

Inspection of School 21

Pitchford Street, Stratford E15 4RZ

Inspection dates: 13 and 14 March 2023

| Overall effectiveness | Requires improvement |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| The quality of education | Requires improvement |
| Behaviour and attitudes | Requires improvement |
| Personal development | Good |
| Leadership and management | Requires improvement |
| Early years provision | Good |
| Sixth-form provision | Good |
| Previous inspection grade | Outstanding |

This school was last inspected nine years ago and judged 'Outstanding' under a previous inspection framework. This reflected the school's overall effectiveness under the inspection framework in use at the time.

From then until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. Judgements in this report are based on the current inspection framework and also reflect changes that may have happened at any point since the last inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

Leaders have a clear vision and ambition to provide innovative and inclusive education in this all-through setting. Many pupils, particularly those in the primary years and in the sixth form, benefit from a well-thought-out curriculum. However, this ambition is not realised to the same extent across all the different phases of the school.

Pupils have a very positive start to their education in the primary years at School 21. A calm and purposeful learning environment from Reception to Year 6 helps pupils to work hard and achieve well. In the large sixth form, a clear curriculum taught by staff with strong subject knowledge prepares students well for their next steps. In the secondary phase of the school, however, curriculum content and implementation is inconsistent. This leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge.

Pupils feel safe in the school and say that bullying is rare. Pupils in the primary years behave well in lessons and around the building. Lessons in the secondary years are too often disrupted by poor behaviour, and sometimes, older pupils do not behave appropriately at social times.

Leaders have emphasised the development of pupils' experiences beyond the academic. This is best exemplified in the impressive programme of work-related projects for pupils in Year 10 and Year 12.

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

Leaders have put together a curriculum that they see as innovative and reflective of the context of the school and pupils' needs. Where this works well pupils benefit from carefully sequenced lessons where content has been well-thought-out. For example, in music, the curriculum is designed to build up skills and knowledge year by year from Reception onwards. The mathematics curriculum shows similar ambition, with careful sequencing which means that learning is revisited and embedded.

An engaging and well-resourced early years environment gives pupils a strong start in the school. Adults engage positively with children to develop early number and vocabulary skills. A carefully thought-out reading curriculum starts in Reception and develops through the primary school. Teachers are quick to spot any gaps and they put appropriate support in place for pupils who need more help with reading.

In some subjects, the curriculum choices do not help pupils to learn more and remember more. For example, there is sometimes a lack of connection in the same subject between the primary and secondary phases. This does not help pupils to build on their prior learning. The curriculum is broad but the content choices in some subjects in Years 7 to 9 mean that pupils have gaps in their knowledge.

Teachers in the primary phase regularly check pupils' understanding. Any gaps in pupils' knowledge are addressed quickly. However, in the secondary phase, pupils' understanding is not regularly checked and their work is often incomplete. This means that misconceptions are not addressed quickly and leads to gaps in pupils' understanding. As a result, some pupils do not feel well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Most pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) follow the same curriculum as their peers. A few pupils with more complex needs follow a tailored programme. Teachers are provided with information about pupils' needs but sometimes they do not use this to adapt their teaching effectively. This means that sometimes, these pupils are not able to access the work that has been set.

In the sixth form, students follow an academic pathway taught by subject specialists with strong subject knowledge. Expectations for students in the sixth form are high. Students develop effective study habits and achieve strong outcomes at A level.

Leaders have established clear behaviour systems and they have high expectations. Bullying is rare, and pupils know that teachers will deal with it, if it is reported. However, older pupils have less confidence in staff to do this. The clear behaviour systems are not consistently applied across the school. Pupils in the primary years and in the sixth form demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning, but learning is disrupted by some pupils in lessons in the secondary phase. This leads to interrupted lessons and lost learning opportunities. On occasions, pupils do not behave appropriately at social times.

Leaders are committed to broadening pupils' horizons and providing opportunities beyond the academic curriculum. A programme of personal development is taught from Reception through to Year 13. This gives pupils important information about how to stay safe. Teachers and leaders adapt this programme to respond to current issues, and pupils have opportunities for follow-up discussions when necessary. Leaders are rightly proud of the careers advice and guidance that pupils receive from Year 7 upwards. This includes a comprehensive programme of highly personalised work experience placements where pupils have the opportunity to work in a range of employment sectors.

