

Centre Academy

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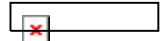
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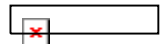
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Introduction and summary

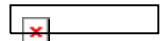


Purpose and scope of the inspection



This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school



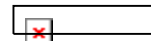
Centre Academy in London is an independent, mixed international school. The school is registered for students between the ages of 11 and 16 years. Currently there are 58 students on roll aged 9 to 19. Thirty eight per cent of students have statements of special educational needs including specific learning difficulties, dyspraxia and attention deficit hyperactive disorder. Almost all of these students are placed by local education authorities. The school caters for a wide range of abilities. Individual programmes are established to meet the needs of students who are high attaining. Sixty per cent of students have British nationality. Families originate from almost twenty different countries. Seven students have English as an additional language but none are at the early stages of English language acquisition.

The school aims to provide a supportive and nurturing programme so that every individual achieves his or her full academic potential, within either the National Curriculum and/or the American High School Curriculum. The school is divided into three departments: the lower school for pupils under 11, the middle school for those aged 11 to 14 and the upper school for those aged 14 to 19.

The school's mission is to teach students the skills necessary to enable them to succeed, within both the academic and vocational contexts, so that they begin to discover their own talents and

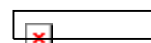
strengths.

Summary of main findings



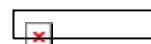
The school provides a good education for students aged 11 to 19. The provision for those under 11 is unsuitable, particularly in relation to the premises. Students enjoy school. There is a positive ethos in which students from different countries, with varying abilities and with different educational needs, work and socialise together harmoniously. Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory and most students follow a curriculum that meets their specific learning needs and prepares them well for life after school. Recent improvements by the headteacher and deputy headteacher are having a positive impact on improving students' academic achievement and the development of their personal and social skills.

What the school does well



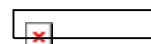
- it promotes students' understanding of and respect for other cultures and faiths which results in a harmonious, truly international community;
- overall teaching and learning are at least satisfactory. Staff know students very well. The close rapport between teachers and students leads to good teaching and learning in the upper school;
- it successfully helps students to manage their own behaviour. As a result, they behave well and are polite and thoughtful towards others;
- it promotes speaking and listening skills effectively across the whole curriculum;
- its commitment to professional development for staff is reflected in teachers' good subject knowledge and their understanding of special educational needs. This is evident in much of the teaching, in particular in the middle and upper school; and
- it uses external professionals well to support students and to ensure staff are fully aware of each student's specific needs.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations



- ensure that the health and safety issues detailed in section 3 of this report are fully rectified; and
- improve the aspects of the premises recorded in section 5.

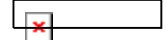
What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002



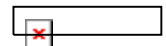
In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

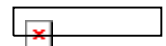
Compliance with the regulations for registration



1. The quality of education provided by the school



The quality of the curriculum



Overall, the quality of the curriculum is good, as it matches well the specific needs of the students aged 11 to 19. It succeeds in its aim of being broad and balanced yet focused, structured yet stimulating, and sequential yet flexible. It is guided by the National Curriculum and students' special needs. Older students follow both General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examination courses and a curriculum leading to the American High School Diploma, which involves continuous assessment. As a result, students gain appropriate experience of the linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative areas of learning. Students' literacy, numeracy and oracy skills are given particular emphasis.

The Curriculum Policy Statement is of good and thoughtful quality and links well with the Policy for Teaching and Learning. It is supported by recently revised policies, syllabi and schemes of work for all subjects which set out what is to be taught and the learning expectations. These schemes vary in quality and depth. Those for the students in the lower school are more generalised and less detailed than the rest. They provide teachers and other staff with only outline guidance.

The curriculum consists of English, mathematics, science, history, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), art, music, drama and physical education (PE), for which students make use of local leisure and recreation centres off-site. Design and technology (DT) is provided through art and ICT. All students have a lesson a week of a combined course in citizenship, religious studies and personal, social and health education. Most also take a course in Spanish. There is limited flexibility for individual students to add additional subjects, such as French and German. Older students also have a careers programme which benefits from good links with the Connexions Services.

The American High School Diploma curriculum for older students focuses on a parallel four-year course based on English, mathematics, the sciences, a modern foreign language and history, complemented by courses in the arts, computer technology and PE. The highest achieving students are given the opportunity to complete an independent study as part of the Diploma; this provides a very good preparation for students' transition to higher education. In recent years the students who have graduated with the Diploma have all been successful in gaining college or university placements.

