

Snowflake School

46a Longridge Road, London SW5 9SJ

Inspection dates

12–14 January 2016

Overall effectiveness

Outstanding

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection

Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The headteacher and leadership team have created a school in which all staff have a thorough understanding of each and every pupil. This enables them to meet individual needs very effectively.
- Teaching across the school is outstanding. This is because of rigorous monitoring of teaching by leaders and excellent provision for professional development.
- The development of pupils' language and communication skills is central to the school's work. This helps pupils to make outstanding progress from their very low starting points on entry to the school.
- Policies and procedures for pupils' safety and welfare are implemented effectively to keep pupils safe.
- The school promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development extremely well.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils' individual tutors are proactive in supporting behaviour to ensure learning is not interrupted.
- The trustees bring a wide range of personal and professional skills to the school. They have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for development, and challenge and fully support the leadership team.
- Links with parents are strong. They are given excellent information on their children's progress through home–school diaries and regular reports.
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Establish stronger links between the school's specialist curriculum and the National Curriculum to further improve pupils' progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Leadership and management are outstanding. The headteacher's passionate commitment to the needs of pupils and their parents is shared by the whole school community.
- Leaders monitor teaching, learning and assessment rigorously to ensure they remain outstanding, and pupils make rapid progress. Supervisors monitor closely the daily one-to-one sessions and provide strong support to tutors. They also check the quality of learning in lessons through regular visits and setting high expectations for improvement.
- All staff feel proud to be associated with the school, typically commenting, 'I look forward to coming to the school every morning,' and, 'I can feel the positivity as soon as I enter the school building'.
- The curriculum is closely matched to pupils' needs. All pupils in the school have their own individual tutors, who ensure that their use of individualised schemes of work closely meets their pupils' needs. This ensures that pupils make accelerated progress. The school's specialist curriculum, based on a research programme, provides a useful tool for teaching, and assessing behaviour and academic learning. The school is continuing to improve the curriculum, for example by taking steps to link it with the National Curriculum. Staff make very good use of these links to raise expectations by comparing achievement with other pupils nationally who do not have special educational needs.
- The school's assessment procedures are outstanding. Pupils are assessed when they join the school both in their behaviour and academic competency. Progress is monitored half termly and reported to parents termly. Most pupils make rapid progress, particularly those with severe behavioural difficulties. They settle down very well to daily routines, and establish strong relationships with staff.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted effectively through assemblies and celebrations such as Christmas, Diwali and Eid. Pupils have many opportunities to learn about fundamental British values, for example on visits to Buckingham Palace and the London Eye.
- The welfare, safety and security of pupils are a strength of the school. All pupils, particularly those who find it hard to distinguish between what is safe and what is not, and get into difficulties when at home, are kept safe because staff are vigilant at all times. All policies and procedures are regularly updated and are on the website to keep parents informed.
- There was only one response to the online parents' questionnaire, but the inspector spoke to four parents when they came to drop their children off at the school. They all praised the school highly; as one said, 'education is outstanding and my child is happy and safe'.
- Safeguarding arrangements are strong and meet current requirements. The designated safeguarding leaders have undertaken appropriate training at the required level, and all staff receive regular update training on how to keep pupils safe.
- There is a clear performance management system for staff, which rewards outstanding performance in teaching. The system is appropriately linked to pupils' behaviour, academic progress and the staff's understanding of keeping pupils safe.
- The authorities that place their pupils in the school are given annual audited accounts in respect of the money they pay towards fees.
- Leaders have ensured that all the required regulations for independent school standards are met for leadership and management of the school's work, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection.

