

North West London Independent Special School

85 Old Oak Common Lane, London, W3 7DD

Inspection dates	11–13 June 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

The school is good because

- Teaching is good overall and students learn effectively. Most students make outstanding progress in their personal development.
- Senior leaders and all staff are very successfully helping disadvantaged students to re-engage in full-time education and achieve success.
- The procedures to ensure that students are well looked after and kept safe are very rigorous. Staff know their students extremely well.
- The proprietor and senior leaders have a strong drive to maintain a high-quality school. This results in students achieving success which previously they have not experienced.

It is not yet outstanding because

- There is some teaching that is adequate rather than good or outstanding. In a few lessons, students are not achieving as well as they could do.
- Senior leaders have not given the same very high focus to improving the quality of teaching as they have to ensuring that students are kept safe and are regularly attending school.

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

- This inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The lead inspector observed 11 lessons or parts of lessons and visited an off-site provision. He had discussions with a group of students representing several age groups. All lessons were jointly observed with the headteacher.
- It was not possible to gather information from the online Parent View survey because too few responses had been made. The lead inspector spoke to three parents and carers by telephone. The lead inspector considered 32 staff questionnaires about leadership and management and had discussions throughout the inspection with the proprietor, senior leaders and other staff.
- The inspector reviewed key documents and policies and scrutinised students' books and the school's information about students' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

Daniel Towl, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- The North West London Independent Special School was originally opened in 2008 and moved to new premises in Acton in 2011. It is part of a group of schools providing education for students with behavioural, emotional and social difficulties and autistic spectrum condition. All students have a statement of special educational needs.
- Currently, it provides coeducational day schooling for 44 students aged between 11 and 17 years.
- Students have complex and additional needs and extremely disrupted previous schooling. They are placed and funded by local authorities from London and counties in the South East.
- This is the school's second inspection. It was last inspected in March 2010.
- It aims to provide '...the highest quality education services which are personalised and achievement driven to ensure that pupils are supported to achieve the best possible outcomes and their full potential...'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Swiftly improve any remaining teaching that is not good or outstanding by :
 - ensuring that the activities planned for lessons are expertly managed and students' learning is brisk and effective
 - ensuring that teachers do not over-emphasise learning objectives and National Curriculum levels so as not to hinder the opportunities for students to 'get on' with the planned activities
 - ensure that teachers' marking is more effective in correcting students' common mistakes.
- Ensure that senior leaders give the same detailed attention to developing teaching as they do to ensuring the personal development, welfare, health and safety of students.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

From very low starting points, students' achievements are good and sometimes outstanding. All students have very significant gaps in their learning when they start. Students achieve success because staff know them well. Teachers plan work at appropriate levels in order to get students to where they should be, step by step.

Despite their good progress, the levels which students reach, when compared with national expectations, remain low for their age, especially for those who have only been at the school for a short period. Students in Key Stage 3 make better progress than older students, who often come to the school to complete courses with little previous preparation for examinations. All students leave with qualifications, which include some GCSEs, when they leave Year 11. Few students reach the higher levels at GCSE. All students in 2012 went on from the school to continue with various studies in local colleges or other centres of training and employment.

In lessons, students often show that they can grasp the main concepts being studied. Teachers give good opportunities for students to answer questions and give their views, and this is effective in helping students to consider their ideas and develop their learning. One group of students successfully discussed what you could tell about a character from the authors' descriptions. Students' speaking and listening skills are developing faster than their writing skills. Students are more reluctant to write down their ideas at length. Their writing is not always as accurate as it should be, both in spelling and neatness.

Students are confident when asked to read out loud and will tackle unfamiliar words. Although some students have gaps in their phonic knowledge (letter sounds and their combinations), overall reading skills develop well. Occasionally teachers miss opportunities to focus on phonic skills as opportunities arise in lessons. Students make good progress in mathematics and gain confidence in arithmetic calculations and other key areas, including algebra, geometry, shape and space and measures.

Students told the lead inspector that they enjoyed the range of lessons they studied and were sure that they are doing much better now than in their previous schools. They have confidence in their teachers and the teaching assistants who help them. This growing confidence is key to the students' good progress.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Students' personal development is outstanding. The school has very clear and consistently implemented procedures and processes to support students' personal development. The expectations of the school are very high indeed. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding overall, given students' starting points and often previous negative experiences of schooling.

