

Spa School

Monnow Road, London SE1 5RN

Inspection dates 1–2 December 2015

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
16 to 19 study programmes	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher has expertly deployed a highly effective team of senior leaders whose skills complement each other. Consequently, the school has improved significantly since the previous inspection.
- The school is an oasis of calm in a busy world, enabling pupils to remain relaxed and focused on their learning.
- Pupils' outcomes are outstanding. They make excellent progress from their starting points because of highly effective teaching and exceptional support for their behaviour and personal development.
- Leaders ensure that the quality of teaching, learning and assessment is consistently high.
- Teachers are well trained to fulfil their roles and leaders make comprehensive checks to ensure that the quality of teaching meets their high expectations.
- Adults other than teachers support pupils' behaviour and personal development extremely well. Their support for pupils' learning is not always as strong.
- The personal development of pupils is at the heart of the school's work. Every opportunity is taken to improve pupils' understanding of themselves and others around them.
- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They attend well and are happy in school.
- All members of staff demonstrate vigilance in ensuring pupils' safety at all times. Safeguarding practices are secure and embedded throughout the school.
- The school's exceptional work to develop pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural experiences is strongly threaded throughout the curriculum.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and highly relevant to the individual and complex needs of each pupil. It is enriched by a wealth of extra-curricular activities which support the personal development of pupils.
- The provision for learners aged 16 to 19 is outstanding. This is because leaders ensure that programmes are tailored to each individual's future plans while maintaining an approach consistent with lower key stages.
- There is a clear focus on preparing pupils for adult life through highly personalised programmes. These relate to academic achievement, vocational development and life skills.
- Governors know the school well. They have ensured that their statutory duties remain met. They gather information from a range of sources in order to assure themselves that the school continues to improve.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that adults other than teachers support pupils' learning as effectively as they support their personal development and behaviour.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- The headteacher has established a team of senior leaders who share his passion and commitment to improving outcomes for the pupils they serve. They have established a culture of high expectations and seamless teamwork with a focus on preparing pupils for adult life in modern Britain.
- Middle leaders take their responsibilities seriously. Guided by the headteacher and his deputy, they are entrusted with a high degree of autonomy when developing their curriculum area and they thrive on this. They have opportunities to develop their leadership skills and are therefore highly motivated and enthusiastic.
- Leaders have developed a broad and balanced curriculum which is rich in opportunities for pupils to explore new experiences. Alongside National Curriculum subjects, emphasis is placed on those areas which pupils with autism find more difficult. For example, all classes receive regular social communication lessons which ensure that they learn how to interact with others in a range of situations. A variety of vocational courses are available including horticulture, catering and creative arts.
- The school provides a wide range of enrichment activities through clubs, trips and visits from external speakers. Leaders ensure that the quality of these experiences at least matches that available in mainstream schools and will not accept anything less. Therefore, pupils experience work with professional actors from the Globe theatre, karate lessons, residential visits and the pride associated with exhibiting their art work in public. They enter, and win awards at, national competitions for chess, animation and music.
- The development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding is outstanding. The school's work in this area is embedded throughout the curriculum. The school's 'happiness project' set out to explore what made pupils with more complex needs feel happy and why. Pupils were supported in making choices about what makes them happy and shared these with others. The results from this work informed curriculum planning and thus improved pupil engagement, motivation and well-being. Leaders have linked this project with their work to combat radicalisation in a module of the personal, health, social and economic education programme.
- Leaders use a range of tools and systems to assess the progress of pupils and compare it with that of others who have similar starting points nationally. As a result, they are rightly confident that their assessments are accurate and that their pupils achieve extremely well when compared with others working at similar levels.
- Leaders use a wide range of strategies to check on the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. Leaders and teachers work collaboratively within the classroom in order to share good practice and drive up standards even further. This joint working also ensures that very high levels of consistency are maintained as teachers move from class to class throughout the day.
- A highly effective structure of professional development for teachers and support staff is well established. A bespoke induction programme for new teachers ensures that they become familiar with the systems and autism-specific approaches used in the school very quickly. Assistant headteachers work closely with the deputy headteacher to ensure that professional development results in further improvements in teaching. As a result, teaching is always good and often outstanding.
- Systems for the performance management of teachers are strong. Any practice that does not meet the high expectations of leaders is addressed with urgency and teachers are supported to improve swiftly. There are clear links between the performance of teachers and progression up the pay scales.
- Leaders have spent the pupil premium funding wisely. They consider carefully what additional support can be provided to eligible pupils on an individual basis and then check that this has had a positive effect. Pupils eligible for this additional funding make similar outstanding progress to others in the school.
- **The governance of the school**
 - Members of the governing body have distinct roles which are relevant to the life of this school. For example, one oversees the enrichment opportunities on offer and another the development of pupils' communication skills. Governors visit the school regularly to observe its work and report back to the wider governing body.
 - Governors undertake training so that they are increasingly able to hold leaders to account for their work. For example, governors attended a presentation about the assessment information used by the school to measure the progress of pupils. They were then able to ask more probing questions to check for themselves that outcomes continue to improve.