■ The governance of the school

- The trustees are closely involved in the work of the school. They are passionate about giving pupils the best possible education and care, ensuring that they are well prepared to develop into confident and independent adults. They believe that, as the school code states, 'as a snowflake is unique and there are no two alike, similarly all children are unique who need the best of everything to match their needs'.
- The trustees are very knowledgeable and have a very good understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. They have high expectations and support the school wholeheartedly to maintain high standards and ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Trustees come from different walks of life and bring a wealth of knowledge that benefits the school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding across the school. The very high pupil to staff ratio is used very effectively to support the learning and behaviour of their individual pupils throughout the day. The additional supervisors who are present in the three teaching rooms help pupils to extend their learning and provide excellent support to tutors if they face any difficult behaviour. Teaching of the most-able pupils, in pairs or groups of three, helps them work together very well socially and academically. Careful supervision of pupils in these sessions ensures that lessons are not interrupted and pupils pay full attention to their learning.
- Staff know their pupils' needs very well, and with the use of a wide range of resources are able to engage them in their learning. Alternative activities, for example watching a cartoon on an electronic device until ready to resume the task, are well directed to engage pupils showing signs of inattentiveness.
- Staff have excellent subject knowledge and plan their lessons extremely well. They are very knowledgeable about the next steps needed in learning that are challenging but also achievable. This stimulates learning and keeps pupils well motivated. Staff know pupils' likes and dislikes and use appropriate materials and resources to stimulate learning.
- Staff have established excellent routines both in the classroom and in the outdoor play area. This helps pupils to move from one activity to another smoothly and quickly with no time lost.
- Assessment procedures for both behaviour and academic progress are rigorous. Staff use assessment information extremely well. Pupils of all abilities are well challenged and as a result make outstanding progress.
- Pupils' writing and the mathematical work seen in their books are well presented and neat. However, the school's marking policy is not always followed, so that opportunities to assess and give advice on improving work are sometimes missed.
- There is an excellent focus on teaching sounds of the letters of the alphabet to link them together to make words. This significantly helps pupils to improve their reading skills. Younger pupils in their group session were quickly learning the sounds of 'ee' and 'oi'. They surprised themselves when they could link the sounds to make the words 'feet' and 'green', and 'coat' and 'boat'. This success motivated them to read more words and they made outstanding progress.
- The strong focus on teaching the basic skills of number, shape, space and measure is proving very successful. In one lesson, for example, the older, most-able pupils were making rapid progress in learning the properties of simple shapes, using signing to describe the number of sides of triangles, a square and a circle. Younger pupils were quickly learning the names of simple shapes.
- All staff are skilled in using a wide range of signs and symbols as well as verbal communication to make sure that all pupils fully understand their work and the tasks set.

- Staff use a wide range of visits and residential trips to further enhance learning. Visitors are also invited to talk about their life experiences, such as when parents came in to talk to pupils when they celebrated the school's 'international week'.
- All independent school standards for teaching, learning and assessment are met.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Policies and procedures for the welfare of pupils are strong and implemented effectively. There is a calm atmosphere in the school, so pupils enjoy being there.
- Parents, staff and pupils agree that pupils are safe and happy in the school. As one parent whose child has limited verbal skills wrote, 'my child kept on saying, "school school school", telling me how much he wants to go back to school after the holidays'.
- Parents are kept extremely well informed about their children's welfare through the home-school books. Almost every day, tutors report on how pupils behaved and the progress they made in their personal and academic development.
- Staff are highly trained in keeping pupils safe. All incidents, including where they occur outside the school, are recorded and followed up to ensure that pupils understand what is right and what is wrong, and how to remain safe even when not in school.
- Relationships with adults are strong. As one pupil said, 'I like school and I trust my teacher'. Attendance is good and pupils come to school on time.
- All the leaders ensure that the independent school standards for personal development, welfare and safety are met.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. All pupils enter the school with very complex needs. Most pupils settle down well because of the strong relationships with parents. Staff are highly skilled in managing pupils' behaviour and emotional needs.
- Staff are very proactive in supporting behaviour. The school policy of reinforcing positive behaviour is rigorously implemented across the school. This was seen, for example, where a tutor persisted in resolving a behaviour issue, helping pupils to understand that the rules are to be obeyed, and keeping learning moving in a calm learning environment.
- Pupils quickly learn what is acceptable and what is not. They are given many opportunities to socialise during snack- and lunchtimes, with very good supervision. The school records show that there have not been any exclusions or incidents of bullying.
- Behaviour in lessons is outstanding. This is because pupils are given activities and tasks that motivate them and are appropriately challenging. Lapses in concentration are handled well, so that pupils engage in doing a completely different activity until they are ready to go back to the original task. This also helps pupils to behave well.
- Leaders ensure that all the independent school standards for this aspect of the school's work are met.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils' achievement is outstanding because of the outstanding teaching they receive. When pupils join the school, they have very low levels of attainment and behaviour. All pupils are assessed, both in the skills they have, and for the barriers to their learning and development that need removing. The curriculum and schemes of work are tailored to individual needs.

