pupils arrive late or fall behind, teachers are quick to intervene, enabling them to catch up or practise their skills. Teachers' expectations of pupils are high and pupils are aware of this. Pupils know when they have not completed enough work and make sure they catch up. There are also well-embedded expectations of positive behaviour and positive attitudes to learning.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is secure. They use highly effective questioning to probe for more information and to provide stretch and challenge. Pupils' responses to questions show evidence of gains in their learning. They develop secure skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects.
- Work in pupils' books shows that they make good progress over time. In English, pupils' use of correct grammar has improved and their writing skills have developed well. Pupils take pride in their presentation of work. Some teachers use feedback effectively to promote higher-level challenge. Pupils are encouraged to analyse texts and consider how writers use language to convey atmosphere and to describe settings. Work in pupils' mathematics books shows that pupils build relevant skills over time. They confidently use percentages, fractions and trigonometry and use these to solve problems. The range of work completed develops pupils' reasoning skills and shows good progress over time. Pupils' learning is supplemented by a series of short video clips produced by the school on key mathematical concepts. The clips are highly engaging and assist pupils with revision and securing knowledge and skills.
- Across the BTEC National Diploma subjects, teachers use assessment and feedback well to plan and inform learning. Pupils have a clear understanding of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve further. Teachers are aspirational for the pupils and use effective feedback and guidance to challenge them to achieve higher grades. For example, staff give precise feedback that helps pupils to understand how they can improve their work. Pupils make good progress towards their qualifications. They are fully involved in this process and take responsibility for their learning and progress. They are encouraged to reflect on and thoroughly evaluate their own work. In their BTEC National Diploma subjects, pupils know what they are learning and why. They understand how their day-to-day learning contributes to their qualifications.

- Teachers plan learning well and take careful account of pupils' needs. Lessons are two and a half hours in length, due to the content that needs to be covered. Pupils remain on task and work productively throughout these sessions, in some cases completing substantial amounts of work. In business studies, pupils learn about different types of businesses as well as developing skills to identify, compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of different types of organisations. Pupils who want to run their own businesses use this knowledge to consider the most appropriate type of business for their choice of career.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Staff know pupils very well. They understand the challenges and barriers experienced by pupils and know where pupils have struggled in previous educational settings. The school has developed an ethos based on nurture and trust. Praise and recognition is used to good effect to boost pupils' self-esteem and increase their self-confidence. Pupils say the school has motivated them to become the best they can be and gives them chances to enjoy a healthy lifestyle.
- Staff enjoy working at the school and say that leaders are considerate of staff well-being. As a result, they feel supported and valued.
- Pupils enjoy school. The majority of pupils attend regularly and arrive on time. When pupils struggle with attendance or punctuality, the school works effectively with parents and the local authority to provide additional support. For example, the school in collaboration with the local authority has provided transport or bus passes. Pupils say that the school has made a real difference for them. They say that staff understand them and help them to do well.
- Careers advice and guidance is highly effective. The school has links with a range of colleges and further education providers. Staff encourage pupils to apply for a wide range of courses and are aspirational for pupils' future choices. The school is supported by an external organisation that provides impartial advice and guidance for pupils. As a result, pupils are able to make well-informed choices about their next stages of education, employment or training.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Leaders have developed a highly effective behaviour policy that staff implement well across all three sites. There are high expectations of pupils' behaviour and opportunities to 'put things right'. Pupils understand this and they respond quickly to adults' requests. They display positive attitudes to learning and make good progress.

