

Kestrel House School

104 Crouch Hill, Crouch End, London N8 9EA

Inspection dates

5–7 February 2019

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The new headteacher has quickly established a strong learning culture and has high aspirations for what pupils can achieve. She has begun to transform the learning environment and review the curriculum. This has had a positive impact on the progress pupils make.
- Governors and directors offer strong support, guidance and challenge. They maintained the quality of education during a time of leadership change.
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards are met. Safeguarding arrangements are effective.
- All staff foster trusting and positive relationships with pupils. In this nurturing environment, pupils develop socially and emotionally, and make good progress.
- Staff understand each pupil's unique and complex needs. They use this knowledge to plan bespoke activities that engage and motivate pupils in their learning.
- Staff deploy a range of approaches to maintain pupils' attention. Pupils are consistently praised for appropriate behaviour.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and most attend regularly. Pupils are well cared for and respected. Adults encourage them to learn and play together, and practise their independent skills.
- The well-being team offers wraparound care, therapy and support to pupils and their families. They provide advice and guidance to school staff to ensure that pupils' plans are met.
- Staff use sign language and visual aids to support the development of pupils' speech and language. Recent training has started to have an impact on staff's confidence and teaching ability.
- The school site is well maintained, and there are good-quality learning resources. Leaders plan to enhance this further.
- Staff record what pupils do. Capturing pupils' progress over time is a priority.
- As the age profile of pupils increases, leaders are looking to forge strong links with other provisions to ensure seamless transition.
- Recent initiatives to build stronger relationships with parents are proving successful.

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?

- Leaders must ensure that:
 - they support all staff to have the teaching skills and confidence to deliver the curriculum and phonics programme
 - staff are enabled to assess and record pupils' progress accurately over time
 - they develop links with other provisions to enable effective transition and prepare pupils for the next stage of their education and/or training.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The new headteacher has had a significant impact on the culture of learning at the school. Under her effective leadership, staff have reviewed the structure of the curriculum, how it is delivered, and improved the learning environment. The headteacher has established an ethos of high expectations, effective staff training and accountability.
- Leaders and governors have an accurate and honest understanding of the strengths of the school, and what needs to be done to secure further improvements. Leaders are clear about their commitment to support the headteacher, and have plans for the changes they want to implement.
- The headteacher has carried out a review of the curriculum. Leaders have implemented a system that provides bespoke programmes of study to meet the needs of each pupil's education, health and care (EHC) plan. The core curriculum of literacy and numeracy is enhanced with investigation, geography, expressive arts and creativity. Staff work collaboratively to plan engaging activities. The headteacher offers regular training for staff to develop their confidence and teaching skills in areas such as the teaching of sign language and early reading.
- Life skills and learning to be independent, in addition to pupils' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development, are given high priority. Teachers and staff find opportunities to celebrate the diversity of the school and pupils' families and backgrounds. For instance, during the inspection, parents were invited into a class to talk about their country of origin, their culture and what it means for them to live in modern Britain. Pupils were keen to share their knowledge of food and music and were able to find countries on the map. British traditions and festivals are celebrated, and pupils are encouraged to think about what it means to live in London. Leaders have established an ethos where all pupils are given the same opportunities beyond the classroom, irrespective of their specific learning needs.
- The headteacher is keen to forge links with other providers. As the age range of pupils increases, these connections will help pupils and their families as they move to the next stage of their education and/or training.
- Parents are very supportive of the school and the impact staff have on their children. As one parent, typically, said: 'My son thrives at Kestrel House school.' Another commented that the school was: 'Supportive and structured, whilst being caring and helpful.' They welcome opportunities to become more involved in the daily life of the school, so that they can be more aware of, and involved in, the education of their children. The newly appointed family liaison officer has already forged strong links with some families.

Governance

- Governors and the directors of the Acorn Care and Education group provide good support and challenge. They ensured that standards did not decline during a time of leadership turbulence. They have provided the headteacher with leadership capacity, seconding other leaders from the group to implement necessary changes.
- Governors have a realistic understanding of the actions required to secure further

improvement. They are committed to the pupils, and aspirational for the school. They have ensured that the school is financially secure and are keen to invest further.

