

Snowflake School

46a Longridge Road, London, SW5 9SJ

Inspection dates 20–21 March 2013

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Pupils' achievement	Outstanding	1
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Quality of curriculum	Outstanding	1
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This school is outstanding because

- Leaders and managers are highly effective and are very successful in driving improvement. They have the highest aspirations for pupils and the highest expectations of staff. They have established systems that ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is monitored very closely.
- The quality of teaching and learning is outstanding and this ensures that pupils make outstanding progress in relation to their individual starting points and capabilities.
- Pupils are extremely well cared for. They learn to keep safe and say that they are free from harassment. The school builds strong relationships with parents and carers to ensure pupils experience continuity of care and education between school and home.
- Pupils make exceptional progress in managing their behaviour as a result of the excellent strategies used to develop their communication and social skills, self-esteem and self-confidence. Staff adopt a very consistent approach to the management of behaviour.
- A multi-disciplinary team, including highly skilled teachers, tutors trained in Applied Behaviour/Verbal Behaviour Analysis (ABA/VB), and specialists work very closely together to plan and implement learning programmes that are tailored to pupils' specific needs. Provision enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well in all areas of learning, particularly in their communication, reading, writing and mathematical skills. Parents and carers are highly satisfied with their children's progress.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspector observed nine lessons or sessions taught by five different teachers and tutors. Meetings were held with senior leaders, teaching staff and pupils. Documentation and policies, particularly relating to safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, were scrutinised, as well as curriculum plans, teachers' assessments and pupils' work.
- The inspector also took account of the responses in 15 questionnaires completed by staff and met with parents and carers to collect their views. No responses were gathered from the online parent questionnaire (Parent View) because the number of responses was too small.

Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Snowflake School is an independent day school for pupils with autism. It was initially registered in September 2008 for up to 15 boys and girls aged from five to 14 years and had its first inspection in July 2009. The Department for Education granted the school permission to extend its age range up to 16 years in May 2012. Pupils join the school at any age within the age range and at any point in the academic year. They stay in the school until they are ready to move on to a school for higher-functioning autistic pupils or mainstream education. The school is located in the Earls Court district of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, London. The current headteacher took up her post in January 2011. The school is run by a charity and the Chair of the Board of Trustees is the founder of the school.
- There are currently 13 pupils on roll, aged between six and 14 years, six of whom are girls. There are 11 pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Pupils come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and most speak English as an additional language. There are very few pupils at an early stage of learning English. Many pupils have moderate learning difficulties, including speech, language and communication needs. All have difficulties in behavioural, emotional and social development.
- The school aims to work in partnership with families and others, striving to enable each child to reach their potential and to improve the quality of family life. It seeks to do this through a highly personalised curriculum and through using the principles of Applied Behaviour/Verbal Behaviour Analysis (ABA/VB). The school does not use alternative provision to educate the pupils.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Continue to develop the professional expertise of staff so that all share an understanding of how individual pupils can be consistently challenged to a high level and so always progress at the fastest possible rate.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Outstanding

Pupils' achievement is outstanding as a result of excellent teaching and a highly effective curriculum. Parents and carers are delighted with their children's progress. Pupils join the school with starting points that are very low compared with those expected for their age, and a history of negative education experiences because their learning has often been hindered by their behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. Although their attainment is below expectations for their age by the end of each key stage, pupils consistently meet or exceed ambitious learning targets. They make exceptional progress in all areas of learning, particularly in their communication, reading, writing and numeracy skills, owing to outstanding teaching and thorough assessments of their progress that ensure that their learning programmes meet their individual needs. Weekly tracking of pupils' progress enables the school to adjust the learning programmes swiftly to provide a sufficiently high level of challenge to maintain pupils' rapid rate of progress. However, occasionally, where the teaching is good rather than outstanding, the level of challenge provided could be even higher, particularly for the more able pupils.

