

Spring Hill High School

Stuart Court, 73-75 Station Road, Erdington, Birmingham, B23 7PG

Inspection dates 10–12 February 2015

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This is a good school

- Senior leadership is good and inspires staff and students. Leaders check teaching quality thoroughly and support staff well.
- Students enter with low attainment and histories of fractured education. They make rapid progress in learning and in resolving their emotional and social difficulties. All students gain external accreditation, tailored to their individual needs.
- The sixth form is good. It successfully supports students to help them prepare for the move to college or employment opportunities.
- Students' social and emotional developments are monitored carefully, which helps them to make good progress. The school's safe environment successfully helps to transform students' behaviour.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is exceptional. Students learn to collaborate, share and support each other extremely well.
- Students understand that others might hold different views and attitudes and this helps prepare them well for life in modern Britain.
- Throughout the school, teaching is at least good. It re-engages students in learning and helps them to enjoy their education, often for the first time.
- Leaders monitor teaching and learning effectively, and ensure that they meet all the independent school regulations.
- Those responsible for governance support and challenge staff well. They have helped ensure that this is a good and improving school.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- Teaching does not fully challenge more-able students to reach their full potential.
- Opportunities for teachers to develop their skills and expertise are not fully developed.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector observed eleven lessons across the different sites, nine of them jointly observed with the headteacher.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor and the company director with responsibilities for safeguarding, the executive headteacher, headteacher and the deputy headteachers, teachers with specific responsibilities for leading subject areas, the independent careers adviser who works with the school, and the school's own speech and language therapist.
- There were not enough responses to Ofsted's online Parent View to trigger an analysis. Inspectors gathered the views of parents and carers from the school's own questionnaire. Several parents also sent in their own written comments and one contacted the inspector by telephone.
- The views of staff were gathered from their questionnaires and from discussions held throughout the inspection.
- The inspector held discussions with students at each site. He looked at their work in lessons and undertook a detailed scrutiny of a representative sample of their work over time. The inspector also considered detailed case studies of specific students to look at the provision made for them and the progress they had made over time.
- The inspector checked the school's compliance with the independent school standards. He looked at a range of written evidence including information on the progress made by students over time, teachers' planning and assessment, the school's self-evaluation and development planning, and a range of policies and procedures, including those for safeguarding.

Inspection team

Martyn Groucutt, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Spring Hill High School is an independent special school for male and female students between the ages of 11 and 19 years. All have behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. In addition, many have associated complex learning and medical needs, including autistic spectrum disorder, Tourette's syndrome and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.
- The school is registered for up to 30 students and is currently full. All but one of the students has a statement of special educational needs. All are placed by their local authority. The school is currently working with eight separate local authorities.
- Eight of the current students live in a children's home, which is also managed by the parent company, 'Thoughts of Others Ltd'; this was not a part of this inspection. The remainder are day students. Around a third of the students are in the care of their local authority.
- The school was first registered in 2005 and was previously inspected in May 2012. Since then the school has acquired a new site, which is the base for its administration and for sixth form provision. In total, the school operates over five sites so that it is able to keep numbers low at each centre.
- The aim of the school is to provide a caring, safe and secure environment that values education and enables students to realise their full potential.
- The school does not currently use any alternative providers. It has a contract with an independent careers adviser for the delivery of advice and support for students about careers education, transition arrangements for leaving school and for arranging work experience opportunities.
- A re-organisation of the management structure since the previous inspection has seen the previous headteacher becoming the executive headteacher. One of the deputies was appointed associate headteacher in January 2015. Two of the site leaders have been appointed since the previous inspection.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Promote greater academic challenge, especially for the most-able students, by:
 - making more reference in marking to students' current levels of attainment and what they have to do to get to the next level or reach their learning targets
 - ensuring that marking leads to rapid improvements in students' work
 - extending the use of the information held about students' gifts and talents so that all staff are aware of a student's particular skills and seek to develop them
 - extending the use of self-assessment so that students are encouraged to think more deeply about work they have completed.
- Expand links with local mainstream schools in order to:
 - enhance opportunities for teachers to gain confidence in moderating and levelling students' work, particularly at the higher levels, by working alongside other colleagues
 - support opportunities for staff training linked to their targets for improvement.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are good

