

# The Holmewood School London

88 Woodside Park Road, London, N12 8SH

**Inspection dates** 13–15 January 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>2</b>
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Achievement of pupils	Good	2
Sixth form provision	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This is a good school because

- Students, most of whom have been unsuccessful in a mainstream school setting, become much more confident learners than previously. They achieve well during the time they spend at The Holmewood School and make outstanding progress in their personal development
- The small proportion of primary aged pupils and the few students in the sixth form make good progress. This in line with the majority of secondary aged students. Students are very well prepared for moving on to the next stage of their education or careers.
- Teachers, teaching assistants and therapy staff are well qualified, committed and often highly experienced in working with a wide range of vulnerable students. The quality of teaching is typically good and improving.
- The highly experienced and committed headteacher provides motivational leadership. She is supported effectively by the proprietor and advisory board who are active and knowledgeable about the work of the school.
- All policies and procedures for safeguarding are robust and rigorously monitored. Students say that the school is a safe place to be and that the school deals very effectively with any problems that may arise.
- Behaviour and attendance are good. This is because of the outstanding support received by both the students and their families in promoting personal development and practical life skills.

### It is not yet an outstanding school because

- The sixth form is new and the school has not yet had time to implement the effective plans for its development and expansion.
- The proprietor and advisory board do not contribute effectively enough to staff appraisal and salary progression.
- Not all teaching is outstanding. Targets to help improve students' literacy and numeracy abilities are not always used to best effect across all subject areas. Teaching does not always ensure students act on the advice given to improve their work.

### Compliance with the Regulations

- The school meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent school Standards) (England) Regulations 2012, 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 was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed the impact of teaching in 14 lessons or parts of lessons, visiting all staff. All visits were joint observations with senior leaders.
- All of the relevant school documents and policies were scrutinised to check for compliance with the independent school standards. These included the school's prospectus, information about students' progress, the school's own evaluation of its work, and the students' workbooks. Records relating to behaviour, attendance, and safeguarding were also scrutinised.
- A full tour of the school's premises took place with the site manager.
- Discussions were held with the proprietor, headteacher, all staff, parents and the students.
- The inspector listened to some students read.
- The inspector took account of the results of the online parent survey from 16 parents and responses from all the members of staff.

## Inspection team

Sandra Teacher, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- The Holmewood School is a special day school located in North London. It admits boys and girls aged between seven and 19 years with Asperger's Syndrome conditions, high functioning autism and associated language and communication difficulties. Some have a fragmented educational history including significant periods out of full-time education.
- The school was registered in December 2010 for up to 64 students. There are currently 35 on roll, of whom 33 are boys. Two thirds are from White British ethnic backgrounds and other represented groups include White European, Asian and Black Caribbean. All but three students have education, health and care plans or statements, that are funded by 10 different local authorities. The school is working to meet the requirements of each local authority's offer, each of which are unique.
- The school is divided into three phases: primary, secondary and sixth form.
- The school is part of the Dwight School partnership. It also works with local schools, local businesses and Barnet College for work experience and offsite provision.
- The school employs a wide range of specialist staff including a speech and language therapist, a psychotherapist and occupational therapist.
- The school's stated aims are 'to combine broad academic learning and a range of therapies to offer students a rewarding alternative to mainstream education ... by recognising students' strengths and successes and providing strategies for them to overcome their learning challenges'.
- The school's last inspection was in October 2011, followed by a material change visit in January 2014, which extended the age range from 18 to 19 years.
- The school gained autism accreditation in January 2014 and Investors in People in 2013, and is a Stonewall Champion. The school's accommodation is a converted house, but some specialist facilities - such as for physical education and farming - are shared with local schools and other providers.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Develop the provision in the sixth form by:
  - ensuring that the transition plans are accepted by the local colleges
  - extending vocational awards and building on qualifications gained in English and mathematics
  - acquiring a sixth form block so that older students can have their own learning environment.
- Improve the quality of teaching and learning further by:
  - ensuring that literacy and numeracy targets are made clear to all the teachers, students and their families and are used across the school, including for homework, in all the areas of learning
  - ensuring that pupils and students act on the advice given to them to improve their work
- Support the work of the proprietor and advisory board by:
  - working with the headteacher and senior leaders to ensure that they have a greater awareness of the link between staff performance management, and salary progression.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management