Students' taking on personal responsibility for their learning and behaviour is an important aspect of the school's approach. Students' behaviour improves very quickly. Attendance increases rapidly from very low levels, or non-attendance, at previous schools. As the school year progresses, there is a rapid drop in instances of serious disruptive behaviour. No lessons observed were interrupted by students' poor behaviour or through serious non-compliance with requests from a member of staff. This means that students mostly remain engaged with their activities. The small group of students that met more formally with the lead inspector all stated that the school had helped them to overcome previous poor behaviour or reluctance to attend school.

There are occasions when students find it hard to manage their emotions and behaviour but staff manage this expertly and consistently well. All staff have received training in a particular approach to dealing with aggressive behaviour. This has successfully increased staff confidence. The approach used helps to calm potentially very difficult situations.

Activities such as drama and role-play in English lessons successfully help students to engage with each other positively, to lose inhibitions and listen and respond to others' views. This positively supports their social development and contributes to students showing more respectful behaviour both in and out of school.

Whole-school activities such as assemblies, tutor periods and the daily breakfast sessions give relaxed opportunities for students of all ages to mix and talk together. This helps students to develop more sophisticated social skills, required to operate effectively within a group. Students said they mostly got on well with each other. The skills learnt make a very positive contribution to students' next steps and future adult responsibilities. These skills are enhanced by taking on roles on the school council, taking part in school productions and contributing to activities such as raising money for charity. The school is currently developing a range of activities which will provide additional opportunities to support the local community and, particularly, local residents.

Students are very aware of each other's wide and diverse backgrounds and expressed the view that it was wrong to be intolerant of anyone who held different views, for example about religion or sexual preference. They had discussed a recent alleged terrorist incident and had access to newspapers at school to view current affairs. Senior leaders and staff are alert to ensuring that students receive balanced views on political issues.

The curriculum provides a programme of talks and activities from an external organisation which addresses a wide range of social and moral issues to help students into their adult life. The students felt that these sessions were very beneficial to them. Visits to places of interest such as museums and the House of Lords, and listening to a range of visiting speakers, support the humanities curriculum and contribute effectively to students' understanding of British society.

Quality of teaching

Good

Teaching is mostly good. Relationships between students and staff are very good. Students like their teachers, teaching assistants and other support staff. There is a high level of respect between all adults and students. This means that for most of the time, students are happy to engage with their work. This helps them to make good and sometimes outstanding progress from their starting points. Staff are very consistent in the way they manage students. All staff have high expectations. It is made clear to students that they go to lessons to work. Teachers listen carefully to their students and provide good opportunities for them to contribute their own ideas. This successfully helps students to become more involved in lessons and take part more willingly. This strongly supports students' self-esteem and self-worth.

Lessons are mostly well planned, with tasks that are appropriate to the students' level of understanding. Although the activities chosen are suitable, they are not always expertly managed and this sometimes leads to adequate rather than good learning. Explanations are not always crystal clear and learning opportunities are not always fully developed. While teachers always outline the lesson objectives and tell students at what level they are working, too much reference to these sometimes hinders the smooth passage of the lesson. Students who are already reluctant to write sometimes spend too long writing out the learning objectives.

There are good processes to assess and record students' progress. This gives a detailed overview of how well students are doing and is used effectively not only to plan each lesson but also to monitor progress over longer periods of time. Teachers regularly mark students' work and give

comments on how to improve. These are not always followed through rigorously by teachers and students and this results in some mistakes carrying on in future work, especially in punctuation, spelling and neatness.

Classes are very small. This means that students have a great deal of individual and personalised attention. This is very effective in helping students overcome problems and misunderstanding and helps them make good progress. There are a few occasions where the well-developed partnerships between teachers and teaching assistants are not used as effectively as they could be, especially in classes where there may be only one or two students.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The curriculum is good and meets all requirements. Personal, social and health education is excellent and underpins the success of the school. Clear policies, schemes of work, lesson planning and timetabling mean that students receive their full entitlement. The curriculum is meeting the needs of students because it ensures that they are able to access examinations and gain qualifications. This enables students to go on to further educational courses when they leave and is successfully helping them to overcome the disadvantages of previous failures. Vocational courses, for example mechanics and health and social care, in partnership with other educational providers successfully broadens students' opportunities. Where lessons are adequate rather than good or outstanding, the curriculum is not as effective in promoting good learning.

