

Inspection of Vanguard School

Lollard Street, Kennington, London SE11 6QH

Inspection dates: 6 and 7 December 2022

Overall effectiveness

Requires improvement

The quality of education

Requires improvement

Behaviour and attitudes

Requires improvement

Personal development

Requires improvement

Leadership and management

Requires improvement

Previous inspection grade

Not previously inspected under section 5
of the Education Act 2005

What is it like to attend this school?

This school opened just before the COVID-19 pandemic began. This meant that school life was disrupted just as it was starting to become established. High levels of staff turnover, including at a senior level, have stunted the school's development. As a result, some parents and carers have lost confidence in the school's leadership.

Pupils sometimes struggle to maintain a high standard of behaviour, and this is not helped by the constant staffing changes. Some pupils are regularly out of class. At these times, staff supervise pupils appropriately. Any reports of bullying are followed up thoroughly by leaders. Leaders also work to make sure that pupils have a secure understanding of what bullying is.

Leaders have high ambitions for what pupils can achieve in recognised qualifications. However, these ambitions have not been realised. This is because the curriculum lacks structure in some subjects. Enrichment opportunities, such as visits to local cafés and shops, have been limited by the lack of familiar staff to accompany pupils.

Pupils are kept safe in school. Staff have been trained in autism awareness, so they understand pupils' needs. However, high levels of staff turnover mean that a few pupils are not sure whom they can speak to if they are worried.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The current leadership team members have been in place since September 2022. Since taking on leadership of the school, they have prioritised the right things. They have made sure that all staff have up-to-date training in safeguarding, behaviour management and autism awareness. New staff have received a comprehensive package of training as part of their induction. This means that pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are understood by staff.

Leaders' vision is to provide a specialist setting where pupils who have autism can achieve nationally recognised qualifications in a range of subjects. Class timetables reflect this ambitious aim, showing a suitable range of subjects being taught. However, in some subjects, curriculum thinking is underdeveloped or has only started in very recent weeks.

The curriculum has not yet enabled pupils to build up and develop their knowledge strongly enough in some subjects. In these subjects, current leaders are trying to work out what has been taught previously, as it is difficult for them to know what has been taught and when. Until recently, a lack of oversight and guidance have meant that teachers have decided for themselves what to teach, leading to a lack of coherence in the curriculum. Sometimes, where there are two teachers delivering the same subject, they teach entirely different subject knowledge. Teachers' assessment of what pupils know is too often driven by preparation for examinations. Some teachers do not know what knowledge pupils have embedded in their long-term memory.

Most pupils arrive at the school able to decode text. Leaders promote a love of reading through careful selection of texts and encouraging pupils to read regularly, both at home and at school. Leaders make sure that pupils have opportunities to develop their confidence in reading aloud.

Some teachers are making suitable curriculum choices, and this works well. In these cases, they have developed curriculums that build key knowledge and concepts over time. For example, in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, pupils learn about consent in a range of different contexts as they move from Year 7 to Year 13. This starts with consent to borrow items from a classmate in Year 7. By Year 11, they are learning about the issue of consent in sexual relationships.

Pupils are prepared for life after school. They receive appropriate careers information, advice and guidance. Leaders provide suitable work experience opportunities for older pupils but, to date, these have been short term, taking place over only a few days.

Staff focus on making sure that they deliver the curriculum in a way that supports pupils' SEND. Leaders have made sure that all staff are trained in strategies that may help pupils who have autism, and these are used consistently.

Some pupils find it difficult to stay in class. They become dysregulated and are supported by staff in corridors or through engaging in a relaxing activity that helps the pupil to regain their self-control. Staff's support at these times reduces the negative impact on others' learning. Any incidents are dealt with calmly by staff and carefully recorded.

Leaders provide enrichment opportunities during the school day. These include activities tailored to pupils' interests, such as football and board games. School trips and visits, including to local community facilities to practise life skills, have been limited due to high rates of staff absence and turnover. Pupils are disappointed when planned trips are postponed.