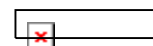
Overall, the curriculum for the students in the lower school is satisfactory. It is appropriately focused on improving their literacy and numeracy skills. However, there are too few opportunities for them to develop these skills through other subjects, such as history and geography, or through creative activities.

There is a suitable range of extra-curricular activities, including after-school clubs for homework, art, sport, drama, music and computing. Students also take part in local soccer and basketball competitions. Lower and Middle School students attend a five-day adventure camp and older students go abroad which helps to develop their cultural awareness and their personal and social skills.

Weekly literacy support is provided for the students with English as an additional language and some speech and language therapy is given to five of these pupils, which assists their growing acquisition of language skills.

The curriculum meets the requirements in students' statement of special educational need. The special educational needs co-ordinator leads and manages the whole staff team well. She ensures that teachers and other professionals work together to produce detailed individual education plans (IEPs) for each student. These are used effectively in whole class and individual sessions to guide teachers' planning and approaches. They also help the student to focus on the next steps in their academic progress and modifications in their social behaviour. Annual reviews are well attended by parents and external agencies. Prior to these, a good range of information is collected on the student's progress during the year so that full consideration is given to the continued suitability of the placement and appropriate targets for the coming year. The student contributes fully to this process.

The quality of the teaching and assessment



The quality of teaching and learning is at least satisfactory. Much of the teaching for students in the upper and middle school is good, but some teaching for younger students, particularly those who have the most complex needs, has some weaknesses.

The headteacher's commitment to professional development for all staff includes encouraging teachers to work towards Qualified Teacher Status and higher degrees. As a result, there is a well qualified team of teachers who have strong subject knowledge and a good understanding of special educational needs. In the middle and upper schools in particular, this is evident in the quality of teaching. For example, in an upper school English lesson, the meaning of technical terms was illustrated very effectively using references to literature from several different countries. This broadened students' knowledge and understanding and enabled them to use technical language confidently. The strong rapport between teacher and students and the interesting lesson content ensured students were thoroughly absorbed in their learning.

Students of all ages benefit from individual and small group support which helps them improve their literacy and numeracy skills. These sessions are planned thoroughly and use resources appropriate to individual need. In the best practice visual cues are introduced and helpful strategies are suggested to assist students in overcoming their difficulties. Teachers' questioning is good as it checks students' understanding and encourages them to expand fully on their ideas. Students achieve well in these sessions.

Therapists and teachers collaborate in writing IEPs which are used to guide teaching in literacy, numeracy and speech and language sessions. Progress towards these targets is carefully recorded. Teaching staff work together to establish general IEPs which focus on improving students' social, personal and behavioural skills. This results in staff sharing common expectations of individuals and adopting a consistent approach to managing their behaviour. This consistency of approach has a most significant impact on improving students' personal and social development and helping them to manage their own behaviour.

In most lessons appropriate tasks are set which challenge students and hold their interest. However, in a few lessons tasks are dull and teachers miss opportunities to reinforce or extend

students' learning. In some, teachers spend too long talking at the start of lessons or activities go on for too long before teachers realise that the attention of some students has been lost.

There are some weaknesses in teaching in a few lower school lessons. Learning for these pupils is not always as successful as it is for older students. Some lessons start with long introductions by the teacher and include the use of complex language and questioning which is too difficult for some pupils to understand. Tasks and resources are at times inappropriate for these students. Opportunities are missed across the curriculum to reinforce students' literacy and numeracy skills through other subjects; for example, in science and ICT lessons. Where these weaknesses occur, students' learning, and at times their behaviour, is not as good as it should be.

Teaching resources, in particular books, have been improved in the last two years but practical, appropriate resources, suitable for lower attaining pupils with more complex needs, are not always available and art and DT resources are limited. There are computers in most classrooms to support subject teaching. At the time of the inspection these were not used to support students' learning but samples of students' work show that they regularly word process pieces of extended writing.

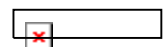
There is an assessment policy which guides teachers and ensures consistency of approach. Teachers' assessment is generally thorough. Older students feel that the way teachers mark their work and the regular testing helps them to understand their mistakes and improve their standards. Detailed annual testing is carried out by educational psychologists and speech and language therapists. Students' progress over the course of a year is measured against these scores. Records show that most students make steady gains in literacy, numeracy and communication skills.

