

Centre Academy London

92 St John's Hill, Battersea, London SW11 1SH

Inspection dates

5–7 June 2018

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
Sixth form provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the last inspection, the headteacher, proprietors and senior leaders have taken successful steps to improve the school. They have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.
- Teaching, learning and assessment are good. Teachers plan interesting activities that enable pupils to make good progress and achieve well. However, teaching does not always challenge all pupils to achieve their best. Pupils make slower progress in writing than in reading because they do not have sufficient opportunities to produce longer pieces of work.
- Pupils behave well. They gain self-confidence and enjoy their work. However, some are too reliant on staff to support their learning. Pupils are not sufficiently involved in decisions taken that influence their learning.
- Effective leadership and teaching in the sixth form have led to good outcomes for students.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe in a wide variety of situations. They feel safe and enjoy coming to school. Their attendance is significantly better than in their previous schools.
- Parents and carers support the school greatly and all who expressed a view would recommend it to another parent.
- Teachers receive helpful training and advice to improve their work. However, the training programme has not yet improved teaching enough to ensure that all pupils achieve their very best.
- Safeguarding is effective. All staff receive valuable training to ensure that they are aware of the latest guidance.
- The interesting curriculum helps pupils to learn well. However, the range of work experience placements for older pupils is limited.
- Governance is effective. Governors are knowledgeable and confident in holding leaders to account for the school's performance.

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?

- Improve the quality of teaching and the pupils' progress by ensuring that:
 - staff training and development are strengthened so that teachers regularly provide challenging activities for all groups of pupils
 - teachers provide more opportunities for pupils to write at length
 - pupils learn to become more independent, both in the classroom and in their involvement in taking decisions that influence their learning
 - older pupils have opportunities to undertake a wider range of work experience.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The headteacher, proprietors, governors and senior staff have taken robust and successful steps to improve the school. Since the last inspection, they have established a culture of high aspirations among the staff and pupils. They have ensured that the provision is of good quality and that all the independent school standards are met.
- The new headteacher took up her appointment in September 2017. Since that time, she has refined the school's assessment system and enhanced the provision for pupils' personal development and the arrangements for the monitoring of teaching. These actions have improved the quality of teaching and pupils' outcomes. She, the proprietors and the principal have an accurate view of the school's current performance and know what needs to be done to ensure outstanding provision.
- The curriculum successfully balances academic subjects with physical, technological, creative and outdoor pursuits. Leaders make effective use of evaluation to develop the curriculum. Useful subjects such as Spanish and touch-typing enable pupils to develop additional skills and interests. A range of clubs are available, including boxing, disco dancing and cardistry (the art of conjuring cards). These activities, together with outings and the annual residential visit, enrich pupils' experience and promote equality well. They have a positive impact on pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn to appreciate how people from different cultures, faiths and backgrounds, including those whose characteristics are protected in law, contribute to life in modern Britain.
- The programme for careers education and guidance ensures that pupils are well informed and prepared for the next stage of their education. However, leaders acknowledge that older pupils do not have access to a wide enough range of work experience placements.
- Parents who responded to the Ofsted questionnaire, Parent View, are unanimously positive about the school. They emphasise the 'unique ethos and approach' of the provision. As one parent reported, reflecting the views of others, her son is a changed person since attending Centre Academy.
- Effective training and appraisal have helped staff to improve their teaching. Responses to the staff questionnaire show that the new headteacher's approach is very much respected and appreciated, and staff morale is high. However, leaders acknowledge that the staff training and development programme requires some further fine-tuning to ensure that teaching challenges pupils to achieve their very best.

Governance

- Governance is effective.
- Governors bring a wealth of experience and expertise from the field of education. They make regular visits to classrooms to monitor the quality of the school's work. They discuss their findings, which gives them an accurate view of the school's performance.
- The proprietors and governors have ensured that the headteacher is challenged and supported through a rigorous appraisal system.

