

# Inspection of an outstanding school: Swiss Cottage School - Development & Research Centre

80 Avenue Road, London NW8 6HX

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Inspection dates:

21 and 22 March 2023

## **Outcome**

Swiss Cottage School - Development & Research Centre continues to be an outstanding school.

## **What is it like to attend this school?**

Leaders and staff are passionate and determined in their work to ensure that all pupils experience success. They provide pupils with a high-quality education and extensive support to meet their individual needs. Leaders' aims are realised through deep curriculum thinking. All of their work is underpinned by expert input from therapeutic and medical staff. As a result, pupils achieve their personalised, ambitious targets. They are extremely well prepared for adulthood and the next stages of their lives.

Pupils enjoy coming to school. They said that staff are caring and always help them deal with any worries that they may have. Well-trained staff, supported by therapists, help pupils to develop their interpersonal and behavioural skills. They do this exceptionally well. When a pupil displays anxiety, staff deal with it swiftly and effectively. This enables pupils to calm down and re-engage in class activities. Adults supervise pupils closely and help them to get along with one another. They make sure that bullying or unkind behaviour are rare.

Pupils and sixth-form students have many enrichment opportunities. These include visits from a theatre company which delivers interactive, sensory shows. Pupils also work with professional musicians, and this contributes to the therapeutic provision. Pupils enjoy being taught sporting and fitness activities, such as cycling, including how to use adapted bicycles.

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

Leaders have established a very ambitious curriculum. It is designed to be bespoke to each pupil's needs. Leaders have thought carefully about the different curriculum pathways on offer. They make sure that these cater for pupils' differing communication and cognitive needs. Leaders have also contributed to a national project to establish an

assessment system designed specifically for use in special schools. This is used effectively by all staff to identify what pupils have learned, as well as what they need to revisit and practise.

Teaching staff, therapists and medical staff work in close collaboration. They assess the needs and starting points of every pupil before they join the school. This includes pupils' academic and social development as well as their therapeutic and medical needs. All these practitioners check pupils' progress often against their bespoke targets. They use the information to great effect in planning individual next steps.

Leaders place the teaching of communication and, as appropriate, reading at the top of their agenda. The curriculum is carefully planned with this priority front and centre. Speech and language therapists train staff in the use of a wide range of visual and electronic communication aids. Staff use these highly effectively to help pupils to build up and develop their communication skills. Classes and corridors have many visual displays and sensory walls, for example. These are selected carefully so that pupils are well supported in practising their communication and language. Consistent communication systems are used throughout the school day. As a result, pupils develop their abilities and confidence to communicate their thoughts and wishes.

Teachers have the expertise to teach the school's phonics programme. Staff give extra support to pupils who need constant revision and practice so they do not fall behind. Pupils thus become more confident and fluent as readers.

Class teams and inter-class teams meet often. They plan together, share ideas and review the effectiveness of their work. The class teams also work seamlessly with therapists. Each brings their expertise so that together they cater for the holistic needs of all pupils.

The curriculum incorporates many subjects to help pupils learn 'how my world works'. Meticulous thought goes into building pupils' knowledge step by step. Planning runs seamlessly from the early years until the end of the sixth form. This ensures that pupils are ready for each stage of their learning, both within the school and beyond.

From the early years, staff teach children how to behave. Staff set very clear routines and expectations. Pupils are supported to develop strong social skills. Staff reward and celebrate pupils' successes. Pupils learn and socialise in a calm and purposeful environment that helps them to achieve extremely well.

Leaders provide pupils with comprehensive, impartial careers guidance. The sixth-form curriculum pathways are very much focused on preparing students for adulthood, with emphasis on teaching functional skills. This is so students can integrate safely into society, such as when travelling and shopping. Leaders give students experiences to prepare them for the world of work and for taking up supported internships. Students have several opportunities in school to develop their work skills. For example, some design and manufacture greeting cards. They source materials, and budget to ensure that they make a profit, as well as advertise, package and post their products to customers. According to their needs, leaders ensure that students are supported to continue into post-18 colleges or adult specialist provisions.

Staff set tailored targets for each pupil's personal development, carefully building in information from each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. They also take account of pupils' views and those of their parents and carers. Preparing for adulthood sits at the centre of this planning. Staff teach pupils about internet safety and fundamental British values. They support pupils' understanding of how to form healthy relationships. Students are helped to develop skills in home and clothes management. They are taught how to store food and about healthy diets.

Leaders have instituted a three-tier staff well-being framework. They use this approach to make sure that staff have a reasonable workload and that their welfare needs are supported. Staff value the daily opportunities for collaborative planning and reflection. They also value the many professional development opportunities they have. These are planned to enhance their expertise and careers.

## **Safeguarding**

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

The safeguarding and positive behaviour teams work closely together. They understand that pupils at this school are more at risk of safeguarding concerns due to their additional needs. They make sure that staff are well trained in how to identify and report any concerns, including for pupils who are nonverbal. Leaders, from before pupils join the school and continuing thereafter, work with a wide range of therapists and external agencies, such as social workers, to support the welfare of pupils and their parents.

Leaders have suitable recruitment processes for vetting candidates' suitability to work with pupils. They also take appropriate action to deal with any allegations that may be made against a member of staff.

## **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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in February 2014.

## 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

<b>Unique reference number</b>	100096
<b>Local authority</b>	Camden
<b>Inspection number</b>	10255539
<b>Type of school</b>	Special
<b>School category</b>	Community special
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	2 to 19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	260
<b>Of which, number on roll in the sixth form</b>	37
<b>Appropriate authority</b>	The governing body
<b>Chair of governing body</b>	Jonathan Hilliard
<b>Principal</b>	Vijita Patel
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.swisscottage.camden.sch.uk">www.swisscottage.camden.sch.uk</a>
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	31 May 2017, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

## Information about this school

- The school is housed in a purpose-built building, which also houses a range of NHS therapists and medical staff who, although working for the local community, are on hand to support staff and pupils at the school.
- All pupils have EHC plans. The school caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorders, severe learning difficulties, and profound and multiple learning difficulties. Many pupils have associated speech, language and communication needs.
- Leaders do not make use of any alternative provision.
- Although the school is registered for the age range of two to 19, there are currently no two- or three-year-olds on roll.
- The current chair of the governing body took up his post in September 2022.

## 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.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading and communication, physical health and development, mathematics, and personal, social and health education. Inspectors held discussions with leaders and teachers, visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and held discussions with pupils. Inspectors also considered other subjects as part of the inspection.
- Inspectors spoke with the headteacher, other senior leaders, the chair of governors and five other governors. They also spoke with a representative of the local authority and the local authority's designated safeguarding officer.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including information related to safeguarding and the checks carried out before the appointment of staff. Inspectors looked at records of pupils' behaviour.
- Inspectors had formal meetings with staff and with pupils. They spoke with parents in the playground and with some parents by telephone. They took account of the responses to the online Ofsted Parent View survey and of emails and a letter that they received. They also considered the responses to the staff survey. Furthermore, they also considered the school's parent and staff surveys carried out a few months before the inspection.

## Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Luke Stubbles

His Majesty's Inspector

Martyn Patterson

Ofsted Inspector

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