- The proprietor, directors and senior leaders all show a strong commitment and clear vision to supporting the students and to making this a successful school.
- Staff are committed to the school. The strong relationships between them and the students, lead to high-quality provision that enables most students to make rapid progress in their learning, and in transforming their behaviour.
- As the school has slowly grown, and with current plans for continuing sustained growth, there has been a development of the role of individual subject leaders. This process expands beyond subject leadership. These middle leaders contribute well to school improvement, for example, in the quality of careers advice, and for speech and language therapy, which enhance the quality of provision.
- The curriculum meets students' individual needs and much of the teaching is at an individual level. This enables every student to become absorbed in learning and to gain success in a range of accreditation. This starts with specific awards that enable students to realise that they can be successful in learning, and goes through to GCSE, where students are increasingly gaining the higher grades.
- Leadership of the sixth form is good and deals well with its core purpose to provide for those who are not ready to leave for further education or employment at the end of Year 11.
- The curriculum is effective. It promotes and thoroughly nurtures the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. This includes developing a good understanding of life in modern Britain and the democratic nature of our society. This was well illustrated by the recent well-argued letter written by students undertaking the GCSE citizenship course to involve their local Member of Parliament. Students are encouraged to develop their self-confidence and self-awareness, while learning the social skills of sharing, collaborating and accepting the views of others.
- Staff strongly promote equality of opportunity, foster good relations and ensure that there is no discrimination. Support is effective for transition to the next phase of students' lives. This is underpinned by the school's careers adviser, with the result that last year every leaver either took up a place in a college or in employment.
- Safeguarding arrangements are robust, fully meeting legal requirements. Ensuring this remains the case, and that training in child protection and in the use of restraint as a last resort is all up to date, is part of the specific duties of one of the directors of the parent company.
- Links with families and support from parents are also very strong. A typical comment from parents included: 'We all work together as a team,' and, 'The school has made a huge difference to my son emotionally, which has led to a far better home life for us all.'
- The school meets all of the independent school regulations. The premises support effective teaching and learning, and are well equipped, including provision for students taken ill or requiring first aid. All the required information is fully available for parents, carers or placing authorities both on the internet and as hard copy. The complaints procedure is clear and meets requirements.
- There is strong leadership of teaching. The monitoring of teaching, marking and planning gives leaders a clear picture of what goes on in classrooms. They use this to inform the effective system of appraisal that sees staff given challenging annual objectives. Effective self-evaluation allows the school to identify areas for development and target objectives to help the school to meet them. At the same time, it largely, but not fully, supports individual staff to develop their own expertise. Strategies to engage with mainstream schools, and to develop teachers' confidence in moderating and levelling students' work, are less well developed.

■ The governance of the school

The proprietor and directors have professional backgrounds of working with extremely challenging young people over many years. They have a clear vision for supporting young people to meet their full potential, although this has not always supported the most able to reach their full potential.

Those responsible for governance ensure that the school meets all statutory responsibilities, including those for safeguarding. Their good knowledge of the improvement in students' learning and results over time reflects their clear understanding of data on students' progress and the quality of teaching. They hold leaders to account and set them challenging objectives, while also having a good overview of the arrangements for supporting staff training and the links with their performance.

Finances are managed effectively and there are positive relationships with the local authorities who place students at the school.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good. On entry, they display a wide range of challenging behaviours. The school has clear and uniformly applied strategies of support, which often involve working closely with other professionals from a health or social care background. Over time, students take greater responsibility for managing their behaviour. They themselves talk about the successful transformation of their behaviour and attitudes. Although there are still occasional outbursts, staff manage these very well.
- The very close relations that students develop with their teachers and key worker support them in being able to focus on learning. Individual and very small group teaching allows staff to act as positive role models and provides time for reflection. Students like the policy because it sees positive behaviour rewarded and, as they become engrossed in learning, they are able to make rapid progress.
- Generally, students start to take a pride in their work and they are well aware of the progress they make. Such positive attitudes reflect the very hard work of staff in supporting and encouraging students throughout the school. As one staff member said, 'I've seen students grow into mature young people, watched their journeys, and seen them move on to positive outcomes.'
- Daily staff briefings alert staff to any problems that individuals might be facing. Staff show compassion in supporting students through the considerable challenges they continue to face in school and in their wider lives. This supports behaviour not only in class, but also around the school and over time.
- The school meets the regulations relating to students' behaviour.

Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is good. Carefully constructed risk assessments cover the school's sites, venues for trips or visits and the students themselves. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. The school meets all the regulations that support the welfare, health and safety of students.
- Students have a good understanding of bullying in its different forms, including cyber bullying and of misusing social networking sites. Through covering topics in lessons they are helped to appreciate that bullying is not a positive way to act and in school relationships are very positive.
- Clear and detailed policies support the provision of first aid, fire safety and care of students who are unwell during the school day. Parents and carers, as well as the students themselves, believe the school is a safe place where young people are looked after with care.
- Because students come to develop much better social awareness and social skills, there is little evidence of discriminatory or derogatory language once they have settled in. The school becomes a positive community where adults and young people get on well together.
- The school checks visitors carefully and takes care to ensure that they will not do anything that disrupts the carefully constructed framework of positive support to help students move forward.

