

North West London Independent Special School

85 Old Oak Common Lane, East Acton, London W3 7DD

Inspection dates

7–9 February 2017

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	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- The school's proprietor is inspirational. His vision to provide a uniquely outstanding education for pupils who have complex needs is shared by all leaders and staff.
- Arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe and the school's robust systems ensure that they are right to feel this way.
- The truly inclusive ethos and very high standards ensure that no pupil is given up on. Against the odds, leaders and staff do whatever is necessary to facilitate outstanding outcomes for all pupils.
- Staff and pupils alike describe the school as a family. The sense of community is exceptional.
- Pupils make outstanding progress in their academic and personal development. They make especially rapid progress in English, mathematics, science, art and their social skills.
- Teaching is highly effective across the range of subjects and pupils learn outstandingly well.
- While pupils' overall progress from their starting points is tracked and reviewed in detail in the core subjects, leaders know they need to now do this in the same detail for all subjects.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Through a wide range of community activities, charity events, enrichment and innovative social skills activities, pupils are very well prepared for life in modern Britain.
- Training and support for staff are excellent.
- Staff are highly skilled in managing pupils' behaviour. Over time, pupils' challenging behaviour significantly decreases.
- The school's leaders can demonstrate that, on average, pupils' attendance doubles when compared with that at their previous settings. The rapid improvement in pupils' rates of attendance reflects the focused care and attention staff provide.
- Governance is very strong. Clear and robust structures ensure accountability and attention to detail. Governors have a detailed understanding of the school and are ambitious to support continual innovation.
- The proprietor and leadership team 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?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management by ensuring that pupils' progress in all subjects is tracked and analysed in the same detail as it is in English, mathematics, science and computing.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- North West London Independent Special School is led by a highly effective proprietor, supported by an equally capable governing body. The daily leadership of the school is innovatively led by co-headteachers, one with teaching and learning expertise, the other with social care and safeguarding skills. Together, the team oversees a truly effective therapeutic provision that uniquely and successfully teaches pupils who have autistic spectrum disorder, and social, emotional and mental health difficulties, together.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a key strength, threaded through every possible aspect of the school's work. Examples include personal and group therapy, 'group process', weekly personal, social and health education, citizenship qualifications, student council, leadership lessons and inspiring assemblies. Pupils contribute on a weekly basis to the local foodbank. They raise money for a range of charities and regularly visit places of cultural and religious interest in London and the local community. Pupils are given every opportunity to reflect and understand how people from different cultures and backgrounds contribute to life in modern Britain. The school's work to teach pupils about equality and diversity, as exemplified during lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) history month, is highly effective.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and very carefully matched to pupils' needs. The focus across year groups is on developing pupils' skills in literacy, numeracy, communication and social skills, as well as raising self-esteem and engagement with learning generally. Additionally, a very wide range of accredited learning is available to pupils, such as sports leadership, humanities, enterprise skills, digital skills and finance. As a result, pupils make excellent progress and are very well prepared for their next steps in learning. The school's enrichment programme has a further positive impact on developing pupils' social skills in preparation for their future. Older pupils access effective careers advice and undertake relevant and supportive work-experience placements, which ensure that they can make informed choices about their future.
- Leaders closely monitor the quality of teaching, learning and assessment. This information is used very effectively and linked to teachers' performance management and associated salary progression. As a result, overall teaching is outstanding. There are plans to develop this monitoring even further to ensure absolute consistency. Leaders have an accurate view of the school's strengths and areas for further development, including in relation to pupils' outstanding outcomes. However, while leaders are able to track, review and analyse pupils' progress from their starting points in English, mathematics, science and computing, they do not yet do so in the same detail, and with the same consistency, for the other subjects.

Governance

- Governance is highly effective. The proprietor, leaders and governors work together closely to ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently.

