

# The Evolution Centre

Holyhead Road, Bicton, Shrewsbury SY3 8EQ

**Inspection dates** 26–28 April 2016

**Overall effectiveness** **Outstanding**

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

## Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

### This is an outstanding school

- Pupils make outstanding progress in their academic work and in their personal development. Progress in English is particularly strong. This is because of the excellent ways in which progress is tracked and pupils are helped to understand how well they are doing.
- School leaders and staff have an ambitious vision for all pupils. They are determined to help pupils achieve as much as possible.
- Expert teaching and very well-matched tasks give pupils confidence in their own abilities. Teachers are skilled at checking exactly what pupils have understood and at adjusting the work when there are misunderstandings.
- Pupils quickly accelerate their learning because of the individual attention and support they receive. They, and their carers, praise the way staff 'go the extra mile' to help them succeed.
- Excellent pastoral care systems and the highly motivating curriculum transform pupils' attitudes to learning. Pupils' attendance improves significantly. The large majority rarely miss a day.
- The proprietorial board monitors the school's performance very carefully, including teachers' performance, and ensures that staff and pupils have the resources that they need. This means provision is continuously evaluated and improving.
- Pupils of all abilities and ages do so well because staff and pupils are highly focused on the next steps for learning and pupils' futures after school. Vocational courses and alternative provision are used very well to support pupils' skills, work attitudes and career choices.
- Staff are skilled at identifying pupils' talents. Leaders are quick to put into place courses that challenge the most able and meet pupils' special educational needs or disability.
- Close teamwork between carers, therapists and the school, and excellent attention to staff training and support, mean that pupils' behaviour and emotional needs are managed very skilfully. Staff expertly help pupils to manage their own behaviour and to recognise their own needs. Consequently, pupils' behaviour improves rapidly and is outstanding.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school is constantly challenging pupils to reflect on their own and other people's circumstances and needs. Pupils have a high level of tolerance, respect for difference and understanding of fair play.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are highly effective. Staff are thoroughly vetted and trained and ever alert. Pupils are extremely well supported to understand risks and to keep themselves safe. Pupils feel safe, valued and listened to.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010 as amended 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

## Full report

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the excellent assessment and tracking practice and highquality feedback given to pupils about their work in subjects such as English are consistently evident in all subjects.
- Work even more closely with placing authorities to ensure that when pupils know that they are to be moved to another placement, their attendance does not deteriorate and they have confidence that their courses will continue.