The quality of teaching is good

- The school meets all the regulations relating to teaching well. Over time, teachers provide strong support, developing successful relationships with students, as do the teaching assistants. This is an important element in students becoming re-engaged in learning and developing much more positive social attitudes. Staff constantly act as positive role models while also offering strong help and support in encouraging students to overcome the barriers that had previously stopped them learning.
- Students make good progress in the areas of speaking and listening, reading, writing, and mathematics. Difficulties in communication is a key element for many students and the school's speech and language therapist plays a very positive role in working alongside teachers and support staff to promote this aspect of learning.
- In lessons, careful planning means that teachers and their teaching assistants form strong teams. All adults play active roles in supporting learning and in helping students, including asking good questions that give students chance to develop their thinking and ideas. Staff have high expectations and appreciate that, although students may have had difficulties in the past, these are not barriers to them making academic as well as emotional progress.
- This positive approach allows students to make rapid progress when they join the school. There is a clear expectation from the start that they will be successful in gaining external accreditation. Starting with Unit Awards in Years 8 and 9, which help students to realise that they can be successful, the school offers a range of accreditation, culminating in GCSE in Year 11 or the sixth form.
- Learning is adapted from the national curriculum, ensuring that students receive a broad and balanced education. Staff consistently provide good opportunities to bring the core skills of literacy and numeracy into their wider teaching.
- Students' work is regularly marked. The school's policy has been refined and developed since the last inspection. Students' books show that staff give praise for good work alongside advice on how to improve. There is little evidence that teachers allow students time to make corrections or improvements. There is also little reference in marking to the current levels that students are working at, and what they need to do to move up to the next level. This sometimes has the effect of limiting academic challenge.
- There are not enough opportunities within the one-to-one teaching setting for students' self-evaluation of their work. This is particularly the case for more-able students who have the capacity to rise to this challenge. Where it is done it can be very effective, such as in a GCSE citizenship lesson where the teacher gave a student the grade descriptors and supported her in analysing the grade she would currently gain, prompting thoughtful discussion.
- Teachers in such a small school as this find the levelling and moderation of work is a challenge, particularly the work of the most able. The school is starting to develop links with a local mainstream school. Leaders are keen to develop this as a way of increasing the confidence of teachers. They also see the wider advantages that this would bring in terms of training and professional development for staff.

The achievement of pupils is good

- Students enter with low attainment and histories of very fragmented education. They quickly re-engage with learning because of the strong teaching, professional expertise and positive values, beliefs and attitudes found in school. Consequently, from their individual starting points, a high proportion of the students make the progress expected for their age, and frequently better than this, over a range of subjects, including reading, writing and mathematics.
- Students make rapid progress and their achievement over time is good. This means that their progress, albeit from low starting points, is better than that made by other students nationally. All gain external accreditation and most remain in education, going on to college places. The school manages transition

arrangements carefully, seeking to ensure this is successful. GCSEs are not taken early.

- At times, the lack of sufficient challenge limits the progress of the most-able students. The focus is sometimes more on meeting the minimum requirements for a Grade C in GCSE, rather than aiming to get the highest possible grade. This is also reflected in the comparative lack of emphasis given to developing the provision for the most able, or to promote support for those who show particular skill and talent.
- Students gain a good range of learning experiences at the right level because teaching takes place in a one-to-one or very small group setting, to ensure individual attention. The school tracks individual progress and the progress of identified groups of students effectively. This shows that there is no difference in rates of progress between groups of students and the others, whatever their abilities or difficulties, or needs.
- The school carefully measures the emotional progress made by students. Good progress in this aspect reflects not only the skill of staff within the school but also the quality of work with other professionals.

The sixth form provision is good

- The school has recently expanded its sixth form provision. It meets all the regulatory requirements well. Its leadership is good and it is successful in supporting students whose transition planning has identified that they are not ready to move on at the end of Year 11.
- Teaching is good and meets individual needs, which enables students to continue to make good progress both in learning and in addressing their emotional and social needs. They remain focused on learning, and strong support maintains good behaviour within a safe environment.
- The sixth form supports students well in further developing their independence and life skills. Alongside this is the opportunity to continue to follow courses leading to a variety of accreditation. Work continues to be undertaken in one-to-one or small group settings. The exact nature of courses student follow reflects the outcomes of their transition reviews that recommended remaining at school. Staff monitor students' progress closely to ensure that the sixth form programme remains the best option. Students are therefore well placed to move on to the next phase of their lives through their sixth form experience.

What inspection judgements mean

School	Grade	Judgement
	Grade 1	Outstanding
	Grade 2	Good
	Grade 3	Requires improvement
	Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook*, which is published on the Ofsted website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	134982
Inspection number	455443
DfE registration number	330/6112

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	Special school for pupils with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties, and associated difficulties.
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	30
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	7
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jim Sullivan
Executive Headteacher	Barbara Scrivens
Date of previous school inspection	30 May 2012
Annual fees (day pupils)	£13,300-£83,980
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