

The Academy School

2 Pilgrims Place, Rosslyn Hill, Hampstead, London NW3 1NG

Inspection dates

17–19 January 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 proprietors have ensured that the school meets the requirements of the independent school standards.
- The school is unique. The quality of its leadership and management is outstanding. The headteacher and other proprietors have created a culture which allows pupils to excel.
- The quality of care, guidance and support is exceptional. Staff nurture pupils and transform their lives when they enter the school. This culture develops confident and well-rounded pupils who achieve very well.
- Leaders are highly ambitious for the school. They are forward thinking, and have introduced an advisory board to increase scrutiny of the school's work. This new initiative is at the early stage of developing.
- Leaders realise their ambition to prepare pupils well for the next stage of their education. Pupils successfully pass the Common Entrance Examinations (CEE) and 11+ entrance examinations to enter the schools of their choice. A few achieve scholarships.
- Achievement is outstanding and pupils make rapid progress to develop skills that are well above average for their age group.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding. Teaching is excellent and carefully planned to meet pupils' needs.
- The fast pace of lessons and workload do not overwhelm pupils; they are deeply involved in their learning. Pupils' maturity and self-discipline enables them to work at 'full stretch' for long periods.
- Behaviour is outstanding. Pupils observe boundaries, and show respect and tolerance.
- Pupils feel very safe in the school; they trust the staff and know they can turn to them at any time.
- Partnership work with parents is excellent; they are highly appreciative of the school's work with their children.
- The school's arrangements for safeguarding pupils are effective. Staff are vigilant and sensitive to pupils' needs.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Ensure that the newly formed advisory board develops its remit to provide the school with additional levels of scrutiny.
- Provide opportunities for staff to extend outstanding practice by developing partnership work with schools across different sectors.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Outstanding

- The headteacher and other proprietors have high expectations for the school and provide a first-class education for pupils. They maintain a steadfast approach to raising standards and accelerating learning so that all pupils succeed. Leaders and other staff are successful in unlocking pupils' potential.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have been highly effective in developing the school's culture. This has been possible because a stable and loyal staff provide excellent support. All live the school's ethos, which is focused on developing the whole child.
- Senior leaders are insightful and have an accurate understanding of the school's work. Their assessment is precise and focused on pupils' achievement. Hence, the school provides what they describe as 'a traditional and quirky education but in a modern manner'. As such, parents see the school's culture as unique for a number of reasons. One pointed out that the school's simple brochure reflected the school's approach to 'emphasising academic success and not a glossy public image'. Parents told inspectors that their children do not need an array of hi-tech resources' and they 'like the school's approach'. The education is highly flexible and individualised, and allows pupils to excel academically and socially. These are the main reasons why pupils achieve high standards in the common entrance examinations.
- The leadership team is consistent in ensuring that the school's vision reflects the Equality Act 2010. Admission is not dependent on pupils' academic prowess, and all pupils have equal opportunity to achieve well. The open door policy means that the quality of care, guidance and support is of high quality, and a key priority. For example, there is due regard to the protected characteristics in the Equality Act. This means that appropriate adjustments are made to accommodate pupils who have a disability or a specific need.
- Systems for monitoring pupils' well-being and academic progress are effective. Senior leaders analyse a range of assessment information and homework tasks to assess pupils' progress. They use their findings exceptionally well to amend the curriculum, and the organisation of groups to ensure that pupils have the support needed to make rapid progress. Thus, leaders ensure that they consistently sustain the school's ethos.
- The monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment is regular and thorough. Senior leaders are uncompromising and ensure that high quality teaching is sustained. Feedback provides clear guidance on areas for development with opportunities for staff to refine their skills internally. Leaders are developing plans to work with other schools to extend their outstanding practice.
- The appraisal of staff is linked to training and pupils' achievement. All staff are held to account for pupils' progress. As a result, there is no compromise, as the aims of the school must be met.
- The curriculum provides pupils with substantial insight into a range of subjects. The demands of the examinations mean that a high proportion of time is allocated to the teaching of English and mathematics, as well as to a range of other subjects. Pupils have access to all subjects including Latin, French, art, drama, and music and food technology. The school is a busy place, where learning is constant and fun, because teachers know

how to energise pupils. Pupils told inspectors that they are not overwhelmed by the challenges thrown at them. Enrichment activities increase pupils' understanding of British traditions and institutions. Pupils have opportunities to take part in regional and international activities, and annual school performances tap into, and extend, their artistic skills. For example, Year 6 pupils' performance of a song from *Les Misérables* illustrated melodious singing and their ability to rise to a challenging task as a group.