- The proprietor works alongside a multi-skilled governance team to provide excellent support and challenge to the school's co-headteachers and wider leadership team. Governors are fully committed to the school's ongoing innovation and speak knowledgeably and confidently about the school's strengths and areas for further development.
- Deployment of an executive headteacher and an external consultant provides regular monitoring of the school. This provides effective challenge to leaders and validation of the school's strengths.
- The proprietor and governors effectively oversee the school's systems for checking staff performance. They are closely involved in ensuring that decisions about salaries, including those of the co-headteachers, are rooted in evidence that is securely based on pupils' outcomes.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Pupils say that they feel safe in their school.
- A culture of care permeates the school. Staff at all levels share a commitment to keeping pupils safe.
- Pupils are taught very well about how to keep themselves safe, including online and outside school.
- The school's safeguarding policy is based on the Secretary of State's latest guidance, 'Keeping Children Safe in Education' (September 2016). All staff know this guidance and the school's safeguarding and child protection procedures, including in relation to physical intervention, allegations against staff and whistleblowing. As a result, pupils are kept safe from harm.
- The proprietor, staff and governors have all completed appropriate training, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty.
- The school's safeguarding log system is a highly effective tool for tracking the progress of concerns and referrals. Detailed records are kept and the school works very effectively with external agencies. Safeguarding leaders do not rest until they are assured that any external referrals have been taken seriously, and followed up appropriately.
- Highly effective systems are in place to follow up pupil absence. The school's 'assertive outreach' systems ensure that rapid action is taken to maximise pupils' attendance, and ensure that they are not at risk of harm.
- The school uses a range of off-site facilities to support its learning and enrichment programmes. Rigorous risk assessments are in place to ensure that effective action is taken to minimise risks to pupils' safety.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- The school's approach to teaching pupils is innovative and unique. In addition to more traditional class-based teaching of core subjects and a wide range of accredited courses, pupils are taught leadership, and thinking and social skills. These skills are taught in an integrated way through an engaging, therapeutic curriculum. As a result, pupils make excellent progress.
- On a weekly basis, pupils learn, debate and listen to one another in a therapeutic 'group process' session. Pupils and staff alike told the inspector that they look forward to this. In an observed session, all pupils in the school engaged in complex, philosophical discussion about gender equality. For pupils with such complex needs to have developed the ability to listen, empathise, take turns and manage disagreements in this way is excellent, and prepares them very well for their next steps.
- Teachers know and accurately check what pupils can do, before planning generally exciting and engaging activities that challenge them to develop their skills further, including homework. A hallmark of teaching in the school is the very high expectations the overwhelming majority of staff have of pupils. As a result, pupils take pride in their work and wanted to show the inspector what they were capable of.
- Teaching includes especially effective practice in art and science. Pupils were absolutely engaged in their learning, for example in measuring the calorie content of different crisps in science or in working on digital animation at a professional level in art and design. In both examples, pupils' learning had been precisely planned for, the classroom environment was calm, and pupils, including the most able, were being appropriately challenged. Leaders' monitoring records show that this is typical practice.
- Pupils make excellent progress in reading because they are encouraged to develop a love and enjoyment of reading. All adults are strong reading role models, as seen during the daily 'drop everything and read' initiative. Pupils, including least- and most-able readers, read with increasing expression and understanding. In every lesson, teachers regularly refer to key vocabulary in their subjects to check pupils' understanding.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils' social and emotional well-being is developed as a matter of priority. As well as through the offer of individual therapies, pupils rapidly develop their social skills and resilience to manage their emotions through the school's unique therapeutic approach.
- The inspection took place during LGBT history month, which featured throughout the school's building, assemblies and the curriculum. Pupils spoke eloquently about diversity, equality and the importance of British values.
- Pupils are very well prepared to live safely and productively in modern Britain, despite their many difficulties and vulnerabilities.