## Inspection judgements

### Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The proprietorial board (the governors) and senior leaders provide excellent leadership. They have ensured that all the independent school standards are consistently met. They have established a culture of high expectations and are determined to ensure that all pupils achieve as much as possible, however short their stay. They are highly focused on pupils' next steps and constantly checking how well pupils are doing and what else can be done to accelerate their learning further.
- The size of the school means that every pupil and their specific needs are extremely well known to leaders and to all staff. Teaching and learning are checked effectively, both formally and informally. Frequent meetings by leaders with teachers carefully examine pupils' progress in subjects and in their emotional well-being.
- New arrangements for assessing and recording pupils' progress are linked carefully into the national curriculum and are established in English and mathematics, but still relatively new in the foundation subjects, such as humanities. However, the progress meetings, end-of-day and beginning-of-the-day reviews, and leaders' very strong overview of staff performance mean that they and subject leaders have a very accurate view of how well pupils are doing.
- Governors, school leaders and staff identify and celebrate pupils' talents extremely well. Pupils are carefully assessed on entry and their personal development, behaviour, emotional well-being and academic achievements are tracked effectively from these starting points.
- A range of therapy support and interventions are available to support pupils' individual special educational needs or personal needs. Highly effective joint working with care staff and therapists, through joint progress meetings and reviews, help to ensure that pupils' complex emotional needs are very well met and behaviour is managed consistently.
- The curriculum is vibrant and carefully designed to engage pupils' interest so that they want to attend school and do well. The ongoing attention to building resilience and confidence works extremely well, so that pupils take progressively higher-level qualifications in key stage 3 and key stage 4. This means that almost all are able to gain GCSE qualifications or their equivalent, including at the higher levels, by the end of Year 11.
- The curriculum is carefully tailored to meet pupils' specific needs and interests, including the requirements of education, health and care plans or statements of educational needs. The special educational needs coordinator checks carefully that the school is providing all the learning experiences that it should and monitors this provision effectively.
- The school rarely has sixth-form learners although its curriculum and procedures are well set up to educate them should such learners be placed at the school. Over the last three years, very few learners have been placed at the school and usually in circumstances where the school has provided short-term support. Immaculate records are kept as to visits and support for such learners. Teaching, including for sixth-form learners, sometimes takes the form of bespoke home tuition for a learner not allowed to attend other provision. Leaders monitor very carefully the effectiveness of this provision. They set clear targets for engagement and outcomes, and ensure that these pupils have access to all the subjects that they should.
- The headteacher and governors have the right development priorities. They are focused on ensuring that the new assessment system is used to equally high effect in all subjects, and on extending their mainstream and other links to help them to moderate standards including those in teaching and learning. They monitor very carefully the standards and safety of all external provision including the outdoor education opportunities and those provided by alternative providers.
- Very good careers guidance is in place as a result of effective links with local providers and businesses, the local authority and pupils' carers, families and placing authorities. This means that pupils are well prepared for life after school. Pupils have access to good-quality impartial support and advice. They praise the ways in which the school helps them to fill in application forms and prepare for interviews, and inspires them to aim high.
- Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Themes and topics are pursued in ways which emphasise to pupils how they can contribute to these. Pupils, for example, devised a board game about British values for key stage 2 pupils at a local primary school. As a result, their explanations of what it means to be British are insightful. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is an intrinsic part of every subject leader's role, and records display a wealth of ways in which this and pupils' personal development are supported. Values such as understanding and tolerance

of difference and diversity, including others' lifestyle choices, underpin everything the school does. Because of this, pupils state that they feel accepted for who they are and are more accepting of others' differences.

- Although too few responses were made to the online questionnaire for these to be analysed, parents and carers who left comments were overwhelmingly positive about the school's work and its effectiveness. In particular, they praise the quality of communication with the school, the accelerated rate of progress and improvements in attendance, behaviour and attitudes of their children. Inspection findings agree that communication with families and carers, other agencies and, indeed, with pupils themselves is a strength of this school.
- **The governance of the school**
  - Governance of the school rests with the proprietorial board. Governors know the school and its work extremely well. They have ensured that the independent school standards are consistently met.
  - Governors ask pertinent questions about how well the school is doing. They are determined to provide the resources and support that each pupil needs to succeed. They look carefully at how well the different services the company makes available to pupils work together. For example, they check on the value and effectiveness of the support provided by care and therapy staff.
  - Governors have an accurate understanding of the quality of teaching and learning and hold all staff to account very well, ensuring that only good or better teaching is rewarded. They ensure that staff have access to the training they need to improve their work, including to subject support networks. They draw effectively on specialist external support to help them to evaluate the school's work further.
  - Governors and school leaders ensure that where additional funding such as the pupil premium is provided for pupils, it is used very effectively to support their academic progress and personal development.
  - Governors have ensured that their provision for expanding the school's numbers and premises, in line with its material change request, meets all requirements.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school does not yet have its own website but is in the process of constructing one. Its safeguarding policy is published on the company's website and reflects the most recent guidance. The school is highly focused on ensuring that pupils are safe and that pupils understand how to keep themselves safe. Safeguarding procedures meet all statutory requirements and are robustly reviewed. Staff are very well trained and knowledgeable, particularly in relation to child protection, the 'Prevent' duty and in understanding how to help pupils to manage their own behaviour.
- **The material change**
  - The inspector concluded that the proposed material changes to the site and to numbers permitted on roll were acceptable. The accommodation and the school's proposed arrangements met the requirements in parts 3, 4 and 5 of the independent school standards. The new buildings meet all welfare, health and safety requirements and standards relating to the premises and accommodation at the school. The school's procedures for checking on the suitability of staff are rigorous and meticulously recorded. There are also appropriate safeguarding and security arrangements in place. Therefore the material change both for the premises and the increased numbers is recommended.

## Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- The outstanding quality of teaching is underpinned by teachers' excellent relationships with their pupils, their outstanding management of behaviour and their expert knowledge of their subjects. As a result, pupils make outstanding progress and achieve well, rapidly making up most, or all, of the ground they have lost previously compared with others of their age.
- Learning is outstanding because the teaching and the work provided are highly individualised to each pupil's needs. The new assessment system is used effectively to identify how pupils' skills and understanding are moving on in subjects. In addition, highly skilled questioning and the small-group and one-to-one teaching mean that staff are ever alert to pupils' misunderstandings. They are swift to find other ways of helping pupils to understand better.
- Teaching inspires pupils to try their best and incites in them a curiosity and confidence to find out things and try new challenges. Pupils, for example, praise the project work that they do and the ways in which it helps them to work as a team and 'bounce things off each other to solve problems'. They use and apply their English and mathematics skills very well as they do this, researching a topic carefully or measuring accurately.

- Teaching and learning in English is particularly strong. Scrutiny of pupils' workbooks revealed the highly effective ways in which the school's assessment and marking policy is applied in this subject and the marked improvement in all aspects of pupils' work, including their writing. Some, who would not write willingly on entry to the school a few months ago, now do so freely and with excellent use of subject terminology and different writing styles and techniques. Excellent guidance as to how to improve means that individual pupils' progress is sometimes remarkable over a very short period of time.
- Pupils have extensive opportunities to improve their reading skills and their listening, language and communication skills. This includes careful identification of any underlying special educational needs such as dyslexia. Specific interventions are used very effectively so that pupils' progress accelerates. Literacy and speaking and listening are promoted highly effectively in all subjects so that such successes are applied well and built on.
- Teaching and learning in mathematics is very effective and rapidly improving. A new subject leader has revamped the school's curriculum and ensured that gaps in pupils' learning, due to previous schooling issues, are being addressed. Pupils comment on how much more they enjoy mathematics now and how well they feel they are doing. Visits to classrooms show that pupils have extended their concentration and accuracy in mathematics and are prepared to review their answers well.
- The school provides extremely well for those pupils who are the most able, tailoring the challenges and targets for them carefully. Sometimes, these pupils' previous experiences mean that their achievement is barely average or even below that of others of their age prior to entering the school. However, their capabilities and talents are swiftly identified and targets and programmes reviewed. Individual pupils in key stage 3, for example, are already achieving at the higher levels in GCSE courses in Italian or English.
- Staff are expert at providing for the needs of pupils with complex emotional needs and linked behavioural challenges. Effective teamwork between teachers and care and support staff means that pupils' behaviour and learning are managed highly effectively. When pupils are not coping, they are swift to adapt the learning so that little time for learning is lost and the learning of others is rarely interfered with. Staff use tutorial time and the school's life skills programme highly effectively to ensure that pupils' personal skills and their readiness to live independently improve rapidly.
- Expert teaching in art enables pupils to develop their skills and appreciation of artists and media extremely well, so that younger pupils and those who take this subject in key stage 4 achieve similarly to others of their age. Learning in all other subjects is at least good because of teachers' specialist skills and knowledge, and careful planning of next steps. However, the assessment and marking system is not as developed or consistently applied in subjects such as science, physical education and food technology. Information provided to pupils about how well they are doing is also less consistent.
- Intensive one-to-one or small-group support accelerates pupils' learning in all subjects very well indeed. However, staff are careful to provide pupils with many opportunities to be independent or to work in teams, so that they successfully develop their social and life skills.

