

Flexible Learning Centre

204 Slade Road, Birmingham, B23 7RJ

Inspection dates

3–5 December 2013

Overall effectiveness

	Inadequate	4
Pupils' achievement	Adequate	3
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Adequate	3
Quality of teaching	Adequate	3
Quality of curriculum	Inadequate	4
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Inadequate	4
Leadership and management	Inadequate	4

Summary of key findings

This school is inadequate because

- Leaders and managers have failed to ensure the welfare, health and safety of students due to inadequate fire precautions.
- The quality and safety of all the school's premises is not sufficiently monitored.
- The curriculum is not adequately implemented because not all students receive physical education.
- Leaders' and managers' evaluation of the performance of students and staff is not sufficiently rigorous. It does not identify areas for development that will enable students to achieve better.
- The proprietor has not ensured that all regulations are met and that sufficient improvement since the previous inspection has been made.

The school has the following strengths

- Some students make good and better progress. Students' achievements have generally improved since the last inspection.
- Students' behaviour in school has a positive impact on their learning and attendance has improved since the last inspection.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements. The details are listed in the full report.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice. The inspectors observed ten lessons taught by nine teachers and looked at students' work. Three lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher. Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and proprietor, staff members, students, parents and carers, and representatives of schools and referring agencies that place students at the school.
- The inspectors looked at documentation including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of students' progress, records of lesson observations and of staff training.
- Fourteen questionnaire responses from staff were taken into account, together with 23 responses to the school's own questionnaire seeking the views of parents and carers.
- No parents and carers' or students' responses to the on-line Ofsted questionnaires were available.

Inspection team

John Gush, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Mary Hinds

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Flexible Learning Centre is an independent day school that is located on four sites in different parts of Birmingham: Pye Hayes, Erdington, Hockley and Weoley Castle. The headteacher is the proprietor and owner of the school.
- The school, which opened in September 2008, provides an alternative education for students aged from 14 to 16 years. It had its last full inspection in March 2010. It also had an inspection to follow up the school's actions to address unmet regulations in October 2010, March 2011 and November 2011. Two material change inspections also took place in March 2012 and September 2012 as the school wished to expand its provision.
- Eighty six students are currently enrolled. About two thirds of students attend full time and the rest on a part-time basis. Most students are referred by schools' partnerships or networks acting through their referring agencies. Some students remain on the roll of local secondary schools and are dually registered.
- Nearly all of the students have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties that have resulted in them not doing as well as they could at school. Currently, five of the students are looked after by the local authority. None of the students on roll has a statement of special educational needs. The students come from a wide range of different cultures and beliefs.
- The school does not use alternative provision to extend its curriculum.
- The school's main aim is to help students to overcome any disadvantages and disaffection in order to achieve their full potential.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that leaders and managers rigorously evaluate all aspects of the school's provision, especially the quality of teaching, and establish robust plans for development in order that:
 - students experience teaching which enables them to develop as independent learners
 - the high standards of the school's best teaching are shared with, and practised by, all teachers
 - all students' work is regularly and consistently marked so that they know the standard expected and what they need to do to achieve it.
- **The school must meet the following independent school standards.**
 - Ensure that there is a curriculum policy set out in writing which is supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and that it is implemented effectively (paragraph 2(1)).
 - Ensure that there is a written policy which complies with relevant health and safety laws and that it is being implemented (paragraph 11).
 - Ensure that there is compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (paragraph 13).
 - Ensure that suitable toilet and washing facilities are provided for the sole use of pupils (paragraph 23A(1)(a)).
 - Ensure that suitable changing accommodation and showers are provided for pupils aged 11 years or over at the start of the school year who receive physical education (paragraph 23A(1)(c)).
 - Ensure that accommodation is provided for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility (paragraph 23B(1)(b)).
 - Ensure that the school's accommodation and facilities are maintained to a sufficient

standard to ensure the health, safety and welfare of pupils, as far as is reasonably practical (paragraph 23C).

- Ensure that cold water supplies that are suitable for drinking are clearly marked as such (paragraph 23F(1)(c)).
- Ensure that the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users (23F(1)(d)).