A key to the school's success is the emphasis placed on developing pupils' communication and social skills as a gateway to the learning process. This focus enables pupils who are at an early stage or more advanced stages of learning English to make exceptionally rapid progress in English. Whether they use words or signs, pupils make excellent progress in communicating with the adults who work with them, their peers, their relatives and visitors. This has a continuously positive impact on their behaviour and learning. This achievement is noted by parents and carers as a life-changing breakthrough. Over time, pupils who use sign language progress to verbal communication.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding, being extremely well supported by ABA systems, the curriculum and the excellent role models provided by the staff. Pupils' behaviour improves significantly soon after joining the school owing to the consistent approach adopted by all staff. Outbursts of anger or frustration are rare and managed extremely well as pupils quickly understand that boundaries are set firmly. As a result, pupils learn in a calm and orderly environment, and thrive in the security of well-established routines and principles. Pupils visibly enjoy their time at school and are highly motivated to apply themselves to the tasks set. Their attendance is good. Pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem is boosted extremely well. Pupils' understanding of the learning process, concentration and ability to manage change are supported extremely well by the timetabling of a succession of short and slightly longer sessions, and by the ABA tutors who act as model pupils, displaying the expected standards of behaviour and work.

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils get on exceptionally well with each other and with the staff. They are polite and considerate. They show a lot of care for each other in and out of lessons and treat each other with affection. There is no bullying. Pupils are taught to be safe as part of the practical, life-skills programme and systematically learn road safety as pedestrians and cyclists and learn to use public transport. They have many opportunities to contribute to school life. They shoulder responsibilities through the pupil council, for example, by organising fundraising events for charity and helping to plan their annual residential journey. They all participate in a Christmas school production in which some can showcase their talents, for example, by singing solo or playing the keyboard. They gain a good awareness of the local community and public services by visiting the police station, the fire brigade, local shops, parks and museums. Pupils' appreciation of diversity is promoted extremely well through the celebration of festivals, international week and daily interaction with peers from diverse backgrounds who, for example, introduce them to music from their culture during the lunch break.

Quality of teaching**Outstanding**

Teaching is outstanding and underpinned by an impressive commitment to extensive continuing staff professional development. Teachers, ABA tutors and other professionals work very closely together to ensure that all pupils learn exceptionally well. They all share the same very high expectations of what each pupil can achieve and know pupils extremely well. The planning of activities is based on thorough assessments of individual pupils' learning and takes into account pupils' personal interests where appropriate. Consequently, activities stretch pupils most of the time and motivate each pupil to learn exceptionally well. Reading, writing, communication and numeracy skills are effectively developed in a range of subjects. The presence of tutors acting as model pupils generates a high level of pupil participation in activities. Pupils are encouraged to learn by the judicious use of individually tailored rewards, which are often agreed with them. They also gradually enjoy the reward of realising how much they have achieved, reflected in their expression of pride.

The teaching in one-to-one sessions is consistently outstanding because tutors relentlessly focus on helping pupils to achieve the next steps of learning identified in pupils' individual learning programmes. Small-group teaching is often outstanding and never less than good. In small groups, pupils' individual needs are met very closely through the use of different levels of questions and different resources that challenge pupils very well. The staff consistently check pupils' understanding throughout lessons, anticipating where they may need to intervene to ensure total comprehension. However, on occasion, the level of challenge could be even higher, especially for more able pupils; in this event, pupils make good rather than outstanding progress.

Pupils know what to do to improve their work because the staff communicate their feedback very clearly to them and insist on a very high standard of response. Several systems are used to assess pupils' learning in their basic skills and in their behaviour patterns in great detail. The school ensures that teachers' assessments are secure by having them moderated internally and externally. The assessments are analysed rigorously to provide a comprehensive picture of each pupil's smallest steps of progress and development and to plan learning programmes that enable pupils to progress at a fast rate. Parents and carers feel very well informed by detailed termly reports on their children's progress and through consultations with the staff.

Quality of curriculum**Outstanding**

The curriculum is outstanding and has a highly positive impact on pupils' learning and achievement. It is broad and balanced and provides all of the required areas of learning. It is very carefully constructed to meet the specific needs of each pupil extremely well. Learning programmes are established on the basis of a wide range of initial assessments carried out by a multi-disciplinary team that includes teachers, tutors, a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and an educational psychologist who is a specialist in ABA/VB. The planning of individual learning programmes is underpinned by schemes of work that follow National Curriculum guidance and clear criteria for ensuring that pupils have mastered certain skills before focusing on new ones. Well written individual educational plans contain specific criteria to measure success and learning targets and they are reviewed frequently in response to continuous checks on pupils' learning.