## **Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding**

### **Personal development and welfare**

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils make excellent progress from their starting points in the development of their confidence and self-esteem and in taking responsibility for their behaviour. The school's values expect pupils to reflect on their behaviour and on events. Pupils respond to this increasingly well as they proceed through the school. They talk with insight about the difference the school has made to them and in particular about how they now feel they have a very positive future.
- A strong emphasis on social and life skills, including caring for the community, helps pupils to improve their social skills and to feel respected and valued. They are enthusiastic about their fundraising and connections with a local primary school: for example, saying that they feel they are 'giving something back' and 'trusted to make a difference'. Pupils make a strong contribution to the development of the school community. Their ideas are listened to, including those as to particular subjects they might wish the school to introduce. The project and theme work has particularly been inspired by their contributions.
- The school is ever conscious of the need to build pupils' resilience and provide them with strategies for situations they find difficult. It tracks carefully a range of personal skills to evaluate the impact of their work and leaders look carefully at what else can be put into the curriculum to strengthen this further. Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and pupils' comments reveal such support to be hugely valued. Pupils themselves comment on how much more respectful they are of others, including how well

the school has helped them to share ideas and opinions more positively with others. Issues relating to radicalisation, sexual exploitation, e-safety and personal safety are explored very well through the school's tutorial support, theme days and the curriculum.

- Despite pupils' previous histories, incidents of physical aggression or bullying are rare. Staff are ever vigilant and mindful of avoiding risk, but the strength of relationships they build with pupils means that lessons and other times are characterised by an atmosphere of mutual respect and concern. Pupils indicate that they feel very safe and trust the teaching and care staff to resolve any issues fairly and swiftly.
- Transition into school is managed very well and individualised for each pupil. Strong relationships are quickly established with social care representatives, local authority officers, carers and the pupils themselves. Pupils' needs are assessed quickly and accurately, drawing well from previous placements wherever possible, so that pupils' learning quickly accelerates.
- Occasionally, however, a few pupils begin to disengage from their learning, having previously made excellent progress at the school. This usually occurs when pupils have been told they will be moved out of the school to another setting, often because their behaviour and attitudes have been improved markedly. The school works hard to share information with receiving schools, as soon as these are known, but individual pupils lose confidence that they will be able to complete their courses elsewhere.
- All the required welfare, health and safety regulations are met, including those relating to safeguarding, fire, water and risk assessments.

### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Almost all make great strides in their ability to manage their behaviour and feelings, and in the ways in which they express these. Therapists, and care and teaching staff, help pupils to develop effective strategies for managing their behaviour and emotions. This means that almost all pupils dramatically reduce their outbursts and improve their ability to cooperate.
- Staff are ever alert to pupils' emotional well-being. Highly effective information sharing between children's homes and the school means that teachers know when pupils are particularly vulnerable and are quick to adapt teaching approaches where necessary. This means that pupils are successfully kept in lessons and continue to learn.
- Despite many pupils being poor or non-attenders prior to attending the school, almost all improve their attendance considerably and their concentration and cooperation skills in lessons improve similarly. Many have 100% attendance. Pupils say this is because teachers make the learning so interesting and because the school convinces them that they are working towards a positive future.
- The school is a calm and highly supportive learning environment. Pupils have a highly developed understanding of different forms of bullying and of different forms of discrimination. They have a keen sense of fairness and of right and wrong, and demonstrate empathy for each other and for others such as the plight of asylum seekers or refugees.
- Individual pupils are placed on the roll of the school with specific requirements as to where or how their education should take place. This may be a combination of part-time schooling and home tuition, or purely home tuition. In such instances, the school has appropriate procedures in place to keep pupils and learners safe and to support their behaviour and attitudes to learning. The school works with the placing authorities well to ensure that appropriate solutions are in place as well as a return to full-time education whenever this is possible.
- Pupils' behaviour and cooperation improve so well because of the high expectations of staff and the effective ways in which their needs are provided for. Pupils' behaviour and attendance at their alternative provision is similarly outstanding. Providers say that this is partly because of the excellent communication between the school and provider, the strength of the discussions before the placement and the careful matching of provision to pupil.