The current interim principal and trust leaders have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in the school. However, over time, trust leaders and governors have under-estimated the challenges of running a school for pupils with complex needs, and where pupil numbers increase rapidly. They have not provided clear support to enable leaders to secure appropriate staffing structures. Staff recognise leaders' efforts to support their well-being. However, the instability of the staff team has resulted in an increased workload for established staff, including at the leadership level.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders have ensured that all staff have received up-to-date training on safeguarding matters. Staff are alert to any signs of concern and know how to report them. Increased capacity in the safeguarding team means that any concerns are followed up swiftly and thoroughly. Safeguarding leads work closely with parents, teachers, support staff and external agencies as appropriate to each individual case. Through the PSHE education programme and assemblies, pupils are taught how to keep themselves and others safe.

Leaders have worked closely with the local authority to check that their safeguarding processes meet statutory requirements. Pre-employment checks on staff's suitability are undertaken and recorded thoroughly.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Over time, trust leaders and those responsible for governance have not fully understood the day-to-day challenges faced by school staff. Frequent changes in staffing and high rates of staff absence have destabilised the school. This has resulted in over-reliance on established staff and the leadership team. Leaders, including trust leaders, should stabilise the staff team, including at the leadership level. They should strengthen governance and oversight processes so that leaders can be supported and held accountable for their work to improve the school.
- In some subjects, the curriculum lacks coherence. Leaders have not set out the important knowledge and skills that they expect pupils to learn in a logical sequence. This means that pupils are not able to secure knowledge and skills in their long-term memory. Leaders should make sure that a clear, structured curriculum is in place in all subjects.
- Teachers' assessment of pupils' knowledge is reliant on preparation for examinations. This means that gaps in pupils' knowledge are not consistently identified and addressed. Leaders should ensure that teachers are trained in assessment strategies, so they have an accurate understanding of what pupils know and where there are any gaps in pupils' understanding.
- Wider opportunities provided for pupils have been limited by staff absence. This means that pupils miss out on trips and visits, including opportunities to practise life skills through visits to community facilities such as shops and libraries. Leaders should make sure that these opportunities are embedded in the curriculum.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	142928
Local authority	Lambeth
Inspection number	10259466
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	58
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	7
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Fleur Bothwick
Principal	Debra Eason (Interim Principal)
Website	https://www.vanguardschool.org.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Vanguard School opened in January 2020 and caters for pupils aged 11 to 19 who have a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder. This was the school's first inspection.
- The current interim principal joined the school in September 2022. Other senior leaders also took up their posts at that time.
- All the pupils attending this school have education, health and care plans. The school aims to meet the needs of those pupils who are not able to access mainstream education because of their SEND, but who are able to access nationally recognised qualifications, such as GCSE and BTEC National Diploma courses, by the end of Year 11.
- The school does not use any alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspectors carried out this graded inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors met with the interim headteacher, other senior leaders and staff. They also met with trust leaders. The lead inspector held a telephone conversation with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, art, geography and PSHE education. For each deep dive, inspectors discussed the curriculum with leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also spoke to leaders about the curriculum in some other subjects and visited some lessons in these subjects.
- Inspectors met with the designated safeguarding lead to discuss the school's safeguarding processes and consider some case files. Inspectors spoke to staff and pupils about safeguarding. They looked at the school's single central record of pre-employment checks on staff.
- Inspectors also considered the school's logs of concerns about behaviour, including records of any physical intervention. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school, including at the end of the school day.
- Inspectors spoke to leaders and pupils about the school's wider offer of enrichment activities and careers education.
- Inspectors scrutinised the responses to Ofsted's surveys for parents, pupils and staff.
- At the time of this inspection, the number of pupils in the sixth form was very small. Some were in the transition process and were not yet attending school full-time. Inspectors did not make a separate judgement about the sixth form to avoid identifying individual pupils.

Inspection team

Gaynor Roberts, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Sarah Murphy

His Majesty's Inspector

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