

Inspection of an outstanding school: Spa School, Bermondsey

Monnow Road, London SE1 5RN

Inspection dates:

17 and 18 January 2023

Outcome

There has been no change to this school's overall judgement of outstanding as a result of this ungraded (section 8) inspection. However, the evidence gathered suggests that the inspection grade might not be as high if a graded (section 5) inspection were carried out now. The next inspection will therefore be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders ensure that Spa School, Bermondsey is a place where pupils are 'happy, safe, and healthy'. Leaders work closely with parents and carers to plan for their child's needs. Parents are full of praise for the school and its leadership. One parent expressed the view shared by many 'Sometimes we struggle but talking to the staff we don't feel so alone.'

Pupils look forward to coming to school. They cooperate well and are nearly always kind to each other. They are particularly courteous to adults and to visitors.

Staff are skilled in using what they know about pupils to provide support when pupils find aspects of life challenging. Pupils trust that adults will help them. They are confident that staff have their best interests in mind. As a result, the school is a calm and purposeful place to learn, where pupils do not have any concerns about bullying or the behaviour of others.

Leaders provide a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their resilience and character. These include work experience in the school café and residential visits. Pupils also spend regular time in the local community. This ensures that pupils are well prepared for life beyond the school.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

School leaders are just as ambitious for pupils' academic achievement as they are for their social, emotional, and mental development. Consequently, they ensure that pupils access a broad and interesting curriculum. Leaders identify pupils' needs well and have ensured that the curriculum meets those needs effectively.

Leaders have thought carefully about the content taught at different stages in each subject. Learning is designed to build on what pupils already know. There are regular opportunities to revisit important knowledge and skills. This means that pupils remember more of the things they have learned over time.

Teachers are skilled at explaining new subject knowledge clearly. This helps pupils to understand new concepts and ideas. Teachers check pupils' learning and provide support if they are struggling. As a result, most pupils make the progress that leaders expect through the curriculum.

Most pupils acquire reliable reading skills. However, there are some variations in how pupils are taught to read, which leaders are taking steps to address. These variations arise because some staff lack the subject knowledge needed to teach pupils to become confident, fluent readers.

Students in the sixth form enjoy a curriculum that prepares them well for adulthood. They study accredited courses and learn how to look after themselves, so that they can be as independent as possible. Pupils' studies are enriched by opportunities to practise and develop their skills in the community, such as in the school flat and the school cafe, which is open to the public.

Following recent vacancies and changes to the governance structure, governors are not able to place enough emphasis on the quality of the curriculum in the checks they undertake. They provide support for school leaders but have not challenged them sufficiently about the quality of education in the school.

Staff are skilful in spotting signs of anxiety, which might lead to challenging behaviour. Effective action diffuses situations quickly in lessons and around the school. There is a strong focus on positive behaviour support and understanding behaviour as a means of communication. Ultimately, pupils are taught to self-regulate and manage their own behaviour. Where pupils begin to struggle with their behaviour, staff get them back on track quickly and kindly, so there is no disruption to the learning of other pupils.

Pupils' personal development is carefully considered. Pupils learn about different types of families and relationships. They also learn about mental health and how to manage their emotions. They understand the changing adolescent body. Girls represent a small minority of pupils in the school. They receive support, so that they do not feel in any way disadvantaged by this.

Leaders provide extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their talents and interests. Examples include karate, street dance, and guitar lessons. Older pupils are able to choose the courses they would like to study, such as politics, sport or history.

Most staff feel that leaders are appreciative of their workload and say that it is manageable. Staff are very supportive of each other, and the sharing of resources and good practice enables them to work effectively as a team.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have embedded a strong culture of keeping pupils safe. Pre-employment checks on staff are carried out thoroughly. All staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Because they have been trained well, they know the signs that may indicate that pupils need extra help.

Teachers and leaders share information well. Staff are swift to identify any potential safeguarding issues because they know their pupils very well. They seek advice from each other and from leaders, even if they have very minor concerns.

Leaders make sure that they use appropriate external services to safeguard pupils and to support families.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- The teaching of early reading is not as good as it needs to be. This means that pupils at the early stages of reading do not learn to read fluently as well as they should. Leaders should make sure that all staff receive the right training to develop their expertise in this area.
- The governing body lacks sufficient educational expertise. This means that despite governors' best efforts, they have not got a deep enough understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the quality of education. Governors should develop further expertise to enable them to effectively hold school leaders to account for the quality of education in the school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the predecessor school, Spa School, to be outstanding in December 2015.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	146190
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10255427
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	107
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	38
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Holly McAlpine
Headteacher	Georgina Quigley
Website	www.spa-education.org
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Spa School, Bermondsey is part of the Spa Education Trust, having joined in September 2018. When its predecessor school, Spa School, was last inspected by Ofsted in December 2015, it was judged to be outstanding overall.
- This is a special school for pupils between the ages of 11 and 19 years.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- During the inspection, inspectors held discussions with the headteacher and other leaders, including curriculum and pastoral leaders.
- Inspectors held discussions with teachers, teaching assistants and governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects.
- Inspectors met with members of staff individually and in groups and spoke to pupils at various points during the inspection. Inspectors took account of responses to pupil and staff surveys, as well as Ofsted Parent View.
- Inspectors looked at records relating to behaviour, bullying, attendance and safeguarding.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding arrangements by checking the school's approach to staff recruitment, scrutinising policy documents and meeting with the designated safeguarding lead.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Lisa Strong

His Majesty's Inspector

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