### **Outcomes for pupils**

### **are outstanding**

- Pupils make outstanding progress from starting points that are below, and sometimes well below, those of others of their age. Even where their achievement is closer to that of others, pupils' poor previous attendance or behavioural issues in school mean that they have 'gaps' in their learning which need to be addressed so that they can achieve their potential. Differences in attainment between the pupils in this school and others nationally close rapidly as pupils settle into the school. Even when pupils stay for a short time, the improvement in their work ethic and their willingness to engage in more challenging work

are evident.

- This outstanding progress is the result of highly effective teaching and learning, work that is very closely tailored to the next step for each pupil, improved attendance and the turnaround in pupils' cooperation, attitudes and aspirations.
- Younger pupils make outstanding progress by the end of key stage 3 and particularly in their reading, writing, speaking and listening, and mathematical skills. They benefit from opportunities to work alongside older pupils in project work and physical education, and from the intensive one-to-one support when they enter the school.
- Throughout the school, pupils' achievement in English is outstanding. The school's focus on writing, many opportunities to practise reading and to extend their specialist vocabulary and language skills support all pupils highly effectively, whatever their background, age, special educational needs or disability. Careful tailoring of qualifications, from as early as key stage 3, builds pupils' confidence in situations they would have found too stressful before. They take their examinations increasingly successfully and achieve very well in them.
- Currently, the most able pupils are on target to achieve the higher levels in GCSE English. Others will take the foundation paper or functional skills papers at level 1 or level 2. A similar pattern is evident in mathematics, information and communication technology, and science for current pupils. Last year, the school achieved its best GCSE levels ever, including pupils achieving higher levels in English, French and art. Mathematics achievement was lower but reflected good progress from pupils' starting points. Work in books currently indicates standards and progress in mathematics to be improving rapidly towards outstanding because of new appointments and leadership of the subject.
- Pupils studying practical or vocational subjects, such as art, food technology and land management, gain good grades in these subjects by the end of Year 11. They all study a life skills course. Pupils indicate that this provides them with the confidence that they will be able to live by themselves when that time comes. They show considerable insights as to the demands of budget management and healthy eating.
- The school tries very hard to keep in touch with pupils and many young people do return to update the school on their progress. All but one pupil successfully moved to college, training or an apprenticeship last year and all are maintaining those placements. Individual Year 11 pupils have already been offered apprenticeships for this year, although not all are yet clear as to where they will be located. Younger pupils reveal high aspirations for themselves and are determined that they will achieve the grades required for their ambitions to go to university or to gain an apprenticeship.
- Unless their stay at the school is very short, pupils leave the school with a range of qualifications, from entry level 3 qualifications to functional skills and GCSE. Individual pupils are considering taking AS level qualifications in Years 10 and 11. Pupils understand why they take these graduated qualifications and endorse the school's view that this approach builds pupils' confidence in taking examinations and in their own abilities. It also ensures that they have these qualifications 'in the bank' should they be moved on to another placement by their placing authority.
- The numbers of learners in the sixth form are so small that judgements on achievement and progress are not possible. However, the school is appropriately focused on improving learners' achievements in English and mathematics, as well as in the options they choose to study, so that learners have as many career choices as possible when they leave.