are good

- The headteacher is passionate about the work of the school and her ambitious vision is shared by staff, parents and the governing body. Considerable commitment and hard work have gone into the successful establishment of the school, and the meeting of all the independent school standards.
- The headteacher gives clear strategic direction to the school, and the management structure of senior and middle leaders is formulated to suit its expanding needs.
- Both internal and external monitoring of teaching and learning has contributed to the development of good provision and practice. There has been a considerable programme of training for all staff as the school has established ways of working and sought to implement these consistently. For example, a staff member has attended training on 'Extremism and Radicalisation'. However, with new staff in place and some staff absence, the full impact on the learning of all of the students has yet to be realised.
- The many school assessment systems are not yet fully integrated and teachers' performance targets to help staff improve are not always sharply linked to students' progress. The school already has plans in place to create an online system that will link all the information available and support speedy analysis.
- The range of activities meet the students' needs well and makes a significant contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In addition to National Curriculum subjects, a considerable emphasis is placed on developing students' personal skills. This successfully ensures that students develop practical skills required for adult life in Britain today and show respect and tolerance for all.
- Activities are enriched by a host of valuable experiences, tailor made to support the students in all aspects of their daily lives. These include residential farming trips, visits to the theatre to see *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, and visits from adults who are from the local autism community. The small number of girls have their own girls' club and recently visited a sexual health clinic.
- School surveys and inspection questionnaires indicate that parents are extremely happy with the school's work. The school has an open door policy. A range of methods of communicating with parents is used. This includes home visits and a daily contact book. A most exciting new 'press play' website supports homework effectively. Its use is proving very popular and already having a positive impact on students' attitudes to learning. A new parent partnership group has also been set up as a supportive network.
- Leaders have been extremely effective in fostering a range of supportive and worthwhile partnerships. They successfully draw on outside expertise to ensure that the students are given the best possible provision to meet their specific individual needs.
- As the school is growing, the management structure is evolving and middle managers are taking on positions of responsibilities. They have not yet all had time to monitor and review the work in their subject areas, but there are clear plans to do so.
- Equality of opportunity lies at the heart of the school's work, relationships are excellent and the school has created a family atmosphere where each student and adult is valued.
- Safeguarding arrangements are rigorous and robust, and fully meet statutory requirements. For example, the school trains the escorts who accompany the students to school.

#### ■ The governance of the school:

The proprietor and the advisory body have a clear sense of the school's direction. They have worked diligently with the headteacher to ensure that the school has the policies and procedures to operate effectively and to meet the independent school standards. Regular reports and meetings with the headteacher keep them informed about the school's performance and the quality of teaching. However, there is not always a clear understanding of the link between staff performance to inform decisions on salary progression.

The proprietor and the advisory board bring a wealth of experience and specific expertise to their roles. They have a good understanding of the needs of the students and can make worthwhile suggestions for further improvements and developments.

### The behaviour and safety of pupils

are good

#### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is typically good and records show that there have been dramatic improvements in their communication and social interaction skills. These improvements are carefully

recorded so that the clear, plans can be constantly modified to guide responses when students' behaviour sometimes dips. These strategies have worked very successfully.

- Learning takes place in a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Students have positive attitudes to learning, moving between short periods of intensive teaching and their chosen reward activities without difficulty.
- The management of students' behaviour is very effective. Members of staff know students very well and are adept at recognising triggers that indicate increasing stress and anxiety.
- Staff are skilful at managing transitions, both during the day and to new activities, to minimise upset to students and to maximise the time for learning. For instance, preparations to support independent travel or to take examinations are carefully and thoughtfully managed, enabling students to succeed.
- Students have the opportunity to contribute to a number of advocacy groups, where a range of school and local issues, environmental problems and community projects are discussed. Through decision-making, negotiation, listening and interacting with others, the students have a strong voice within the school.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep the students safe and secure is good. Policies and procedures are fully in place to safeguard students and to ensure that safe recruitment procedures are followed.
- High levels of staffing mean that students are very well supervised. Members of staff are alert to the harm which students may cause themselves as a consequence of their special needs. Praise and constant rewards are used well to reinforce positive behaviours.
- Considerable emphasis is placed on extending students' understanding of risk. This includes consideration of sexual health, internet safety, including cyber bullying, and homophobic bullying or preventing indoctrination to extremism. For example, in science or food technology lessons, students are reminded that they are dealing with hot or dangerous substances and should consider health and hygiene issues.
- Attendance improves significantly for many compared to their previous schools and is improving year on year. Very few remain persistent absentees and the school is working to improve attendance further.

### The quality of teaching

is good

- Teaching is good because it is generally closely matched to the personal and academic targets of each student. Lesson planning ensures that students work consistently towards their personal and academic targets. However, literacy and numeracy targets are not always emphasised sufficiently in the learning time. This leads to some missed opportunities for students to develop these skills in all subject areas.
- Sessions are carefully timed to make the most of students' concentration spans. This was seen in the primary school where pupils made outstanding progress in learning their letters and sounds. This is because rewards are used very effectively to mark each small success in learning. Short breaks are then created in which pupils enjoy choosing their own activities.
- All members of staff make good use of a range of communication techniques that build well on the speech and language therapy. They speak clearly and appropriately, encouraging students to recognise social cues and listen to others. This was observed in a Key Stage 3 mathematics lesson where students had to explain to each other what fractions were.
- There are specific sessions for guided reading and improving the use of grammar and punctuation. These are well planned and organised, and students work in different ability groups. Achievement and progress are good because teachers make the learning fun. Students learn about the past and present tense, or critically analyse song lyrics from a Willy Russell show by playing games and listening to music.
- A range of effective approaches, including questioning, is very effective in gauging how securely students have grasped what is taught. In a GCSE English lesson, students were required to write a piece of persuasive text. The lesson aim focused on giving them the required skills through an acronym reminder. The structure of the lesson and the skilled support of the teacher and teaching assistants in responding to students' questions demonstrated high ability learning and teaching.
- Students record their work in a variety of ways, with good use being made of a range of technologies; all have their own laptop computers. However, there is not always enough encouragement for the more able students to record their work independently. Some activities do not sufficiently inspire students and so the pace of learning slows.
- Teachers generally mark students' work promptly and there is good immediate spoken feedback. However, at times, written comments about students' next steps in learning are unclear. This means they are not always sure about what it is they have to do to improve their work. In addition, teachers often write comments about the quality of students' written work, but are inconsistent in checking if students respond to them.