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Adequate

Students' achievement is adequate overall, including in English and mathematics. Achievement is not good because of some weaknesses in teaching and the curriculum. Although the number of students who make good or better progress has increased since the last inspection, there is insufficient evidence that the gap between students' achievements and those of their peers nationally is closing fast enough.

Most students start at the school late in their educational career, often following a disrupted experience of schooling. They undertake GCSE courses in a range of subjects, including in English and mathematics, and achieve grades ranging from A to G. Students who are unlikely to achieve GCSE in English and mathematics take the Functional Skills awards in literacy and numeracy and this enables them to achieve nationally accredited qualifications. The grades they attain represent adequate progress from their starting points. Some students take great pride in their work and their attitudes to their studies show good improvement and spur them on to work harder. Most students make suitable use of information and communication technology (ICT) to carry out tasks in a number of different subjects. This, and specific ICT subject teaching, aids them to develop a reasonable level of competency. They are motivated to use computers and this also helps them to develop their literacy skills. Almost all students who left school at the end of the last academic year progressed to further education college or into apprenticeships. This is an improvement since the last inspection.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Adequate

Students' behaviour and personal development is adequate. For many, this represents a substantial improvement since joining the school. Behaviour and personal development are not good because too much learning time is lost because of lateness. In addition, students are only provided with limited opportunities to develop as confident independent learners. Although attendance continues to be below the national average, it has improved substantially since the last inspection because of very careful management. All absences are immediately and effectively followed up with students' parents and carers, and with the mentors who work with their referring agencies. Lateness remains a problem because too many students come late to school and to lessons. This disturbs their learning and that of others, and results in them making slower progress than they could. Otherwise, lessons are rarely disrupted. Students appreciate the presence of support workers who encourage them in their work and reinforce the school's very clear rules for behaviour.

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is adequate. Through lessons in citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) students are introduced to a wide range of cultures and religions. Visits from the police community liaison team and the operation of the school council acquaint students with British democratic institutions and the rule of law. Projects, such as one on homelessness in the locality of one of the school's sites, provide students with first-hand knowledge of local issues and the opportunity to make a positive contribution to the life of the community. These activities help the students to develop the attitudes and skills they need to take an active part in a democratic and multicultural society. However, they are not delivered consistently enough for all students to benefit from them as fully as they could. The citizenship curriculum, and the manner in which it is implemented, ensure that, when political issues are raised, balanced and non-partisan views are always presented.

Quality of teaching

Adequate

The quality of teaching is adequate and enables students to make adequate progress in their

academic learning. The best teaching engages students' interest, takes account of their different levels of ability, and sets high expectations for all students. In these lessons, a useful variety of teaching techniques, including probing questions and discussions between students, help those of all levels of ability to think for themselves and to make good progress. However, there are times when too much teaching is based on copying information and completing worksheets. High expectations are not always promoted and teachers do not always take account of students' different ways of learning and abilities. As a result, some students are not sufficiently challenged while, at times, others struggle to keep up with the work set.

All students are assessed when they start at the school, although the resulting information provides only limited detail of their academic capability. Valuable information about the social and behavioural background of all new students is shared with teachers. This is used effectively to help most students settle well into the routines of the school. On-going assessment is largely carried out through tests and mock examinations. The information from these is used satisfactorily to support students as they prepare for their GCSE examinations and Functional Skills tests. Students regularly carry out written work using ICT and this results in their literacy skills being reinforced in a number of subject areas. Excellent arrangements are made to use ICT to encourage students to complete homework assignments and revision. This includes a 'virtual learning environment' where students can gain access to their work through the internet, and a recent initiative to use social media so that students can see course material on their smart phones. These strategies have enabled some students to engage with schoolwork who otherwise would not have done so.

The quality of students' work and the way that it is marked varies between teachers and subjects. In the best, careful, neat and well-presented work is regularly marked with helpful comments that encourage students and let them know what they need to do to improve. However, in other subjects, scruffy and careless work is not commented on and marking is irregular or absent altogether.

Quality of curriculum

Inadequate

The quality of the curriculum is inadequate. Although the planned curriculum is broad and balanced, and covers all the required areas of learning, it is not fully implemented. In particular, only a very limited number of students receive any physical education. Although most students study sports science, practical physical education is not consistently taught.