- Governors fulfil their statutory duties well. They receive information about how the additional pupil premium funding is spent and know that, as a result, these pupils achieve as well as others. They carry out the performance management of the headteacher and receive information about the appraisal of teachers. They make decisions about pay that are closely linked to performance.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective and exceptionally well managed. There is a joined-up approach across child protection, recruitment, and health and safety. This is linked with pupil well-being and the management of behaviour. Robust policies and procedures are communicated to staff effectively and all understand the critical importance of this area of the school's work. Any concerns are passed on swiftly and meticulous records are kept. Leaders maintain close links with other agencies in order to ensure that referrals are followed up effectively.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching and learning throughout the school are characterised by a very high degree of consistency and a personalised approach. Teachers and other adults know the pupils extremely well because of strong relationships and effective assessment systems. Therefore, they know exactly where to pitch activities so that pupils make rapid progress.
- Teachers have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They plan activities that are pinpointed exactly on the next steps for each individual pupil. Pupils are clear what they are learning and why. They benefit from a clear, consistent lesson structure that is evident throughout the school.
- The use of assessment within lessons has a significant impact on the progress of pupils. In a drama lesson observed during the inspection, the teacher provided excellent direction and advice to the pupil actors, resulting in improvements in both engagement and performance. It was clear that, as the teacher continued to provide advice, pupils' self-esteem and confidence grew.
- Transitions between lessons are managed extremely well and learning is not disrupted. Leaders have carefully organised the timetable so that familiar adults stay with class groups throughout the day. Teachers move from class to class, depending on the curriculum area taught. These changes are very well managed. During the inspection, one class ended a healthy living lesson with a discussion in the social area of the room. The teacher then played calming music and dimmed the lights, leaving support staff and pupils for a few moments before another teacher entered the room for the next lesson. This ensured that pupils made a seamless, timely and calm transition from one lesson to another.
- Leaders and teachers work closely with speech and language therapists and occupational therapists to ensure that all the needs of pupils are met. Pupils with sensory needs requiring additional help, such as the use of headphones, are provided with this support unobtrusively and without disruption to learning. Others follow specific programmes to enable them to access learning more effectively when in class.
- The calm approach of all members of staff supports learning extremely well. However, occasionally, adults other than teachers do not support learning as effectively as they support behaviour and personal development. For example, when supporting a group of pupils in a lesson they do not always continue to promote learning when the teacher moves to a different group within the room. Similarly, they do not always adapt symbol communication to match the level of understanding of the individual pupil.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- The school places considerable emphasis on the development of independence skills. Pupils make excellent progress whether this is in learning to open a door for themselves or in travelling to school without adult support.
- Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe in different circumstances. In the school café, for example, visual reminders of 'hot' are placed on the cooker and grills. During the inspection, a social communication lesson taught pupils in Key Stage 3 what a stranger is and how to keep themselves safe around people they do not know.