- The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school environment enables pupils to grow in confidence, express their viewpoints, debate and ask probing questions when exploring topics. For example, pupils in Years 2 and 3 explored the concept of colour to represent depression in Picasso's work. Additionally, Year 7 and 8 pupils considered the implications of obeying the essence of the Ten Commandments in the 21st century.
- British values permeate the school's work. Pupils know and exemplify the concepts of tolerance and respect, evident in their relationships and understanding of living in a diverse society. Work in general studies, history and the school council introduces pupils to the theory and practices of democracy.
- The number of pupils requiring additional support is extremely low. Provision for these pupils is accounted for in the curriculum. Partnership work with a local school provides much needed specialist support for those who need it. Close monitoring of attendance, close tracking, and the use of specific resources leads to pupils concerned making outstanding progress.

Governance

- The partnership board has a thorough understanding of the school's work, and all members make an excellent contribution to the school's development.
- Each member brings specific management skills to the board, which contribute to setting the strategic direction for the school. The board meets regularly and knows how well the school is performing. This direct, 'hands on' approach means that members have immediate feedback on the school's effectiveness. They monitor and evaluate the school's performance, through pupils' progress, staff appraisal and teaching. They ensure that expectations never fall below the standard expected. Board members ensure that staff receive support if required, but this is rare because the quality of teaching and learning is consistently outstanding.
- The partnership board has begun to forge links with a local independent school to set up an advisory board to provide independent and increased scrutiny of the school's work. The board has worked with the school to begin auditing its work and prioritise areas to scrutinise. Together, the school and board members have decided to focus on safeguarding. This is because it is a key priority nationally. The board intends to consider other aspects of the school's work. It is, however, too early to comment on the impact of their work.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school makes consistently good use of statutory guidance to make sure that staff are up to date. The quality of training ensures that staff can identify signs in pupils' behaviour

and act on their observations quickly. Training in all areas of safeguarding is thorough, as are risk assessments. There is attention to regional, national and international priorities, including child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation, children missing education and radicalisation. Senior staff with responsibility for leading safeguarding are knowledgeable about their duty to keep pupils safe. Likewise, staff and pupils know who to turn to if they have concerns. This includes staff making an appropriate referral if there are allegations against senior members of staff.

- Pre-employment checks meet requirements. The quality of recording of incidents is detailed and well maintained. The school makes very good use of the expertise of specialist staff. Referrals are timely, and pupils are protected from potential harm. Staff are vigilant and, because of the high level of trust, pupils turn to them without hesitation. Early help, if required, begins with the school providing professional support and working with external partners.
- The curriculum covers all aspects of safeguarding and ensures that pupils understand the basic rules of keeping safe, whether online, in school or out of school.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Outstanding

- Teachers are highly effective in developing pupils' confidence and love for learning. Expectations of what pupils can achieve are high. They know their pupils very well and engage them quickly in their work.
- Assessment on entry is used well to identify pupils' needs. Staff skilfully use the information to provide individual or group support and work that enables pupils to believe in themselves and improve quickly.
- Teachers are attentive to detail and swiftly identify the kind of pastoral or academic support pupils need to develop their learning. They sensitively tailor support and guidance to help pupils. Pupils do not fall behind, as teachers guide them to achieve their potential. Parents and pupils alike say that teachers' deep understanding of pupils and their belief in them are key factors to them achieving exceptionally well. Inspectors agree.
- A key feature of teachers' work is their approach to building pupils' confidence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils are happy to try anything, and are not afraid to be competitive; they accept setbacks without giving up.
- Teachers are passionate about their subjects and teaching at The Academy School. Strong subject knowledge permeates the curriculum, notably so in English and mathematics.
- All elements of pupils' literacy skills are highly developed, and pupils who are particularly gifted and talented pupils are well ahead in reading. For example, challenging texts such as *Great Expectations* are used in Year 5. Pupils are able to infer, make deductions and comment on the use of language when discussing the dilemmas the main character faced.
- Pupils are articulate and listen keenly before giving well thought out responses. Teachers encourage them to become inquisitive and give them opportunities to engage in debate or intervene with pertinent questions during teaching. Writing is a strength, with strong progress in all year groups. Pupils command and use a wide and varied vocabulary accurately. They have a very good understanding of how to organise their writing coherently into paragraphs. Pupils told inspectors that Latin helps them to use grammatical features accurately.