- Governors are determined to ensure that the facilities are of the highest quality for their pupils. They have already demonstrated their commitment by the recent opening of the new sensory room.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Governors and leaders are clear about their statutory responsibilities to keep pupils and staff safe. Checks on the suitability of staff to work at the school are in line with statutory guidance and recorded well.
- Staff receive regular and up-to-date training on safeguarding matters, including for the 'Prevent' duty. They work very closely with individual pupils and are highly vigilant around identifying any changes in their behaviours that may indicate an issue. Any concerns are recorded on the new electronic system. This enables leaders to gather a range of relevant information so that they can intervene quickly, should they need to. Staff are aware of the highly complex needs of individual pupils, and some of the challenges facing their families.
- The school well-being team offers wraparound support for pupils and their families. This ensures that pupils get timely and effective intervention from outside agencies, when necessary. Increasingly strong partnerships with parents ensure that pupils quickly receive the help they need.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils are grouped according to their specific needs, rather than their age. Staff know each pupil's preferred learning style, interests and abilities. Teachers use this information to plan engaging activities that maintain pupils' attention using sensory and visual stimuli, movement and high-quality resources.
- Staff spend considerable time supporting pupils' speech and language development. They communicate verbally, using signing, and with visual and facial cues, to ensure that pupils consistently experience high levels of good-quality communication. Staff encourage pupils to interact with each other and adults. As a result, many make good progress.
- Learning support assistants (LSAs) are highly effective and make a strong contribution to pupils' achievements. They work seamlessly with the teacher to adapt activities, support individual pupils, and provide endless energy and motivation.
- The learning environment is bright, well resourced and well planned. The headteacher has adapted the layout of some classrooms to enhance this. Songs, music, creative activities, visual stimuli and technology are all utilised to engage pupils in their learning.
- Staff keep detailed records of what pupils do. They share information daily with parents through the home-school books. However, staff do not systematically note in these records, the progress pupils make from their starting points. Some of the pupils' achievements are too heavily reliant on staff intervention. The learning intention and learning outcome of activities are not always clear.
- Pupils are encouraged to become curious and active learners. They undertake

experiments, create artwork and learn about shapes and numbers. Early reading and writing is incorporated into lessons in an enjoyable and hands-on way. However, staff confidence in delivering these sessions is variable, and their further training is a priority for the school.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good. Each pupil has a well-being support plan that is linked to their EHC plan. The plan details each pupil's cognitive, learning, sensory, physical, communication and interaction needs. Staff use these plans to ensure that they communicate successfully with each pupil. They personalise each activity and anticipate situations that might prove stressful for individual pupils. In this way, pupils' anxiety is minimalised, and they are able to learn in a calm and productive way.
- The well-being group consists of a range of specialists who work individually with pupils and staff. They carefully track pupils' social and emotional well-being, and support speech and language development. They have established effective links with external agencies and parents to ensure that pupils receive the support they need.
- Leaders and staff have created a safe and stable environment in which pupils thrive. There is a balance between pupils working and playing together and having some time alone. The new sensory room provides a calm and stimulating place for pupils. Daily activities encourage pupils to practise key social skills, such as taking turns, sharing, waiting patiently and eating lunch together.
- Staff support pupils to learn independent skills and stay safe in the wider world. There are regular reminders about road safety, 'stranger danger', and staying safe online. It is a key priority to develop pupils' communication skills so that they are able to verbalise or articulate any worries or concerns.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and most do so regularly. Staff welcome pupils warmly at the start of each day. They know which pupils need to enjoy active time in the playground, and which need somewhere calm. Consequently, each day begins in a positive and productive way.
- Pupils receive good-quality one-to-one support and adult intervention throughout the day. Staff work consistently with the same groups of pupils and are quick to anticipate when a pupil becomes agitated, anxious or worried. Consequently, they de-escalate potential conflict by reacting quickly and calmly. Staff are well trained and highly supportive of each other. As a result, the school is a secure and safe place and some pupils have made strong progress in managing their own behaviours.
- Pupils are consistently reminded of how to behave towards each other. They rehearse respecting each other's personal space and being kind to and tolerant of each other. Staff model this at all times. Deliberate unkind behaviour or bullying does not happen.