- All the parents and carers are pleased with the quality of teaching and their child's enjoyment of learning. Students told the inspector that they are given individual help when needed and the support provided by the teaching assistants is particularly valuable. They enjoy coming to school and are 'learning loads'.
- As one student said, 'Students feel they can learn because of the ethos provided by the school and because of the freedom to make their own choices.'

### The achievement of pupils

is good

- The achievement of students is good because of the consistent progress they make whilst on roll at Holmewood. Most students have made limited progress before they start the school, often as a result of persistent absence from school or breakdown of previous placements. Their rate of progress then accelerates rapidly. For example, most of those who completed their Year 11 programme in 2013 made progress in English and mathematics in line with their peers in mainstream education. They secured GCSEs, including English and mathematics, and other functional skills accreditation, depending on their abilities.
- The abilities of the most able students are recognised. Where appropriate they sit early entry GCSE examinations to spread the work load, and special mentoring and tutorial arrangements are put in place. One student has already gained an A\* award at GCSE level in Spanish, whilst another is studying for physics A level at a nearby school.
- Students are given opportunities to read widely and often, which gives them good reading skills. They study poetry, plays, including Shakespeare, which culminated in a visit to see the Globe Theatre and a school performance of *Macbeth*.
- Achievement in personal development is outstanding and lies at the heart of the school. Students are very well prepared for their future lives through personal, social and health education lessons. Together with the mentoring programme, this makes an important contribution to students' moral, spiritual and cultural development, and personal development. In one mentoring session, for example, students were developing skills for independent travel through planning a route for a visit to Buckingham Palace.
- The coding computer club is a great success, and very popular with all of the students, helping to prepare them for their future lives. Other students achieve well through making smoothies to drink and learning about the benefits of a healthy lifestyle through healthy eating.
- Students' writing skills are less well developed and the school is exploring a range of alternatives to overcome barriers to writing by using the latest technologies.
- The use of the therapeutic education, that covers speech and language, art and music, makes an outstanding contribution to students' learning. It very effectively supports the ways in which students are given opportunities for learning and working with their peers. Both the one-to-one and the group work give careful consideration to students' barriers to learning. Excellent progress has been made by helping students to be motivated and keen to learn. This has a positive impact on their overall progress and achievement.

### The sixth form provision

is good

- The new sixth form provision has made a good start to providing a good quality of education to the three male students and one female student. Students make good progress. They reinforce their GCSE qualifications by resitting examinations, where necessary, to gain even higher grades, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Good links are being developed with local colleges and schools. Students are currently accessing childcare and A level physics courses. These courses contribute well to their work in school, and recent reports from the off-site provision are very positive. Transition plans are being put into place so that students will be able to access, and be prepared for, full-time attendance in the coming year.
- Teaching is good and each student receives a tailor-made plan. These plans place a strong emphasis on ensuring that students have a good understanding of potential risks to their health and well-being.
- Leaders of the sixth form have high expectations. They ensure that students receive good careers advice and can try out a range of work experiences, such as farming and construction. Such opportunities enable students to make well-informed choices about their future lives. One student wrote, after a visit to The Forest School, 'I enjoyed lighting fires and unleashing my inner adventurer! The Forest School is a wonderful experience and you can learn valuable skills.'
- Sixth form students also support their younger peers, such as reading with the primary pupils or taking

assemblies such as about Burns' Night celebrations.

- The leadership and management are working on plans to acquire a sixth form block to enable the students to have their own, independent learning environment.

## What inspection judgements mean

### School provision

Grade	Judgement
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Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook).



## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	136263
<b>Inspection number</b>	454298
<b>DfE registration number</b>	302/6201

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Special School
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	7–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	35
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	4
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mr D Rose
<b>Chair</b>	Mr D Rose
<b>Headteacher</b>	Lucia Santi
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	October 2011
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£54,000
<b>Telephone number</b>	0208 920 0660
<b>Fax number</b>	0208 445 9678
<b>Email address</b>	enquiries@thsl.org.uk

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Manchester  
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