- Staff have a strong expectation that the right match of work to pupils' abilities will motivate them to learn. They have been successful in doing this, and as a result pupils make exceptional progress in their behaviour and learning.
- The main focus is always on helping pupils to be able to communicate. Staff do this very effectively through teaching, signing and using a symbolic communication system. Technology is also used effectively, which excites and stimulates both behaviour and learning.
- The basic skills in reading, writing and numeracy are promoted very effectively. The most-able pupils are extremely well challenged and as a result older pupils are beginning to read simple stories and show their understanding through sequencing pictures and answering comprehension questions. They showed excellent understanding of why the giraffe became happy after getting a muffler to keep warm.
- The older most-able pupils are able to tell the time in hours and half hours, add coins to make a pound, and do simple fractions. This shows outstanding progress from when they started school. The younger most-able pupils quickly learn to link the sounds of letters to make words, can count to 10, and know the names of simple shapes.
- Monitoring records show that there is no difference between the progress made by different groups. This includes those who attract the pupil premium, or those from different ethnic communities. The school is very successful in meeting the needs of every individual.
- The school prepares pupils extremely well for the next stage of their education. Some of the most-able younger pupils visit a local mainstream school to get used to working in a class with a larger number of pupils and playing with them in a big playground. Some older pupils have made sufficient progress to move to a school which caters for pupils with less severe needs.

School details

Unique reference number	135616
Inspection number	10008525
DfE registration number	207/6408

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.

Type of school	Special school
School status	Independent
Age range of pupils	5–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	16
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Snowflake School Limited
Chair	Faryaneh Akhavan
Headteacher	David Haswell
Annual fees (day pupils)	£55,776
Telephone number	020 7370 3232
Website	www.snowflakeschool.org.uk
Email address	info@snowflakeschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	20–21 March 2013

Information about this school

- Snowflake School is an independent day school for autistic pupils. The school is registered for 17 pupils and currently has 16 pupils on roll, aged between five and 12 years. There are 15 boys and one girl. Fourteen pupils have a statement of special educational needs. Two pupils who do not have a statement of special educational needs have come from abroad and have complex special needs.
- The school was initially registered in September 2008 for 15 pupils aged from five to 14 years. In May 2012, it received permission to extend the age range to 16 years and extend the number of pupils to a maximum of 17. Currently, the oldest pupil in the school is 12 years old.
- The school was last inspected in March 2013 under section 162 of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005. The school is run by a charity, and the Chair of the Board of Trustees is the founder of the school.
- Pupils come from a diverse range of cultural backgrounds and most speak English as an additional language. All have difficulties in behavioural, emotional and social development and many have speech, language and communication needs. Very few pupils are eligible for pupil premium funding, but the school does not receive any additional funds.
- Different local authorities place pupils in the school and pay its fees.

- Pupils join the school at any stage 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.
- The school does not use alternative provision to educate its pupils.
- The current headteacher took up his post in September 2013.
- The school is oversubscribed and is planning to acquire another building to expand the service.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed all 16 pupils being taught by their tutors. Three group-teaching sessions were also observed through a combination of visits to lessons and learning walks. Teachers' planning, pupils' work and the school's assessment information were analysed.
- Meetings were held with the headteacher, assistant headteacher, teacher and other middle leaders.
- The inspector also met with three trustees.
- School policies and other documentation were examined on the website and through hard copies presented in the school.
- Records of pupils' behaviour and other incidents, as well as accident reports, were examined. Pupils' behaviour was also observed during breaktimes.
- A meeting was held with pupils in the presence of tutors.
- The views of all the 21 staff (100% response) that returned their questionnaires were analysed.
- Only one parent responded to the Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, and so could not be taken into account for statistical purposes. The inspector spoke to four parents (when they brought their children to school) to get their views.

Inspection team

Kanwaljit Singh, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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