- The school environment is clean and tidy. The variety of activities and resources both indoors and out support pupils' well-being very well. The grounds have been skilfully transformed into distinct areas where pupils access outdoor play equipment, such as swings and exercise equipment. There are also quiet areas, a greenhouse, vegetable patch and grassy area where pupils care for the school's chickens.
- The school provides an exceptionally safe and healthy experience at lunchtimes. As a result of detailed planning, staff and pupils move seamlessly from lessons to the dining hall, outdoor activities or clubs. A high level of visual support does not detract from the relaxed atmosphere. Staff are extremely vigilant, picking up on any changes in mood and providing support that promotes independence and self-confidence well. Pupils say the food is good and explained the benefits of healthy eating to the inspector.
- Highly effective systems are in place to manage the risks associated with pupils' medical needs. Leaders have liaised effectively with health professionals to ensure that the plans they have in place are appropriate.
- A wide range of therapies are available within the school to support the personal development and welfare of pupils. Music, drama, art and small-scale construction therapies have all been used effectively with individuals or small groups. Leaders identify which pupils would most benefit from these therapies to ensure that the impact is maximised.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. They demonstrate a high degree of respect towards others because members of staff are exceptional role models.
- An atmosphere of calm pervades the school building and grounds. Members of staff never raise their voice, enabling pupils to focus on their learning. Pupils are happy to come to school; they know who to go to if they have any concerns and are confident that they will be well looked after.
- The few pupils who, because of their special educational needs, find it difficult to maintain high standards of behaviour at all times are extremely well supported. When this happens, the learning of others is not disrupted because of timely and effective intervention by staff. Individual behaviour plans are reviewed regularly and show that over time behaviour improves quickly. This is borne out by the ongoing reduction in the number of incidents.
- The school takes bullying seriously, although there are very few occurrences. When these do occur, they are handled effectively and sensitively. Leaders are not complacent, however, and maintain involvement in programmes such as an anti-bullying week.
- The level of pupils' attendance is very high. A high proportion of pupils have a full attendance record. School leaders work closely with the local authority to support the very few pupils who find it difficult to attend school regularly.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress from their starting points. In 2014 and 2015, almost every pupil made the amount of progress that would be expected in English and mathematics. A high proportion of pupils made more than expected progress. Any pupil who does not make the expected amount of progress is identified early, and a personalised programme of therapies and support is put in place to ensure that they catch up swiftly.
- Teachers and teaching assistants evaluate each pupil's work in all subjects on a lesson-by-lesson basis. They note any small steps of progress that have been made and what the next steps are for the individual pupil. Consequently, pupils make rapid progress across the full range of curriculum subjects.
- School leaders look very carefully at the progress made by different groups of pupils. They consider the progress of boys compared with girls, those eligible for free school meals and those of different ethnic groups. There is no significant difference in the progress made between any of these groups of pupils. Similarly, there is no difference in the progress made by pupils with differing levels of learning difficulty or those who speak English as an additional language. This is a result of the highly individualised programmes that are matched closely to each pupil's needs.
- Most-able pupils make excellent progress. They are enabled to achieve higher-level qualifications because leaders are creative in finding ways to offer these courses. For example, they have sought advice and expertise locally, and enabled pupils to achieve the highest grades in both art and mathematics GCSE courses.

- Teachers and leaders also record the outcomes for pupils outside the National Curriculum subjects. Pupils make outstanding progress in terms of self-management, life skills and communication. They learn to be aware of each other's needs and to make friends. For example, a group of learners aged 16 to 19 were learning to make a hot drink safely. As part of the programme, they are taught how to make a hot drink for a friend. This develops their communication skills and ability to understand the choices others make, alongside the practical skill of making the drink itself.
- Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for adulthood. All pupils leave Spa School with accredited qualifications. The school offers a wide range of courses at pre-entry level, entry level and GCSE level. Pupils study these as appropriate according to their aptitude and interests. All pupils also study vocational and life skills courses.