Pupils present themselves confidently, supported by the school's emphasis on developing oracy. There are opportunities for pupils to take on leadership responsibilities in school, for example diversity ambassadors lead assemblies for their classmates in the primary phase.

Trustees and leaders share their vision for the school and recognise where improvements need to be made. They know that inconsistencies mean that their vision is yet to be realised. Staff have access to appropriate training and development, and teachers who are new to the profession feel very well supported.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

A well-qualified safeguarding team is able to respond quickly to any concerns raised about pupils' well-being or safety. Staff know to report any concerns in a timely way, although leaders do not always check that the weekly safeguarding information they share with staff has been read and understood. Leaders carry out appropriate pre-employment checks on all staff.

Pupils know that they can report their concerns to adults, and in the primary phase they can also make use of the 'worry boxes'. Pupils have been taught how to keep themselves safe, including how to stay safe online.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- In some subjects in the secondary phase, the curriculum that is offered does not support pupils to know more and to remember more. Leaders and teachers need to be clearer about what key content needs to be taught, how it builds on previous learning, and how it will support future learning, so the pupils can build strong subject knowledge over time.
- Teachers do not routinely check pupils' understanding, particularly in the secondary phase of the school. This leads to gaps in pupils' knowledge. Leaders should ensure that teachers should routinely check pupils' understanding and revisit areas where there are gaps in pupils' knowledge so that pupils are better prepared for the next steps in their education.
- Some teachers do not use the information that they receive about pupils with SEND to adapt their teaching for these pupils. This means that some pupils with SEND are not able to achieve as highly as they should. Leaders should ensure that staff make use of the provided information and adapt the delivery of the curriculum to meet the needs of pupils with SEND.
- The school behaviour policy is not applied consistently by staff. As a result, some pupils do not behave as well as they should in lessons and around the building. This is mainly the case in the secondary phase of the school. Leaders should ensure that their high expectations of behaviour are applied consistently and effectively by all members of staff so that pupils can learn in a calm and orderly environment.

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

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| Unique reference number | 138196 |
| Local authority | Newham |
| Inspection number | 10265830 |
| Type of school | All-through |
| School category | Academy free school |
| Age range of pupils | 4 to 18 |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 1,197 |
| Of which, number on roll in the sixth form | 301 |
| Appropriate authority | Board of trustees |
| Chair of trust | Richard Collier-Keywood |
| Headteacher | Nicola Mason |
| Website | school21.org.uk |
| Date of previous inspection | 29 and 30 March 2022, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005 |

Information about this school

- School 21 is part of Big Education Trust.
- There have been recent significant changes to the school leadership team.
- On occasions, the school makes use of Newham College for a very small number of pupils in Year 11.
- The school has grown significantly in size since the last inspection, and now has pupils in all year groups from Reception to Year 13.
- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 7 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

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 carried out deep dives in reading, mathematics, history, music, and art and design. For each deep dive, they discussed the curriculum with subject leaders, visited lessons, looked at pupils' work and talked to teachers and pupils. Inspectors also met with subject leaders for English and geography. They looked at curriculum information and visited lessons.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher and senior leaders, and with members of staff, as well as a range of pupils.
- Inspectors looked at the school's policies and procedures for safeguarding and supporting pupils' welfare and well-being. This included looking at case studies and reviewing the school's single central record of pre-employment checks.
- Inspectors met with leaders responsible for early years, the sixth form, SEND, careers education, reading, behaviour and attendance, and pupils' wider development. Inspectors met with governors and trustees, including the chair of the multi-academy trust. The lead inspector met with the chief executive officer for the trust.

Inspection team

| | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| Bob Hamlyn, lead inspector | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Bruce Goddard | Ofsted Inspector |
| Deborah Walters | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Rebecca Iles-Smith | His Majesty's Inspector |
| Anne Hudson | Ofsted Inspector |

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