

Nisai Virtual School: School Improvement Partner visit

13/11/2025

Methodology

Documentation review and interviews with Leaders and relevant staff

Key Strengths

1. Personalised Wellbeing and Emotional Re-engagement

- Nisai has evolved a highly effective range of measures to support students who have often failed or struggled in mainstream settings. The personal development of students is supported both by the curriculum and a range of functions within the Customer and Support Team (CAST).
- Targeted SEND/Wellbeing Expertise: The staff (teachers, mentors, wellbeing advisers) are highly attuned to the specific barriers to learning (e.g., Autism, anxiety, chronic illness) faced by the students. This is supported by a comprehensive range of CPD for all staff. One Page Profiles are used effectively to address barriers to learning.
- Safety and Low-Pressure Environment: The virtual setting itself is expertly adapted to remove potential anxieties, allowing students to re-engage with education. This environment works because it allows students with sensory sensitivities and social anxiety to control their sensory input and eliminate high-stress social settings. This reduction in cognitive load immediately frees up mental resources for learning, supporting the development of self-regulation by removing the need for 'survival mode' coping mechanisms. Staff across the CAST team articulated how the practical use of the Virtual Learning Environment actively builds skills that cater to neurodiverse communication styles. Requiring students to use chat functions and discussion boards develops digital etiquette and written communication, which can be less socially challenging and more predictable than real-time verbal interaction. This format aligns with the neurodiverse preference for clear, text-based communication over ambiguous non-verbal cues and therefore enables students to learn effectively and to gain levels of autonomy and confidence previously unattainable.
- Students who struggle with verbal communication and social cues can use chat functions, discussion boards, or email. Text-based communication offers time to formulate thoughtful responses and removes the pressure of instantaneous verbal reply, boosting their confidence in participation.
- Teachers are highly skilled in operating virtual learning environments that successfully balance challenge with sensitivity to student need.
- Impact on Attendance and Progression: The combination of support and low-pressure environment leads to tangible improvements in student outcomes.
- There are strong data demonstrating significant increases in attendance and engagement, and high progression rates into further education/employment (often for students who were previously NEET or facing exclusion).

2. Structure of Mentoring and Personal Support

- The system of consistent, multi-element, personalised support is the engine of Personal Development in Nisai.
- High-Quality, Consistent Virtual and face to face Mentoring: The mentorship programme (virtual or in-person) acts as an effective vehicle for delivering life skills, building confidence, and monitoring emotional wellbeing.
- There are comprehensive and effective systems for addressing the non-academic objectives outlined in EHCP documentation. The SEN Lead maintains strong lines of communication between students, families/carers customers and key Nisai staff ensuring that the review process is as person centred as possible.
- The Well -being coordinator manages well-being check-ins for vulnerable students. One of the distinctive features of Nisai is the physical proximity of the different teams that make up the provision.
- Perhaps paradoxically in a virtual school, staff from different departments consult and collaborate on a regular basis face to face, creating a strong collegiate culture. This is particularly effective when combined with strong strategic leadership and oversight which is demonstrably present in Nisai.
- Proactive Safeguarding and Communication: The system enables staff to be highly vigilant and responsive to online cues of distress or disengagement, essential in a virtual setting. There are timely and efficient safeguarding procedures in place, a clear, well-documented communication loop between staff, the Designated Safeguarding Lead (and deputy) and commissioning bodies.

3. Curriculum Adaptability and Life Skills Focus

- Despite the inherent focus on academic progress built into the contractual agreements between Nisai and commissioning authorities, strenuous efforts are made to take a holistic view of student need, the curriculum and the wide range of support functions successfully address the significant barriers to learning experienced by most of the student body.
- Age and Ability-Matched Classes: Placing students into small classes based on ability, not age, reduces fear of failure and allows students to build confidence by experiencing success. Lesson plans and schemes of work for non-core subjects (like PSHE/Life Skills) that show differentiation tailored to cognitive or emotional maturity, not chronological age.
- Explicit Development of Life and Digital Skills: PD is built into the curriculum through specific lessons, enrichment activities, and the practical use of the online platform itself. There is some evidence of students participating in non-academic enrichment activity although take up rates are higher for international students, this is understood by the leadership team and is the subject of constant review.
- Effective Pathways and Transitions: Nisai is highly effective at preparing students, particularly those with SEND, for their next steps. Comprehensive support is delivered by the CAST team resulting in 92% of students achieving positive outcomes including reintegration into school, progression into further and higher education and into employment or further training.

Personal Development overall grade “**Good**”

Currently there is a gap between the quality of data analysis in academic and non-academic components of the EHCPs applying to around 85% of the student body. I am confident that when it is possible to substantiate the claim that “learners make good if not exceptional progress in all aspects of their personal development” with reliable data then this overall assessment will be revised upwards.

Graeme Pyle, School Improvement Partner