The curriculum is suitably built around the National Curriculum. It is satisfactorily implemented to enable students to make adequate progress. All students have appropriate opportunities to develop their abilities, including in literacy and numeracy, and to prepare for relevant examinations. Health and social care lessons enable students to explore issues such as drugs and relationships. Students learn how to keep safe and to recognise threats and dangers. Suitable policies exist to ensure that, when students do have statements of special educational needs, the requirements of their statements will be met.

Appropriate advice about future options is provided for students through meetings with the school's independent careers adviser. Students also use the new software the school is providing to identify appropriate college courses, and receive guidance from their referring agencies' mentors. These arrangements are successful in enabling the vast majority of students to make suitable progression to further education or employment when they leave school.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Inadequate

Arrangements to promote the welfare, health and safety of students are inadequate. Two regulations for independent schools are not met. The assessment of risks to the health and safety of students and staff across the school's four sites is inconsistent, and some significant risks are not identified or remedied. In addition, at the start of the inspection, arrangements to protect

students and staff against the risk of fire at one of the sites were inadequate. By the end of the inspection suitable action had been taken to address the particular serious failing.

Staff recruitment is carried out carefully. All the required checks for the suitability of staff to work with students are made and recorded accurately on the central register. All staff receive training in safeguarding, including the designated child protection officer and deputy who have both received the required higher level training. This adequately ensures that a suitably trained staff member is able, within a reasonable time span, to be at any of the school's site to respond if a concern related to child protection is raised. Effective first-aid provision is available at all the sites, including sufficient and appropriately trained first aiders. Good communication with children's homes and referring agents takes place. This ensures that students who are looked after by their local authority receive the support they need while they are at the school.

The school has an effective policy to support appropriate behaviour and suitable strategies to counter bullying. Students say that they do not experience bullying and are aware of the school's arrangements to ensure that it does not take place. They are aware of on-line bullying, and the potential dangers associated with social media sites and the inappropriate use of text messaging. The school provides them with valuable support to help them to build the resilience they need to deal with such situations, should they occur. Students say that they feel safe in school and that they receive appropriate support and guidance. They adhere to the outright ban on smoking in or near to any of the school's properties and this has had a positive impact on their health. They appreciate the good-humoured manner in which supervision is provided. When visits outside school are arranged, appropriate risk assessments are carried out. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained as required.

Leadership and management

Inadequate

Leadership and management are inadequate. This is because of the failure to promote the students' welfare, health and safety and, in particular, to protect them against the risk of fire. A number of the independent school regulations are not met.

The school's proprietor and headteacher, together with her senior colleagues, have overseen the substantial growth of the school in recent years. The provision is valued by the partner schools and agencies who place students at the school. Similarly, students' parents and carers say they greatly appreciate the impact the school has had on their children's prospects. Improvements since the last inspection include better achievement and attendance, and a reduction in the number of incidents of poor behaviour and resultant permanent exclusions. However, leaders' and managers' evaluation of the school's provision and their planned developments have not been sufficiently rigorous to ensure the continued safety of students or to establish whether they are making all the progress they could. In addition, inadequate attention has been paid to monitoring the performance of teachers, and providing guidance to help them improve their teaching and the way they mark students' work.

Valuable information is provided to parents, carers and others through the school's well-presented and informative website. The detailed prospectus is thoroughly updated each year. Monthly reports provide a record of each student's progress for their parents and carers, as well as for the referring schools and agencies. Annual reports give a fuller account how students are doing in each subject. The school has provided premises across the city in areas requested by partner schools and referring agencies. The quality and safety of all school premises are not monitored sufficiently. Some of the accommodation is of a good standard and meets requirements but a uniform quality is not maintained across the four sites. There is no evidence that the Weoley Castle site has been approved through a material change. As a result, a number of the regulations regarding property and accommodation in independent schools are not met. The complaints policy meets requirements and is implemented effectively.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135561
Inspection number	420204
DfE registration number	330/6128

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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	Secondary school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	13–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	86
Number of part time pupils	20
Proprietor	Shamim Akhtar
Chair	Shamim Akhtar
Headteacher	Shamim Akhtar
Date of previous school inspection	16–17 March 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9.50 per hour for full-time students (25 hours per week) £10.00 per hour for part-time students (less than 25 hours per week)
Telephone number	0121 240 3718
Email address	info@flexiblelearning.org.uk

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