Sometimes, a minor squabble or misdemeanour occurs, which is promptly, and effectively resolved by a teacher or LSA.

- The outdoor area is well supervised, secure and well resourced. Staff provide interesting and stimulating activities, which pupils value. For instance, they enjoy playing with the parachute or the bubble machine. At lunchtimes, pupils practise their social skills and eat together in the school hall. Trips and activities support pupils to prepare for life in modern Britain. For instance, they recently had a meal out together at a local restaurant.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils arrive with highly complex social, emotional and learning needs. Staff undertake a comprehensive assessment of their cognitive, sensory, physical, communication and interaction need. Individualised programmes are developed in line with each pupil's EHC plan. Staff quickly establish positive routines to ensure that pupils make good progress in all areas.
- Pupils undertake project work that encourages working across different subjects. Pupils are encouraged to deepen their thinking in a number of ways. This includes in writing, reading, recognising shapes and sounds, and exploring textures and objects. Staff encourage creativity and the use of the senses. Pupils' particular skills and interests, such as drawing or reading maps, are drawn on to engage and motivate them in lessons.
- Classrooms display good-quality artwork and examples of pupils' writing. Some pupils demonstrate increasing competence in these areas. Older pupils work towards pre-entry level accreditation.
- Teachers report regularly and comprehensively to parents and the local authority on what pupils can do. They write reports for different subjects, and comment on pupils' academic achievement and their social, emotional and communication development.
- Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their learning. Staff plan regular opportunities to promote pupils' independent skills. The life skills room provides opportunities for pupils to prepare food, and there are regular visits to the local shops. This helps pupils to learn different skills and use local resources to extend their learning environment.
- Pupils are now set personalised targets, which are reviewed half-termly. These include in key skills, such as literacy, numeracy, communication and science. Teachers review and note the activities that pupils carry out in these different areas. Checking on the progress pupils make against these targets is a school priority.

School details

Unique reference number	135683
DfE registration number	309/6002
Inspection number	10067177

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	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	24
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education
Chair	Craig Ribbons
Headteacher	Lorna Bailey
Annual fees (day pupils)	£49,950
Telephone number	020 8348 8500
Website	www.kestrelhouseschool.co.uk
Email address	admin@kestrelhouseschool.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	5–7 February 2019

Information about this school

- Kestrel House School is an independent special school, and is part of Acorn Care and Education group of schools.
- There are 24 pupils on roll, of which there are three girls and 21 boys. All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. These are related to autistic spectrum disorders and associated difficulties and conditions, including attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, mood disorders, mental health issues and other learning difficulties.
- Pupils are referred to the school by local authorities. The school does not receive pupil premium funding.

- The majority of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- No pupil attends off-site provision.
- In the last two years, there have been numerous changes in senior leadership. A new headteacher was appointed in September 2018, and assumed the substantive post in January 2019.
- An on-site well-being team consists of a well-being manager, a clinical psychologist, a senior occupational therapist, psychotherapists in music and play, a newly appointed family liaison officer and a well-being coordinator.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector visited all five classrooms at various points to observe teaching, learning and assessment.
- The inspector held discussions with directors from Acorn Care and Education who represent the proprietor, the chair of governors, the headteacher, the well-being manager, teachers and learning support assistants. The inspector observed pupils at play and lunchtime and watched them interact with staff.
- The inspector took account of the four responses to Parent View, two completed parent questionnaires and the views of parents at the start and end of the school day. The inspector considered the 18 responses to the staff survey and 13 responses from a pupil questionnaire generated by the school.
- The inspector scrutinised a wide range of documentation including: records relating to pupils' behaviour and attendance, minutes of meetings, information on the progress made by current pupils, the school's self-evaluation documentation and the school development plan.
- Inspectors reviewed safeguarding records, policies and procedures. They checked the school's procedures for ensuring the safe recruitment of staff.

Inspection team

Helen Matthews, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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