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	135511
<b>Inspection number</b>	10006045
<b>DfE registration number</b>	893/6107

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Secondary day special school for pupils with social, emotional and mental health difficulties
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	11–18
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	19
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	1
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	2
<b>Proprietor</b>	Reflexion Care Group Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Keith Harrington
<b>Headteacher</b>	Jacqui Brooks
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£36,140–£32,760
<b>Telephone number</b>	01743850517
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.newreflexions.co.uk">www.newreflexions.co.uk</a>
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:jacqui.brooks@evolution-centre.co.uk">jacqui.brooks@evolution-centre.co.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	14–15 November 2012

## Information about this school

- The Evolution Centre is a small independent special school near to Shrewsbury in Shropshire. It is located in a former village school. The school specialises in providing for the needs of pupils who have complex social, emotional and mental health needs, and have histories of poor attendance and very challenging behaviour.
- The Evolution Centre opened in 2008 and is owned by the New Reflexions Care Group. The group also owns a number of children's homes and are providers of alternative provision for pupils at other sites. The school is registered for up to 28 pupils aged 11 to 18 years. At the time of this inspection there were 19 pupils on the school roll. One sixth-form learner had very recently come onto roll. Two pupils were part-time pupils either because of their placement conditions or because their education was jointly delivered with another provider. The school provides home tuition for pupils who cannot attend school.
- Many pupils have had multiple placements before attending this school as a result of changes in their home circumstances or because they have been excluded from school. Most have histories of interrupted schooling.

- The school rarely has learners in the sixth form. Over the last three years it has admitted three learners for very short times each. Although it has appropriate courses and qualifications available for sixth-form learners, no such learners were present in school during the inspection or had been for some time previously. Consequently, there was insufficient evidence about teaching, learning and assessment, personal development, behaviour and welfare, and outcomes for the sixth form. No judgement was made about this provision.
- Pupils enter the school at any point during their secondary school career and sometimes as late as Year 11 or 12. Occasionally, they remain in the school for a relatively short time. About half the pupils had attended the school for less than a year at the time of this inspection and none for the duration of their secondary school life.
- All but one of the pupils are in the care of local authorities and reside in the proprietors' children's homes or occasionally those belonging to other care providers. The school receives a small amount of pupil premium funding for individual pupils. The very large majority are of White British heritage, although a few are from other heritages such as European or African.
- The school uses alternative provision to extend the experiences of its pupils and the curriculum. These include Safe and Sound Outdoors, MOTaTech and Red George Rural Skills Project.
- At the time of this inspection, the school had requested a material change to its registration. It had requested that additional accommodation in Battlefield, Shrewsbury, be approved and that the numbers the school could admit be increased from 28 to 34.
- The premises at Battlefield are part of a building used as alternative provision by the company. There is a shared entrance but all other accommodation is discrete. There are two classrooms, a common area, including a sink and drinking water, toilet facilities and a medical room.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out at one day's notice.
- The inspector met with school leaders and a representative of the proprietor. She also talked with a member of the company's therapy team and with leaders of alternative provision that the school made use of.
- The inspector visited lessons, observing pupils' learning and looking at their workbooks and resources, usually accompanied by the headteacher. In addition she scrutinised pupils' current and past work to further ascertain their progress in subjects. She visited one of the alternative provisions used by the school and the new premises that the school intends to use as part of a material change request.
- The inspector examined a range of school policies and other documentation, including the school's self-evaluation development plan and the records that it keeps about pupils' progress. She considered the school's health and safety procedures, its fire risk assessments and records, and its policies and practices for keeping pupils safe.
- Not enough responses were received to Parent View for an analysis. However, a number of parents or carers did leave comments which the lead inspector evaluated.
- The inspector held discussions with school leaders and the proprietor's representative as to how they checked on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment and managed the performance of staff. She had discussions with the special educational needs coordinator and other staff as to how their work contributed to pupils' achievements.
- The inspector talked with pupils about their work and their views of the school and their progress. She examined the views expressed by staff through 10 completed staff questionnaires.
- The Department for Education had requested that consideration be given to the requested material change to accommodation and numbers during this inspection. The inspector visited the school's proposed extension to its accommodation to consider its compliance with the independent school standards. She examined documents relating to the safety of these premises including fire risk assessments and health and safety arrangements, including the security of the site.

## Inspection team

Susan Lewis, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate  
Store Street  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
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