- The teaching of mathematics is of high quality. Pupils and parents spoke about the unremitting challenge in mathematics. Pupils take tangible pleasure in learning the subject. Teachers build pupils' confidence and work jointly with them. For instance, in the Years 7 and 8 mathematics lesson on algebra, the pace was intense. Short activities led to pupils working accurately and quickly, and knowing how to spot and explain errors in their work. They moved quickly from basic algebra to working out Pythagoras's theorem, while the most able pupils solved the theory unaided. This contributed to pupils consolidating and applying their mathematical skills to solving problems.
- Teaching is challenging across all subjects, and teachers demonstrate a passion for pupils to gain a deep knowledge of subjects taught. For example, in science, Year 6 pupils took part in experiments to explore the formation of limestone and the impact of carbon dioxide in the home. Pupils were able to talk about periodic tables, the formation of carbon dioxide, its use in carbonated drinks, and the impact on the body when it is absorbed.
- Teachers are ambitious for pupils, and reinforce skills taught through setting and assessing challenging homework. They ask probing questions and feedback is immediate. This gives teachers the opportunity to deal with misconceptions, extend thinking and helps pupils to know how they can improve their work.
- Classroom management is very good, and teachers show sensitivity when they speak to pupils who might be off-task by refocusing them quickly. Occasionally, work is not always checked when pupils make personal notes.
- The small class sizes help pupils to flourish, particularly as support is intensive and there is more time to work with them.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are proud of being a part of the school and speak glowingly about the benefits derived from the high-quality care, guidance and support provided. In the words of pupils, 'there is no need to make any changes, the school is very good as it is.' Pupils, like their parents, see the school as remarkable in the way it quickly transforms their attitudes. Pupils quickly lose their timidity and become confident learners.
- Pupils and parents alike say the school is safe. Pupils are clear about who to go to if they need to tell or require support. They are not afraid to talk to staff who they trust, and are confident that they will act quickly if there is a concern. Pupils are very much aware of how to keep safe.
- Personal, social and health education, general studies and assemblies are used effectively to direct and shape pupils' thinking about British values, and safeguarding matters. Pupils understand the rule of law. Good use was made of the recent referendum on Brexit, the hustings for the school council and the presidential election in the United States of America to explore the meaning of democracy.
- Across the school, pupils see this small, close and diverse community as a family. Pupils demonstrate a high level of respect for each other and the adults around them. They

show tolerance and understanding when interacting and working with each other. Pupils look up to former pupils as role models who, as internees, visit the school. They intend to do likewise. Pupils are deeply involved in charitable events, both locally, regionally and internationally, all of which contributes to their outstanding moral and social development.

- Pupils know the meaning of self-discipline, which is very strong and a key feature of the school's culture. They adopt the school's ethos effortlessly, are responsive to instructions and self-regulate without constant supervision.
- Pupils understand the meaning of good manners; they live it. While the school's culture is to call teachers by their first name, there is no over-familiarity. Pupils recognise boundaries; there is a high level of trust, and relationships are strong.
- Careers education and guidance begin in Year 4, and is of good quality. Pupils explore the world of work through project work before they enter Years 7 and 8. A range of visitors, including parents from different professions, provides them with additional information about a variety of academic and vocational pathways.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding in lessons and around the school.
- The environment is calm, convivial and relationships are strong. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour are rare, and the overwhelming majority of parents say that behaviour is very good.
- Records show that there are few incidents, and if they occur, they are dealt with swiftly and decisively. There is a zero tolerance towards poor behaviour.
- Pupils are knowledgeable about the different types of bullying; including prejudice-based bullying, for example being tolerant to others regardless of skin colour, ethnicity, ability, disability or religion or lifestyle. The school teaches pupils very effectively how to exercise tolerance.
- Attendance is in line with the national average. Variability occurs in some year groups because of religious celebrations and pupils attending interviews for secondary schools.