There is, correctly, a strong emphasis on key subjects such as English, mathematics, science and information and communication technology. Opportunities to develop creativity are met through art, music and drama lessons. One student was observed developing skills on a bass guitar and others were involved in 'hot-seating' in drama, where they each took the role of a different character and answered questions about themselves as that person. These activities are effective in developing students' self-esteem and confidence.

Physical education takes place at a local sports centre. During the inspection, students were observed following a programme to develop their personal fitness. This not only supported students' understanding of living healthy lives but also contributed effectively to developing behaviours appropriate for public places. There are regular links with outside agencies involving visiting speakers to support students' understanding of the world of work, career opportunities, their own place in society and personal health and safety.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Outstanding

The provision for promoting students' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. This and the efforts to develop students' personal skills are the main drivers in the success of the school. All requirements are met.

There are very rigorous procedures for safeguarding students and managing any matters to do with child protection. All the required checks are carried out on staff before they are appointed. All staff have received training appropriate to their duties concerning child protection, first aid and fire safety. There is a very systematic approach to ensuring that required training is undertaken. All required risk assessments have been completed. Students are extremely well supervised at all times. Staff are confident in their knowledge about what to do if they have any concerns that might involve child protection. There is a very consistent approach in the way staff interact with students.

The proprietor, senior leaders and all staff are very alert to individual students' welfare needs. The school has excellent access to expertise in a wide range of areas, including clinical and therapeutic

support such as speech and language, counselling, art and drama and well-being therapies. There are very good links with the placing local authorities and social services. This enables the school to provide an effective 'all-round' package of care which has a very positive impact on helping students gain some stability in their lives and return to full-time learning. The school has very effective links with parents and carers. The small group of parents and carers who spoke to the lead inspector were very positive about the way in which the school was helping their children. Weekly panels, run by senior staff and supported by an additional expert consultant, discuss the needs of the most vulnerable students and carefully analyse how well students are progressing. Where there are any serious concerns, senior leaders and other staff develop short-term action plans to meet a student's specific needs when they arise. This ensures that students' welfare is constantly under review.

Students are aware of maintaining their personal safety. They say they feel safe. They told the inspector that bullying is rare because most of them get on well with each other. They told the lead inspector that sanctions were clear and that they had been involved in developing the rewards system, including the " 'catch ya' doing something good" awards. They were very positive about the way in which rewards were put into a 'draw' to win a financial reward.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good. They are well supported by the education group's board of directors who have a wide range of specialist expertise. There are high expectations of staff and students. This permeates the school community. The returned questionnaires from staff show that they have confidence in the leadership and management of the school. Previous good performance has improved in some areas. All regulations are met for this standard.

There is a strong and effective drive to ensure that students achieve success where they have previously failed and a strong commitment to helping students both academically and personally. The school's own survey of parents and carers shows that the majority hold positive views about its work. The school makes every effort to work with parents and carers. This liaison is successful in developing continuity of support between home and school. The school provides all the information it should do through personal contact with parents and carers, the school prospectus or on the Internet.

Senior leaders have a good understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They have very successfully developed the provision for students' personal development but, despite improvements in teaching, have not been as successful in raising the quality of teaching so that more is good and outstanding. This means that while most students make good progress from their starting points, more could be making outstanding progress.

The curriculum is well organised and flexible to meet the changing needs of students. It is securely underpinned by the expectation that students will gain qualifications so that they are in a better position to move on to their next steps. The range of different types of expert support available is effective because it helps students with wide-ranging needs to find a 'pathway' to success. This includes access to a therapeutic curriculum that sometimes involves learning the skills of massage, and horse-riding lessons. The school has the capability and capacity to successfully tailor its provision to meet individual needs.

The recent move to new premises has provided high-quality classrooms and some specialist provision. The premises are well looked after and provide a good environment for learning. The complaints procedures meet requirements.

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	135794
Inspection number	420207
DfE registration number	307/6401

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	Special
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	44
Proprietor	Thomas Keaney - TC Education Services
Headteacher	Mark Jordan
Date of previous school inspection	17–18 March 2010
Annual fees (day pupils)	£48,000
Telephone number	020 8749 5403
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