

Centre Academy

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Martyn Groucutt

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

Centre Academy is an independent day school which provides education for up to 60 students who have special educational needs, including dyslexia/specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorders. It is registered for students from seven to 18 years, although virtually all are of secondary school age. Forty-four students have a statement of special educational needs. It was first registered in 1974 as part of the Centre Academy group which was based in the United States, but since 2002 it has been in private ownership. Although it is no longer such a strong element as was once the case, this is still an international school with staff and students from many countries, reflected in the range of ethnic backgrounds in the school. It is situated in an Edwardian Grade 11 listed building in the borough of Wandsworth, with students coming from all over London and beyond. The large majority have been placed by their local authority in order to meet their special educational needs. The school was last inspected in November 2008.

Evaluation of the school

Centre Academy provides a good education which supports the process of transforming the lives of its students, and provision has improved since the last inspection. The curriculum is good and is individualised to meet the needs of each student, while good teaching and assessment, ably supported by the school's therapists and counsellor, have resulted in the students overcoming previous academic failure. Students enjoy their learning, attend regularly and demonstrate rising achievement, frequently from low baselines, so that their progress is good. The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and behaviour is outstanding. The welfare, health and safety of students are good and procedures for safeguarding, including training for staff, are effective. The school is very successful in meeting its aims and meets most, but not all, of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good because teachers take care to individualise learning, ensuring effective challenge while allowing all to experience success.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Students up to the age of 14 follow a modified National Curriculum, ensuring a broad and balanced programme. In Key Stage 4 there are two distinct academic pathways. Those more able academically follow a curriculum leading to entry for the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE), while others follow a programme of Foundation Level learning with a more practical and vocational bias. The development of the two pathways is a response to the greater complexity of need and lower attainment of increasing numbers of students, reflecting the expertise the school has developed to meet a range of increasingly challenging learning needs. At the moment they are mutually exclusive and the school has identified that this can restrict achievement. It is planning to allow flexibility to enable students to follow courses selected from both pathways depending on their specific abilities to maximise the best of their talents. The curriculum is complemented by effective speech and occupational therapies and counselling, all of which are provided by staff of the school. The curriculum is enriched through participation in clubs and activities, which allow for all ages to mix and participate together. Active engagement in learning enables all students to make progress and to experience success at school, sometimes for the first time. An unusual feature of the provision is that the post-16 curriculum is based on the American High School Diploma. This is continuously assessed and provides a balanced range of subjects which allows students to continue to broaden their learning horizons while following a qualification that gives access to higher education throughout the United Kingdom.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good, some is outstanding, and progress is tracked effectively from an initial baseline assessment on entry. Progress data are collected regularly and enable predictions of eventual outcomes to be made, together with plans for accelerating progress that will enable these to be surpassed. There is a strong rapport between adults and students, giving students a confidence in learning that few had experienced previously. As one said, 'I have a wonderful teacher who told me I could be independent and it's helped me a lot.' Lessons are planned in detail and learning is individualised within the very small teaching groups because the teachers know the needs and abilities of each student so well. They are not only effective subject specialists, but also develop expertise in supporting students with learning needs through the very good in-service training programme. The progress made by students is good. While overall attainment may be below the levels usually expected, progress from students' starting points is often striking. Individual learning plans are in place for all students and these are monitored regularly to ensure that targets remain meaningful and challenging.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students is good. Particularly impressive is the encouragement of positive self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-awareness. Consequently, students who have had very negative experiences of education prior to joining Centre Academy start to realise their full worth. They are encouraged to respect the law and to understand the concepts of right and wrong not only through the formal teaching of citizenship and through good links with the local community liaison officers, but also through the strong mentoring

programme that starts each school day. For example, a lively discussion was observed in which students, some of whom had come from abroad to study in London, were discussing the growing belief in some countries that it is wrong for young people to be educated abroad. In discussions, students are able to talk about ideas such as justice and fairness, well illustrated in a sixth form lesson on the rights of Israelis and Palestinians. Students are keen to help each other and display loyalty and friendship. Opportunities are taken to encourage students to accept responsibilities, for example through the recently established School Committee Group. Links with the local community are not easy to develop because students come from so many localities, but connections with a local company foster enterprise opportunities and students participate in a range of charity events. The school is looking to develop local links further. The fact that a range of creeds and cultures is found among staff and students enables students to develop very positive attitudes towards other cultures in an atmosphere in which different backgrounds are appreciated and valued.

