

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk



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Dr Matthew Rayner
Headteacher
Stephen Hawking School
Brunton Place
London
E14 7LL

Dear Dr Rayner

Short inspection of Stephen Hawking School

Following my visit to the school on 23 February 2016 with Janice Howkins, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in March 2013.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

The school is a vibrant and welcoming place where pupils feel at ease. This means that they can engage very well in their activities. The focus is on education and learning, supported by effective care and provision for medical needs. You have embedded an inclusive culture where pupils are involved in religious festivals, sporting activities, musical experiences and daily life skills while they are learning the key skills of communication and social behaviour.

Wherever possible, pupils access learning alongside their peers in mainstream schools on a regular basis. A few pupils make exceptional progress and these placements in mainstream schools become permanent. Pupils and their families are very well prepared for transition into the school and for the next stage in their education when the pupil leaves the school.

At the time of the last inspection, you were asked to find ways to present information about pupils' progress more clearly. Leaders have devised a termly report for parents which provides detailed information about the learning that their child has been involved in and the progress they have made towards their individual targets. This is presented in an attractive, visual way which includes a wealth of photographs to demonstrate exactly what the pupil is able to do. You do not consider this to be a completed task, however, and continue to seek ways of improving your practice further. You also acknowledge that more formal reports of

individual progress would be strengthened further if they were linked more closely to the daily ongoing observations made in class.

Leaders have continued to expand the school's expertise in meeting the needs of pupils who have special educational needs or disability. Governors have supported the development of individual members of staff as they study relevant external qualifications. This includes study at postgraduate and foundation degree level.

Leaders share their expertise through the delivery of level 2 and level 3 qualifications for teaching assistants from this school and other schools. These courses provide staff with the necessary skills to support pupils' learning more effectively. The outreach team are commissioned by the local authority to work alongside staff in local primary schools where pupils with severe and complex needs are placed. The expertise of the outreach team is well received and held in high esteem by leaders of these other schools.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding of pupils is given the highest priority. Leaders have made sure that policies and procedures are adapted well to fit the context of this school and the special educational needs and disabilities of the pupils on roll. Members of staff are alert to any emerging concerns because they have strong relationships with pupils, regular training and a highly professional approach.

Leaders work closely with a range of other professionals, including those from health services. Regular meetings are held between school leaders, health professionals and the school's delegated social worker to discuss any issues that arise. This means that action can be taken very quickly if needed.

Leaders have not been complacent when new guidance or duties have been introduced. They have made sure that all staff are trained in child protection, and in the prevention of radicalisation and extremism. They recognise their wider responsibilities to the local community in this regard and maintain a high degree of vigilance.

Inspection findings

- Leaders are excellent role models. They work tirelessly to continually improve the outcomes for pupils within the school, all of whom have profound and multiple learning difficulties or multisensory impairment. Leaders have ensured that the school has continued to improve. The school has extended its support for other schools in the local area since the last inspection.
- Leaders use a range of tools to assess pupils' progress and judge whether this progress is as good as it could be. They do not accept the findings of one system but compare it with others. Consequently, they have confidence when judging the outcomes for pupils to be outstanding.

- Leaders and governors make sure that members of staff are well equipped to fulfil their roles successfully. The professional development provided by the school is a strength. Leaders provide training and accredited courses for both their own staff members and those from other schools. Governors have supported members of staff who wish to study relevant qualifications at foundation degree or postgraduate level. This means that the staff team are exceptionally well trained and are highly effective.
- Teachers and other adults assess pupils' skills accurately. They are highly proficient in using this information to plan motivating activities that are focused sharply on the next steps in learning for each individual. Teachers meet regularly with school nurses, physiotherapists, speech and language therapists, and occupational therapists to make sure that the targets they set for individual pupils take into account all of the pupils' needs.
- Pupils are engaged for prolonged periods of time because all adults in the classroom are involved in the delivery of dynamic and exciting lessons. For example, when telling Eric Carle's story of *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, a teacher used a caterpillar hand puppet and real fruit with holes through the middle, as depicted in the book's illustrations. Teaching assistants supported pupils as she told the story. Pupils' rapt attention demonstrated their engagement in the activity. Similar levels of motivation were seen throughout the school.
- Learning continues throughout the school day. While outside at lunchtime, for example, adults use the equipment available to continue pupils' learning. For example, a pupil was encouraged to look and focus on an adult spooning dry pasta into a bowl. While this proved challenging at first, the pupil persevered and over a few minutes was motivated to watch the action several times. Other pupils enjoyed the physical sensation of swinging or playing on the wide range of equipment with adult help.
- Well-established routines help pupils to understand the structure of the day and remain calm. A piece of music is played as pupils arrive at the front of school each day. The same music is played each day for a term. This tells pupils that they have arrived at school and need to be ready for learning. Similarly, a different piece of music is played as they leave at the end of the day to indicate that learning is finished and they are on their way home.
- Positive verbal feedback to pupils is a consistent feature. Members of staff at all levels acknowledge what pupils do or remind them to use their skills, for example by saying 'use your words' or 'good listening'.
- Regular class team meetings provide a forum for discussion about each individual pupil within the group. Any underachievement or slowing of progress is identified and strategies put in place to address this swiftly.

- Pupils' health needs are not allowed to delay learning. Wherever possible, members of staff attend to any medical needs within the classroom. Leaders arrange for paediatricians and other medical practitioners to hold clinics in the school so that parents can attend and pupils are out of lessons for the minimum amount of time possible. One school nurse commented, 'Our role is to make sure pupils are able to access learning.'
- Leaders have demonstrated creativity in commissioning services from outside the school. For example, they recognised that some families needed additional support and sought input from the educational psychology service in these cases. As a result, parents have a deeper understanding of their child's needs and can meet them more effectively within the home environment.
- All adults within the classroom make notes of the progress made by individual pupils on a daily basis. These notes are sharply focused on precisely what the pupil has done and what progress this demonstrates. Because they know the pupils so well, teachers can transfer their knowledge into reports for parents and other professionals. The link between the daily assessment system and more formal reporting is not clear, however, and therefore relies on the individual teacher's knowledge of the pupil.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and governors should ensure that:

- notes of pupils' progress made during lessons and written reports of progress made over a longer period of time are linked more closely.

I am copying this letter to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Regional Schools Commissioner and the Director of Children's Services for the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Gaynor Roberts
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

Inspectors made short visits to lessons in all classes to observe learning. They also joined pupils playing outdoors at lunchtime. Meetings were held with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, a representative from the local authority and senior leaders. An inspector also met with a group of staff including the school nurse, outreach team leader and home/school liaison officer. A wide range of documentation was scrutinised including the arrangements for safeguarding; information about assessment; and minutes from governing body meetings. Inspectors considered reports about the progress and attainment of a sample of pupils across all areas of their development.