The progress made by the youngest and lowest attaining students is measured against the targets in IEPs. It is difficult to measure small step improvements over time using specialists' test results as attainment is low and scores are not always obtained. Currently no other criteria are used to enable teachers to measure students' achievement. This means that in subjects other than literacy and numeracy teachers do not have enough detailed information on which to plan subsequent lessons. Students with statements of special educational need are assigned National Curriculum levels at the time of their annual reviews. However, this practice is not well established across the school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils



Students' spiritual, moral and social development is good, and their cultural development is very good.

The school encourages students to reflect on, and form a view on, a range of human and ethical issues and concerns. This occurs through both planned and spontaneous opportunities in lessons, in homeroom sessions, in assemblies and in the school council. Examples include Spirit Week and whole school assemblies which include presentations from guest speakers from a range of religions. Themes such as pacifism and presentations from staff and pupils on different religions prompt students to think about a spiritual dimension to life.

Students encounter constant reminders of the need for clear moral values, such as those of honesty, integrity, trust, fairness, respect, civility and compassion for others. These are clearly set out in the school's mission statement and its explicit rules, which are posted throughout the school and reinforced by displays such as the 'Values Tree'. Students are aware of what is right and are made to know when they are in the wrong. They respond well to rewards, such as stickers, merits

and 'Student of the month' awards, and they comply with sanctions imposed.

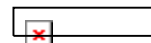
Students' social development progresses well in this small, close community. The intimate and friendly atmosphere promotes a mostly relaxed and co-operative atmosphere between students of different ages, supported by the homerooms, house teams and the school council. Behaviour and relationships are generally very good. Any disruptive or attention-seeking behaviour is managed promptly and effectively by staff and often by the students themselves. Respect and concern for others are characterised by thoughtfulness and small gestures such as polite help with doors and chairs, interested questioning of visitors and ready apologies to fellow students when necessary. Students undertake various community service projects and collect for charity appeals such as Red Nose Day, Christmas gifts to the needy and the fund for the recent tsunami disaster.

The internationally diverse students have a very good level of cultural awareness, understanding and respect. The school promotes the celebration of cultural and religious differences well. As a result students show an interest in each other's differences and are accepting of them. The rich cultural diversity evident in the school is used effectively to broaden students' experiences in learning, for example, through the literature of different countries, African art, and Indian music. Cultural events include the annual Art, Science and Talent Fairs, visits to theatres and theatre workshops, and the Science Museum. Individual students have been successful in a national photography competition and gaining a place with a touring dance group. In citizenship, religious studies and personal, social and health education students extend their study of topics such as 'society and citizenship' to wider issues such as 'Europe', 'racism', 'women in Islam' and 'Human Rights'. Celebrations such as Thanksgiving Dinner, religious festivals and the 'International Night' further strengthen students' multi-cultural awareness.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils



Staff know students very well and successfully place their care and welfare at the heart of their work. Relationships within the school are very good. Discussions with students show that they feel safe. They like the small classes and the friendly staff, whom they find very approachable. Through the school council and through informal discussions staff listen to their opinions and take them into account.

A good range of specialist advice, including a counsellor, is available to support students in their academic, social, emotional and behavioural development. These professionals ensure that staff have all the information they need to provide suitable education and care for students.

A range of policies guide staff in their work and promote a consistent approach. The behaviour policy emphasises the importance of reinforcing positive behaviour as well as outlining sanctions. This is consistently followed by staff and helps students to manage and improve their behaviour.

The anti-bullying policy provides a useful outline for staff but it does not clearly state the procedures to be followed, the way each incident is monitored and the systems for evaluating the effectiveness of the policy and procedures. There have been some incidents of bullying which have resulted in appropriate action. Discussions with students indicate that they do not feel bullying to be an issue. There are clear procedures for child protection and all staff have been trained appropriately in these last year. The health and safety policy is comprehensive. The headteacher has undertaken the necessary training and carries out regular checks of the site.

The school has rectified many of the points on the recent Fire and Community Safety Directorate letter and the fire assessment verbal feedback but it has not yet ensured that the door in the art room meets fire door regulations.

There is a disability rights policy and the school has carried out a general survey on difficulties of accessibility. The findings from this survey have not yet been incorporated into a three-year plan showing timings and costings.