Behaviour in lessons and around the school is outstanding. This not only reflects the students' positive commitment to learning, but also the exceptionally positive relationships that exist throughout the school.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall provision for welfare, health and safety is good and virtually all regulations are met. However, the first-aid policy does not make clear all of the procedures for cleaning up spilled bodily fluids. The school safeguards and promotes the welfare of its students effectively and all the necessary checks on employment are carried out. Students feel safe because they trust the adults with whom they come into contact and because there is a high emphasis on safeguarding. There are effective arrangements to ensure effective supervision of students. Policies and procedures for child protection are thorough and all staff are trained to the required levels. Students get on well together and confirm there is no bullying, including cyber-bullying. The welfare and safety of students is the prime concern of all staff, supported by good supervision arrangements. Not all staff, however, have been fully trained to use one of the recognised forms of restraint that can protect staff and pupils from being hurt, should a challenging situation arise. There are good systems for risk assessments to promote safety around the site and on trips and visits, including arrangements for regular fire drills. All appropriate checks on equipment and the safe storage of potentially hazardous materials pay due regard to national guidance. The school fulfils the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Systems and procedures for the appointment of staff, including enhanced level checks through the Criminal Records Bureau, are securely in place. Details are included in a suitable single central register.

Premises and accommodation at the school

Centre Academy is based in a large Edwardian house which provides a suitable environment for safe and effective learning for the comparatively small numbers of students. Additional space is provided in an on-site annex and the next-door community church. Standards of maintenance, fixtures and furnishing are good in the well-equipped and decorated classrooms. Provision of washrooms and for students taken ill meets requirements.

Provision of information

The school's brochures contain nearly all the information required for parents, carers or local authorities who are considering applying for a place. The information does not currently include details regarding the provision for students who speak English as an additional language, or details of academic performance during the preceding school year. The requirement to make available the safeguarding policy has not been met.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has recently developed a new policy for making complaints and there are a few areas in which it does not comply with regulations. In particular, the policy needs to establish timescales for dealing with complaints and to specify that, if there is a formal appeal before a panel, then one member needs to be independent of the school. There is also a need to specify that written records are to be kept in a confidential manner, and that they indicate if there was an informal resolution or whether the complaints proceeded to the formal stage.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure the policy on first aid fully meets requirements and is implemented (paragraph 14).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make the following information available to parents of pupils and parents of prospective pupils, and on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State, or an independent inspectorate:

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made.

- particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language
- particulars of academic performance during the previous year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 24(1)(b)).
- make available to parents of pupils (and of prospective pupils on request) the safeguarding children policy (paragraph 24(1)(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the manner in which complaints are to be handled (standards in part 7) and must:

- ensure that the complaints procedure sets out clear timescales for the management of a complaint (paragraph 25(c))
- ensure that when there is a panel hearing of a complaint there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 25(g))
- provide for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 25(j))
- provide for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 25(k)).

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development.

- Use the data available to ensure that individual pupils have opportunities to access both the GCSE and the Foundation Studies pathways to ensure that they access the pathways best suited to their individual needs and learning profiles.
- Ensure that staff are trained and regularly updated in an approved method of restraint.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		✓		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		✓		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		✓		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		✓		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		✓		
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils		✓		
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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Junior and secondary special school for disabled pupils and those with a range of special educational needs		
Date school opened	1974		
Age range of pupils	7–18		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 45	Girls: 10	Total: 55
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 38	Girls: 6	Total: 44
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees	£26,100 – £38,775		
Address of school	92 St John's Hill London SW11 1SH		
Telephone number	0207 7738 2344		
Email address	info@centreacademy.net		
Headteacher	Mrs V Langford		
Proprietor	Mrs M Murphy		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



3 February 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Centre Academy, London SW11 1SH

I am writing to thank you for the very warm welcome you gave me when I visited your school to carry out the inspection. You told me how much you like school and this was also clear from the questionnaires which some of you completed. I am pleased to tell you that you go to a good school. I was particularly impressed by your outstanding behaviour, the ways in which you are able to show the good progress that you are making as result of your hard work and the very good teaching you receive.

Teachers are measuring your progress from the time you start and know just what you are capable of. As a result they are able to make sure the work is at the right level to challenge you, while enabling you to succeed. All the adults in the school work hard to make sure you do your best and it is clear that in return you work very hard and get on well with all the staff. This makes the school a very happy place. Some of you have been unhappy in school in the past, so it is good to see you doing so well and growing so much in confidence.

I have asked the school to look at introducing a couple of things. You should, for example, be able to choose a subject from either the Foundation Learning course or from the GCSE course in Key Stage 4, depending on how good you are at it. I also think that, since some of you sometimes find it hard to control your behaviour, staff should be trained in how to hold pupils gently to make sure that nobody is hurt.

Everyone is working hard so you can do your best. If you maintain such positive attitudes to learning you will be doing your bit to ensure that the school remains so effective.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Groucutt
Lead inspector