Outcomes for pupils

Outstanding

- Standards are high and pupils make outstanding progress. Results in the common entrance examinations, at the end of Years 6, 7 and 8, show that the vast majority of pupils achieve exceptionally well and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- On entry to the school, pupils' academic skills are above average in the various tests taken to identify their starting points. However, while test scores show that their academic level is above average, most who join the school in Year 3 and above do not have the confidence to demonstrate their true potential. Staff therefore provide a nurturing environment, which builds pupils' self-esteem and contributes to them making and sustaining rapid progress. As a result, they achieve well above average results in the 11+ and 13+ common entrance examinations. Progress is particularly strong in mathematics, a subject that pupils love; they embrace their teachers' passion for the subject.
- Book scrutiny shows clear evidence of strong progress in English and mathematics in all

year groups, especially in Years 4 and 5. Pupils command and use a wide vocabulary. There is a strong focus on pupils using a range of reading skills and reading different genres. They read fluently and accurately, and comprehension work shows very good engagement with different texts. Excellent oral and listening skills enable pupils to take part confidently in challenging debates.

- Across the curriculum, pupils make above average progress in all subjects. Pupils achieve very well because there is a consistent approach to teachers challenging them to apply themselves. Extension work is provided to deepen their understanding; homework is set to consolidate the taught skills, and individualised support builds pupils' confidence.
- The very few pupils requiring additional support make similarly rapid progress to other pupils because of the regular and intensive support that is focused on literacy and numeracy skills as well as science. Good planning and adaptation of the work covered means that these pupils can access the full curriculum offered.

School details

Unique reference number	131291
DfE registration number	202/6396
Inspection number	10008533

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 school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	6 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	89
Number of part-time pupils	1
Proprietor	Academy School (Hampstead) LLP
Chair	Chloe Sandars
Headteacher	Garth Evans
Annual fees (day pupils)	£19,005
Telephone number	020 7435 6621
Website	www.academyhampstead.com
Email address	office@academyhampstead.com
Date of previous inspection	4 November 2009

Information about this school

- The Academy School opened in 1997 as a co-educational preparatory school for pupils aged 6-14 in Hampstead, London.
- The school serves a diverse community of 89 pupils currently on roll.
- The proportion of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very low. A small minority speak English as an additional language but none is at the early stage of learning the language.
- Pupils join the school at age 6, but are accepted at any point during the academic year.
- The school works with Lime Springs, a local alternative provider, that offers specialist

part-time support when required.

- The school aims to provide pupils with ‘...a well-rounded education and take each child to their own maximum potential.’
- The school works in partnership with St Margaret’s Independent School.
- The school’s website meets the requirements on the publication of specified information in relation to the independent school standards. Where the information is not on the website, parents are directed to the school office to obtain it.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection team observed 14 teaching sessions across a range of subjects in both key stages. Six of these were joint observations undertaken with the headteacher. Inspectors also looked at pupils' work in both key stages.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, including the proprietors to consider and evaluate the impact of their work. Meetings were also held with other post holders with specific responsibilities for pupils' welfare, and their learning. The inspectors held discussions with two groups of pupils, and listened to several groups of pupils read from Years 2, 3, 4, 7 and 8.
- A meeting was held with a member of the recently formed advisory board.
- Inspectors considered 27 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke with a large number of parents who wanted to share their views when picking up their children on the first day of inspection. A meeting with parents also took place on the second day of the inspection. Inspectors also took into account 30 responses from parents who sent in the free text as part of the Ofsted survey, and 18 questionnaires completed by staff.
- The inspection team observed the school's work and scrutinised a range of documentation. This included the school's own review of its strengths and areas for improvement. Inspectors checked the school's monitoring of teaching and learning, policies, records of pupils' attainment, progress and behaviour, and evidence relating to safeguarding pupils, including case studies. The inspection team also took account of information from parents, and testimonials and letters from parents and pupils, past and present.

Inspection team

Carmen Rodney, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Karen Matthews

Ofsted Inspector

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