- The proprietor has agreed to provide additional funding to refurbish the annexe building this summer. This is to ensure that the school's facilities continue to meet the needs of its vulnerable pupils.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The school's culture of safeguarding is strong. Effective systems are in place. Together with high levels of staff supervision around the school, as well as on trips and visits, they help to keep pupils safe.
- Any concerns are quickly raised, documented appropriately and referred to external agencies as required. The school engages well with parents in its safeguarding work. Leaders take effective action to minimise risks to pupils.
- Staff have a thorough understanding of the most up-to-date guidance, attend regular training and use it well to remain vigilant and alert to any concerns arising about individual pupils.
- The safeguarding policy is appropriate. It is published on the school's website, along with all other required policies and information. It reflects the most recent statutory guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (September 2016). All safeguarding training for staff is up to date.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Pupils make good progress across a range of subjects because they are well taught.
- The teaching of mathematics has improved since the last inspection and, overall, pupils make good progress in the subject. This is because teachers use a range of effective methods. They provide interesting activities that enable pupils to explore mathematical ideas and apply them to different situations. Pupils respond well to these approaches, which help them to deepen their understanding of mathematical concepts.
- Personalised experiences and effective support enable all pupils to make significant progress and overcome barriers to learning.
- The inspector was shown a film clip made by older pupils who were performing two scenes from 'Macbeth' as part of their examination assessment. Here, pupils not only memorised a challenging text, but also designed the sets, costumes and make-up. Staff reported that this experience helped pupils to develop high levels of self-confidence and self-control, particularly when performing in public.
- Overall, good teaching motivates pupils to overcome their learning difficulties and to achieve well. Teachers are increasingly confident in using assessment information to pinpoint where support or challenge is needed. In a few subjects, however, activities are not sufficiently demanding to enable all pupils to achieve their fullest potential.
- Pupils have regular opportunities to develop their literacy skills. For example, younger pupils discussing a particular text used a range of descriptive vocabulary, such as 'tenderly', 'quivering' and 'panting', to extend their answers. However, opportunities for

pupils to write at length, and in a range of forms, are sometimes limited. This can reduce the pupils' rates of progress in developing their writing skills.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Throughout the school day, pupils have many opportunities to reflect on their behaviour and learning with staff.
- Effective pastoral care by staff, including a qualified counsellor, ensures that pupils' physical and emotional needs are well met. This support is very beneficial in improving pupils' self-esteem and helping them to understand how best to manage any anxiety and, so, learn successfully. It also helps pupils to learn tolerance of and respect for different cultures and faiths, including those whose characteristics are protected in law.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspector reported that there is no bullying in school. Pupils have a good understanding of the different types of bullying, including homophobic bullying. They know how to travel safely to and from school. Pupils reported that they feel safe in school.
- Through personal, social, health and economic education sessions and assemblies, pupils learn about the benefits of leading a healthy lifestyle and of regular exercise. They also learn how to stay safe when using the internet. They are taught to be alert in spotting unusual behaviour by adults, and the dangers of being drawn into extremism.
- The assessment of risk for all activities, including trips, residential visits and training away from the school site, helps to keep pupils safe in and out of school.
- Parents and staff who communicated with the inspector, or who completed Ofsted's surveys, agreed that the school is a safe place. There were no concerns raised by parents or staff regarding pupils' safety.
- Pupils receive helpful careers guidance and are supported well for the next stage of their education. However, older pupils do not always have access to a wide enough range of work experience placements.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Many pupils have experienced significant challenges in their lives before they arrive at Centre Academy. Because of the school's caring ethos and high expectations, relationships between staff and pupils are very positive and mutually respectful. Pupils behave well, inside classrooms and around the school site.
- Pupils who spoke to the inspector reported that the teachers understand their learning difficulties and special educational needs, and are not judgemental. As a result, pupils enjoy coming to school regularly. For many, this is in direct contrast to their previously high levels of absence at their previous schools. Sometimes, pupils are too dependent on adults to guide their learning, which inhibits their ability to work on their own and develop