- Pupils say bullying is extremely rare and are confident that staff would resolve any problems quickly. Pupils say that they can talk to all staff members and that staff will listen to them. Pupils learn about different types of bullying, including cyber bullying and homophobic bullying, and know how to keep themselves safe in the community. The school's extensive work on internet safety has ensured that pupils are aware of the dangers of grooming, identity theft and cyber bullying. Pupils say that they would report any concerns to teachers. All staff say that the school deals quickly and effectively with any rare cases of bullying.
- Staff say that pupils behave very well and that leaders always support staff in managing pupils' behaviour. Systems for promoting good behaviour are well established across all of the school sites. Parents say that the school's work 'transforms' pupils' behaviour and helps them to develop positive attitudes to learning and to others.
- Relationships are exemplary. Staff take time to get to know pupils as individuals and develop positive, trusting relationships. For some pupils, this is challenging because, before starting at the school, they have experienced many placements and not had the opportunity to forge lasting relationships. Staff recognise the importance of developing pupils' self-esteem and looking after their well-being. They know that this is important in order for pupils to progress academically and to achieve their potential.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Outcomes for pupils are good. Pupils arrive at the school having experienced disruption to their formal education. Many have been excluded from previous schools, while others have not attended school for considerable periods. A large number of pupils also arrive extremely late into the school year, leaving little time to prepare for formal examinations. However, through careful planning and effective intervention, pupils catch up quickly and are able to complete GCSE examinations and achieve BTEC National Diploma and equivalent qualifications. During the previous year, a significant number of pupils arrived at the school in January. On average, these pupils were able to achieve five GCSEs, or their equivalents, including in English and mathematics. The majority of pupils make good or better progress given their starting points and length of stay at the school.
- The school's information system also records pupils' social and emotional progress. Pupils' attendance and punctuality are tracked and reported to parents and the local authority. The information shows that the school's interventions for improving attendance and punctuality have been successful over time. Individual case studies show significant improvements in attendance and, consequently, pupils' progress. For some pupils, however, punctuality remains a problem and prevents a crisp start to their school day.
- Leaders use the information well to make comparisons between similar schools and the national performance for schools that provide alternative education. This comparative information show that pupils who attend the school make better progress than those in schools of a similar setting.
- The support for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities is well planned and effective. Teachers use information from previous schools, along with their own detailed assessments of pupils' work, to plan appropriate lessons and allocate additional adult support where needed. Many of the pupils became disengaged from formal education and some have been reluctant to attend school. The school has

developed opportunities for pupils to access learning via video call and through online video tutorials, which support pupils with revision and securing knowledge. Parents speak highly of this system and say it has been extremely effective in helping children to settle into school.

School details

Unique reference number	135561
DfE registration number	330/6128
Inspection number	10020744

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	46
Number of part-time pupils	8
Proprietor	Shamim Akhtar
Headteacher	Shamim Akhtar
Annual fees (day pupils)	£8.00 per hour for full-time pupils (25 hours per week) £10.00 per hour for part-time pupils (less than 25 hours per week)
Telephone number	0121 5547918
Website	www.flexiblelearning.org.uk
Email address	info@flexiblelearning.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	3–5 December 2013

Information about this school

- Flexible Learning Centre is an independent day school for pupils aged between 13 and 16 who have experienced significant disruption to their formal learning. Many have been excluded from previous schools. The school provides alternative education for pupils who cannot attend mainstream schools.
- Nearly all of the pupils have social and emotional difficulties, which have resulted in them not doing as well as they could at school. Four of the pupils on roll have education, health and care plans.

- The school is located on three sites in different parts of Birmingham: Hockley, Erdington and Northfield. Staff work across all three sites. The headteacher is also the proprietor and owner of the school.
- The school opened in September 2008. The school's last full inspection took place in December 2013 when it was judged inadequate overall. Progress monitoring inspections also took place in July 2014 and April 2015.
- There are 46 pupils on roll, eight of whom attend on a part-time basis. Most pupils are referred by local schools through network agreements or partnerships. Some pupils are dual registered and remain on the roll of local secondary schools. The school is registered for 140 pupils.
- The school does not use alternative educational provision to extend its curriculum.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out over two days with notice of one day.
- Inspectors met with the proprietor (who is also the headteacher), senior leaders, teaching staff and pupils at all three sites. The inspectors also spoke with the school's improvement partner on the telephone.
- Inspectors observed lessons in English; mathematics; sports science; health and social care; religious education; business studies; art; and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. The inspectors also reviewed work in pupils' books.
- Inspectors toured the premises of all three sites and examined key policies, including those for safeguarding, the curriculum, behaviour, complaints and anti-bullying.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including the attendance and admissions registers, the school's information on pupils' achievements, and behaviour logs. Inspectors also reviewed the school's own online reporting and recording systems.
- The inspectors reviewed the parental feedback received through Parent View.

Inspection team

Melanie Callaghan-Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Michael Onyon

Ofsted Inspector

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