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

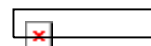
- draw up and implement effectively a written policy to prevent bullying, which has regard to Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance: 'Bullying: don't suffer in silence' (paragraph 3(2)(a)); and
- ensure that there is a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by a report from the fire authority (paragraph 3(5)).

What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the premises.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff



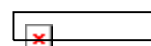
The headteacher has established a very thorough system for appointing staff which includes collecting written information from academic and personal referees and medical practitioners.

All staff appointed since 2002 have had the necessary checks through the Criminal Records Bureau. Staff appointed prior to this date have been checked with the DfES.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation



The premises are suitable for students aged 11-19. The accommodation in the main building is in good decorative order and it is maintained well. The staircase, corridors and classrooms include bright display of students' work and photographs of special events; this creates a stimulating learning environment. The annexe building requires some improvements, especially the ceiling tiles, cleanliness of the flooring and general decoration of the art room.

The stairway in the main building is narrow, steps are fairly steep and at change of lesson times

congestion occurs. Congestion occurs at change of lesson times and break times as students from the ages of 9 to 19 move from one room to another. The doors in this Grade II listed building are heavy. The congestion combined with the weight of doors makes the present accommodation unsuitable for pupils aged 9 to 11. Classrooms are mostly of a sufficient size but some of the rooms used for small group teaching are too confined and are badly ventilated. This is a particular problem when older or larger students are taught in these small areas. There is an adequate range of specialist rooms, although the library is very small. The present stock of books does not encompass the needs of all the students in the school in terms of their age or ability.

There is insufficient outdoor space for the number of students and the wide age range. Younger students have few, if any, opportunities to play outside during the school day. This provision is not suitable for these young students.

Lower school students share one washroom. This does not meet requirements as separate facilities are required for boys and girls. The provision for staff washrooms is unsatisfactory. There is only one washroom for men and women to share. As a result long queues build up at breaks and lunchtimes. This is totally inappropriate.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

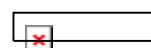
No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that there are sufficient washbasins for staff and students, including facilities for students with special educational needs taking account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k)); and
- make appropriate arrangements for providing outside space for students to play safely (paragraph 5(t)).

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners



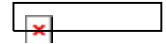
Parents and others interested in the work of the school have access to a comprehensive range of clear and increasingly well-presented information. The prospectus contains a helpful overview of the school's philosophy, aims, ethos and curriculum, and makes it clear that copies of all the policies in operation are available on request. In addition, at the start of the school year the 'Guide to Centre Academy for Parents and Students' provides further detail on its organisation and the standards, codes and routines expected. Parents also receive regular letters from the headteacher and the very supportive Parent/Teachers Association, for example concerning school events.

Communication with parents and other agencies is good. In their responses to the questionnaire sent out prior to the inspection parents stated that they were well informed about their children's progress, for example, in one case citing weekly telephone updates. Contact with local authorities concerning students' statements and funding is also regular and thorough. Each half term the school sends out helpful reports to parents which indicate grades for most subjects studied. At the end of each term they receive reports which contain assessments of their children's achievements in each subject, including strengths and areas to work on further. Twice a year teachers, mentors and a senior member of staff meet parents to discuss students' progress. Parents may also attend information evenings on such topics as the American High School Diploma and application to colleges and universities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

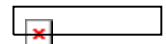


The school has revised its complaints policy and the amended procedures accord with the regulations and are available on request. In the rare event of a complaint not being able to be resolved informally, there is suitable provision for both formal referrals to senior staff and correctly constituted independent hearings. These aim to be fair, open and honest, providing appropriate timescales and recording procedures, assuring confidentiality and emphasising the importance of the interests of the student above all else.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

School details



Name of school:	Centre Academy
DfES ref number:	212/6408
Type of school:	Special International School
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	9 - 19 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 45, Girls 13, Total 58
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 21, Girls 1, Total 22
Annual fees (day pupils):	£18,355 - £23,445
Address of school:	92 St Johns Hill Battersea London SW11 1SH
E-mail address:	ukadmin@centreacademy.com
Telephone number:	0207 738 2344
Fax number:	0207 738 9862
Headteacher:	Ms Claudine G Hakim
Proprietor:	Centre Academy London Ltd
Lead Inspector:	Helen Sharpe HMI
Dates of inspection:	31 January - 3 February 2005