- Excellent arrangements for safeguarding confirm why pupils were universally confident in telling the inspector that they feel very safe in school.
- Pupils told the inspector that, 'bullying doesn't happen here'. Records show that where rare incidents of bullying do occur, staff deal with them swiftly and effectively.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school's positive behaviour system, which outlines clear and consistent rewards and consequences, is highly effective in challenging misbehaviour and reinforcing positive behaviours. Progress records of behaviour and physical intervention are detailed and clear, and effectively used alongside twice-daily briefings to discuss, diagnose and review causes of behavioural issues. As a result, pupils make excellent progress in managing their emotions and improving their behaviour. Incidents of misbehaviour and fixed-term exclusions typically significantly decrease for individual pupils over time.
- The school does not permanently exclude and is committed to 'never giving up' on pupils.
- Most pupils attend very regularly. Generally, pupils arrive at the school with poor attendance records. Their attendance improves rapidly, doubling in comparison with their starting points, on average.
- Highly effective training for staff, including in de-escalation and physical intervention, ensures that all adults truly understand pupils' complex needs and use the school's positive behaviour system consistently.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Group sizes are very small, and a significant proportion of pupils join and leave the school at different times of the year. Achievement on entry is typically very low. Despite this, the complex nature of pupils' needs and their histories of interrupted education, pupils' outcomes are outstanding.
- Observations in lessons and pupils' work show that current pupils in all year groups make rapid rates of progress in a range of subjects, particularly in English, mathematics, science and art. Pupils make especially excellent progress in their social and communication skills, and emotional well-being. More recently, progress in reading has improved even further as a result of the daily 'drop everything and read' initiative.
- The school's 'curriculum guarantee' entitles pupils to opportunities to work towards a wide range of academic and work-related courses designed to meet their needs and interests. Pupils are successful in completing qualifications in core subjects, art, photography, computing, leadership, boxing, music, cooking, debating, peer mentoring, citizenship and many others. As a result, they are very well prepared for the next stage of their education or training.
- The most able pupils are identified early and make, alongside all other pupils, excellent progress from their generally low starting points.

- Over the past three academic years, all Year 11 pupils proceeded to further education or an apprenticeship. More recently, some pupils have remained at the school for Year 12 where they are re-taking GCSE qualifications, attending supported work placements and working towards a wide range of relevant qualifications, in line with their abilities and interests.

School details

Unique reference number	135794
DfE registration number	307/6401
Inspection number	10012833

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	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Thomas Keaney
Chair	Thomas Keaney
Headteacher	Katrina Medley and Kevin Parker
Annual fees (day pupils)	£54,500 to £63,000
Telephone number	020 8749 5403
Website	www.tces.org.uk
Email address	admin.nwlis@tces.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	11–13 June 2013

Information about this school

- North West London Independent Special School is a school within TCES Group of schools for pupils who all have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan related to their autistic spectrum disorder or social, emotional and mental health difficulties.
- In September 2016, the Department for Education granted a material change to the school's registration, increasing its age range to 7 to 19. The school does not provide separate sixth-form provision and at the time of the inspection, there were four students aged 16 to 19.

- All pupils are placed and funded by a range of local authorities.
- This is the school's third inspection. It was last inspected in June 2013, when its overall effectiveness was judged to be good.
- Additional off-site sports and enrichment activities are made available to pupils as follows:
 - sports and gym activities at Bridge Park Community Centre, Brentfield
 - sports and athletics activities at Willesden Sports Centre, Willesden
 - trampolining at Phoenix High School, Shepherd's Bush
 - sports at Vale Farm Sports Centre, Wembley
 - rock climbing at West Way Sports Centre, White City.
- The school's website meets all the requirements of the independent school standards.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector jointly observed a wide range of teaching and learning with a co-headteacher throughout the inspection. He also heard pupils read, met with a group of pupils, observed an assembly and spoke with staff and pupils informally throughout the inspection.
- The inspector jointly scrutinised the school's information about pupils' progress and their attendance and behaviour.
- The inspector had several meetings with a wide range of staff, including the proprietor, leaders, teachers, therapists and teaching assistants. He also observed a briefing, a staff reflection session and considered the 19 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspector spoke with a representative of a large number of placing local authorities.
- The inspector reviewed a wide range of documentation, including school policies, logs, evidence of staff training, and information related to safeguarding and health and safety. He also spoke with the local authority's designated officer (LADO).
- There were not enough contributions to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, to generate a report. However, the inspector took account of parents' views by considering the school's most recent internal survey. He also met with a parent.
- The inspector also toured the premises and considered additional information and evidence in relation to the independent school standards.

Inspection team

James Waite, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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