The curriculum supports pupils' social skills and personal development extremely well. A good balance between whole-class activities and intensive individual sessions ensures that pupils have daily opportunities to develop their social skills with different peers and staff as well as to progress in their academic learning. Links with local schools are used very effectively to further extend pupils' social skills once they are ready to function in a wider environment. A broad range of multi-sensory resources, lots of hands-on activities and a well-thought-out enrichment programme ensure pupils swiftly engage with learning when they join the school and thoroughly enjoy their

education during their stay. The 'excel' Friday afternoon programme gives pupils the opportunity to sample a wide range of activities including swimming, yoga, art, gardening, French and playing the keyboard, which they may wish to pursue as a hobby. The school makes very effective use of local parks and schools to provide a wide range of physical activities. The programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education (PHSCE) is suitably modified to teach the specific life skills that individual pupils need at different stages of their education and to increase their independence. Through the challenging experiences of an annual residential journey, pupils develop self-reliance, self-confidence, self-esteem and cooperative skills, and practise a wide range of other personal skills planned in their individual programmes. Careers education includes work experience for Key Stage 3 pupils in catering and hospitality. Very effective arrangements ensure that pupils' transition to their next school occurs smoothly.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. As a result, all the regulations for this standard are met. The staff provide an exceptionally high level of care, supported by robust safeguarding arrangements, clearly written and up-to-date policies for child protection, health and safety, behaviour, anti-bullying and first aid, and by extensive training. All policies and procedures are implemented consistently, resulting in a calm environment in which all pupils feel safe to learn. An effective anti-bullying policy is in place and it is implemented effectively. Consequently, pupils are free from any harassment or intimidation. The school keeps meticulous records of any behaviour incidents. These are analysed to check trends and patterns. The Chair of Trustees and headteacher have received training in safe recruitment and all of the checks required on staff and others prior to confirming their appointment are recorded in a single central register in the proper manner. Thorough risk assessments of the premises, activities and off-site visits are carried out, as well as all the regulatory fire safety checks. Supervision of pupils on- and off-site is vigilant and accidents are very rare. Parents, carers and staff make effective use of liaison books in which they write daily comments related to pupils' well-being and learning. Pupils are encouraged extremely well to adopt healthy lifestyles through a wide range of physical activities, close supervision of their eating and drinking at lunch and break times, and the PSHCE programme.

Leadership and management

Outstanding

The leadership and management of the school are outstanding and have a considerable impact on pupils' learning and achievement. The headteacher inspires all staff to strive for excellence to secure the highest levels of achievement for each pupil and leads by example. As a result, all staff share the same passion for providing learning experiences of exceptionally high quality so that pupils develop a 'can-do' attitude and can progress at a very rapid rate in their social, emotional, basic and life skills. The staff are very proud to be associated with the school and feel extremely well supported by leaders and managers at all levels, be they tutor leaders, headteacher, trustees or external specialists. Teaching expertise is constantly enhanced by an exceptional programme of training that includes regular sessions with ABA specialists, links with outstanding schools and formal appraisal. Tutor leaders are extremely well trained to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and assist the headteacher very competently. The senior leadership team has an accurate view of teaching and learning and of the improvements required to further increase the proportion of outstanding teaching. The trustees know the school extremely well. They are proactive in supporting and challenging the headteacher and have very effective systems to verify the robustness of the school's self-evaluation. As a result, self-evaluation is accurate and provides a solid foundation for sustained improvement. The school is strongly committed to forging close partnerships with parents and carers to provide the continuity of care and education which pupils need to thrive. Parents and carers say they are immensely grateful for the level of support they receive.

The compact premises are used creatively to support safe and highly effective learning. The

trustees have improved the premises since the last inspection to provide suitable facilities for pupils who are ill. They ensure that parents, carers, placing authorities and others receive accurate and up-to-date information, that safeguarding arrangements are robust, and that the complaints procedure meets all requirements. All of the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	135616
Inspection number	397681
DfE registration number	207/6408

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Day special school for pupils with autism
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	13
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Snowflake School Limited
Chair	Faryaneh Akhavan
Headteacher	Jayne Jardine
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,950
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