

Inspection of Spa School, Bermondsey

Monnow Road, London SE1 5RN

Inspection dates: 22 and 23 May 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education	Good
Behaviour and attitudes	Outstanding
Personal development	Good
Leadership and management	Good
Sixth-form provision	Good
Previous inspection grade	Outstanding

The head of school is Georgina Quigley. This school is part of the Spa Education Trust, which means other people in the trust also have responsibility for running the school. The trust is run by the chief executive officer who is also the executive headteacher, Steph Lea, and overseen by a board of trustees, chaired by Holly McAlpine.

Ofsted has not previously inspected Spa School, Bermondsey as an academy under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 as, until November 2020, the school was exempted by law from routine inspection, so there has been a longer gap than usual between inspections. However, the academy received an ungraded inspection under section 8 of the Act on 17 and 18 January 2023. 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 graded inspection of the predecessor school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This school is aspirational for all pupils' academic, personal and social development. Experiences and the curriculum are designed to ensure that pupils learn important, meaningful and functional information. These are well chosen to help pupils in their lives beyond school.

Pupils said they enjoy coming to school and trust adults will support them if they are worried or unsure. This helps them to feel safe. Some pupils spoke about their ambitions for the future and how the school is helping them to realise these. The school does this through links with local colleges, preparing pupils for functional skills exams and personal progress qualifications. As well as teaching independence skills such as cooking and how to do laundry.

The school provides a range of opportunities to develop pupils' interests as well as to experience new activities. This includes weekly special interest lessons, where pupils take part in activities of their choice. For example, these include musical theatre, horticulture or learning to play the piano.

The school proudly talks to pupils about autism and how each of them is unique. This helps pupils to understand the individual needs of one another. Consequentially, pupils build positive relationships with their peers, cooperating with and working alongside each other well. This means that inside and outside of classrooms are places where pupils can, and do, learn without distraction.

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

The school's curriculum aims to prepare pupils for adulthood. Pupils, and students in the sixth form, learn a broad range of subjects. They gain qualifications, awards and accreditations. These prepare them well for their next steps in education or employment.

The curriculum, including in the sixth form, is ambitious. It is designed to enable specific subject knowledge to be taught alongside personalised learning goals. The sequencing of knowledge in most subjects ensures that key skills and knowledge build up progressively. These are carefully considered to ensure that they are in line with pupils' personal learning needs. However, in a few subjects, the school is still developing curriculum thinking. The school aims to ensure that all pupils can learn new knowledge and skills cumulatively. In those few subjects where curriculum thinking is not as precise, pupils are sometimes moved on to new learning too quickly, without having secure prior understanding. This sometimes means they have gaps in the prior knowledge needed to learn new skills and to be able to remember more.

The staff team members know the pupils exceptionally well. They keep a close eye on pupils' academic progress and social development. They also build positive working relationships with pupils. These enable teachers to adapt their teaching in

an individualised manner to support pupils in their learning and address their knowledge gaps. They also use pupils' interests to create motivating work.

The teaching of reading is prioritised. All staff know the importance of reading. They understand how it enables pupils to become more independent, improves communication and can keep pupils safe. There is a systematic approach to teaching phonics, including in the sixth form when needed. Staff have been trained in the school's approaches. However, the agreed methods are sometimes not implemented as consistently as they should be. Occasionally, staff do not precisely know the phonics sounds that pupils are learning. Sometimes, activities do not allow pupils to access the intended learning as effectively as they could. In these instances, pupils do not develop confidence and reading skills as well as they should.

The governing body members have taken effective action to improve their understanding of the quality of the school's education. Although this is still developing, they check the quality of the curriculum more robustly and challenge leaders more effectively.

The school's personal development provision is thoughtful and responsive to the needs of pupils. Pupils are taught important life skills to build their confidence and independence. This includes weekly learning in the community. For example, pupils regularly visit the public library, post office and supermarkets. They practise what they have learned in real-life situations. Students in the sixth form also have the opportunity to participate in overnight residential stays. They take part in adventurous activities such as archery, as well as work experience in the school's café.

Staff said that they value the training they receive in relation to behaviour management. They feel well supported by leaders. They apply their training effectively. They understand the individual needs of pupils and the best ways to support them when distressed behaviours occur. Pupils are taught communication and other strategies needed to manage their own emotions and feelings. As a result, behaviour improves over time.

Pupils mostly attend school regularly, and leaders have robust procedures in place to improve attendance rates should they fall. When these procedures are implemented, pupils' attendance at school typically improves.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Occasionally, in teaching phonics, staff do not check pupils' accuracy or correct their errors quickly. This means that, sometimes, pupils do not learn new sounds

and become fluent readers as swiftly as they could. Leaders should make sure that all staff check pupils' phonics reading accuracy routinely and systematically and address any mistakes.

- In a few subjects, curriculum thinking is developing. Consequentially, some pupils do not achieve as well as they could in those subjects. They miss key components of knowledge and skills or are moved on too quickly before important foundational knowledge is secured. Leaders should ensure that curriculum thinking routinely and specifically sets out what they want all pupils to know and be able to do securely and when to move pupils on to the next steps of knowledge acquisition.

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' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	146190
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10296676
Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	11 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in sixth-form provision	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	116
Of which, number on roll in the sixth form	35
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	Holly McAlpine
Headteacher	Steph Lea (Executive Headteacher) Georgina Quigley (Head of School)
Website	www.spa-education.org
Dates of previous inspection	17 and 18 January 2023, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- Spa School, Bermondsey is part of the Spa Education Trust, having joined in September 2018.
- This is a special school for pupils with autism between the ages of 11 and 19 years.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan.
- The school makes use of one alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

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

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- Inspectors discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading, English, mathematics and computing. For each deep dive, inspectors met with subject leaders to discuss the curriculum, had discussions with staff and pupils, visited lessons and looked at samples of pupils' work. Inspectors also considered the curriculum in other subjects as part of this inspection.
- Inspectors scrutinised a range of documents, including leaders' evaluation of the school and priorities for improvement.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors reviewed the single central record of pre-employment checks; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors met with senior leaders, teachers and the wider school team.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the trust and other trustees.
- Inspectors met with the chair of the governing body.
- Inspectors also considered responses to Ofsted's online surveys for parents, staff and pupils.

Inspection team

Kieran Bird, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Emma Watford

Ofsted Inspector

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