16 to 19 study programmes

are outstanding

- Leaders have skilfully blended a curriculum content that prepares learners well for their next placements and a curriculum delivery that is consistent with learners' experience in earlier key stages. This means that each lesson is presented using symbols, signs or routines that the learner is familiar with. However, the knowledge they gain is more adult in nature, and relates closely to their future plans and aspirations.
- Each learner follows a personalised programme of academic, vocational and life skills-based learning, dependent on their aptitudes and abilities. All learners leave the school with accredited qualifications at an appropriate level. Each year, the school expands the range of qualifications available by considering the learners on roll and making sure that their precise needs are met. As a result, very few learners leave the school either before or during the 16 to 19 programme.
- Learners in the 16 to 19 provision make outstanding progress, including in English and mathematics, because of the very high-quality teaching and personalised approach. Teachers and other adults use the information they have about learners' prior achievement to plan courses that are precisely focused on the needs of each individual.
- Learners in the 16 to 19 provision behave extremely well. As a result of successful behaviour management plans when they were in earlier key stages, they are able to manage their own behaviour and keep themselves safe in the school environment. The 16 to 19 curriculum prepares them to extend these skills as they move into the wider world of work or local college.
- Learners are offered a range of opportunities to extend their experience of the workplace. At the centre of this work is the school's café, which is located next door to the school and is open to the public on a daily basis. Staffed by learners, this example of exemplary practice provides learners with opportunities to interact with the public, use money, meet the needs of customers and practise their catering skills.
- A key focus of the careers education programme is that of making choices. As these learners prepare to move on from school, they are equipped with decision-making skills that stand them in good stead for the future. Likewise, every opportunity is taken by the skilled staff team to promote life skills and independence. This work supports the ongoing personal development of learners.
- Transition out of school is an outstanding model of practice, shown by successful placements and long-term outcomes for those who left the school some time ago. Leaders have an extensive knowledge of the destinations available to learners. They are highly skilled at identifying possible placements for learners based on their in-depth knowledge of each individual. Parents and learners are involved every step of the way when transition is planned, in order to ensure success.

School details

Unique reference number	100873
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10001215

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	11–19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in 16 to 19 study programmes	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	100
Of which, number on roll in 16 to 19 study programmes	35
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Bridget Gilchrist
Headteacher	Simon Eccles
Telephone number	020 7237 3714
Website	www.spa.southwark.sch.uk
Email address	headteacher@spa.southwark.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–6 December 2012

Information about this school

- Spa School provides for pupils who have autistic spectrum conditions. In addition to autism, pupils have a range of additional needs including moderate learning difficulties, severe learning difficulties and social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- The school caters for the needs of pupils aged 11 to 19. There are more boys than girls, as is typical for this type of provision. All pupils have a statement of educational needs or an education, health and care plan.
- Just under half of the pupils are eligible for the pupil premium as a result of being looked after or eligible for free school meals. This is well above the national average.
- Around a quarter of pupils come from White British backgrounds. A wide range of minority ethnic backgrounds are represented, with Black African being the largest group.
- The school does not place pupils in any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 24 lessons. Many of these observations were undertaken jointly with senior leaders.
- Meetings were held with senior and middle leaders, teachers, support staff and a representative from the local authority. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with the Chair of the Governing Body. Inspectors spoke to pupils both informally and in a more formal setting to ask them about their experiences in school.
- A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including that relating to safeguarding, checks made on the quality of teaching, minutes from governing body meetings and information about pupils' progress.
- Inspectors scrutinised the work of a sample of pupils and considered this alongside other reports and information held regarding these pupils.
- Inspectors took account of 14 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View. They also considered the school's surveys of the views of parents, pupils and staff.

Inspection team

Gaynor Roberts, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Angela Corbett

Her Majesty's Inspector

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