good study habits. Leaders acknowledge that pupils have limited opportunities to contribute to the running of the school, for example through the school council.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Most pupils are taught in mixed-age classes and teaching groups are small. For these reasons, information about achievement needs to be interpreted with caution, as analysis of trends or comparisons with national results are likely to be misleading.
- Most pupils enter the school with large gaps in their education. This is often due to their previously poor attitudes to learning, erratic attendance and social and communication difficulties.
- The school's information, visits to classrooms and scrutiny of workbooks show that pupils make good progress across the range of subjects. They achieve good outcomes in a number of recognised qualifications, including GCSE, at the end of key stage 4 and in the sixth form. Pupils achieve particularly well in drama, information and communication technology, performing arts and science. They make especially strong progress socially, emotionally and in other aspects of their personal development. For instance, they worked well together in science when learning about different types of magnets or when working cooperatively on a film project in humanities.
- Pupils of all abilities, including the least and the most able, are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is because they leave the school with nationally recognised qualifications which enable them to gain access to college or university courses.
- Pupils make particularly strong progress in reading as a result of the emphasis placed on it by leaders. The attractive and centrally located library enables pupils of different abilities to find stimulating material designed to appeal to their interests and enthusiasms. As a result, most pupils' reading improves markedly over time.
- Overall, pupils from different backgrounds make strong gains in literacy and numeracy, as well as in other subjects, because they are well taught. Pupils make strong progress in their listening and speaking skills so that they become confident in expressing themselves.
- Pupils who attend off-site training make good progress in their sports and physical fitness courses.
- Leaders have taken effective action to make sure that progress in mathematics matches that in English. Scrutiny of pupils' work demonstrates that it is set at an appropriate level, and challenges them to make good progress.
- Pupils make less progress in writing than in reading because they do not have sufficient opportunities to write at length. Not all pupils are set challenging enough tasks in some subjects to ensure that they make substantial progress.

Sixth form provision

Good

- In 2017, all Year 11 pupils entered Year 12. All those students in Year 12 moved into Year 13, where they stayed to complete their studies.

- In discussion, one student reported that 'Our teachers treat you like adults' and that 'This is a school where you can be yourself.' Students very much enjoy their time in the sixth form and appreciate the care, consideration and continuity that staff give them. This approach helps students to feel secure about continuing their studies at Centre Academy and helps motivate them to attend regularly.
- Teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects and they encourage students to make good progress. As a result of good teaching, students achieve well in both the academic and work-related strands of the American High School Diploma.
- Students make good progress in English and mathematics. This is as a result of the strong emphasis during their time in school on developing their literacy and numeracy skills across a range of subjects.
- The well-balanced sixth-form curriculum is tailored to meet students' needs and aspirations, including those who find learning difficult. Within the academic and work-related strands, a wide range of subjects are available. The curriculum progressively and effectively enables all students to acquire a broad range of skills and experiences. It also helps them to develop their confidence and self-esteem so that they become articulate learners.
- Effective leadership of the sixth form has led to good outcomes for students. They develop good academic and personal skills which enable them to learn cooperatively. They engage well in extended projects, which are assessed through coursework rather than examinations. This approach helps to reduce anxiety and stress and motivates students to do well.
- Students conduct themselves well in classrooms and around the school. Relationships between staff and students and between students themselves are very positive.
- Students continue to develop the tolerance and respect for others' beliefs and lifestyles seen in the earlier year groups.
- In 2017, of those students who left the school, a third entered universities based in the United Kingdom or the United States. The remaining two thirds entered further education in the United Kingdom.
- The careers education and guidance are of good quality and prepare students well for their futures. Nevertheless, leaders acknowledge that students would benefit from a wider choice of work experience placements so that that they have the fullest appreciation of the possible career pathways available to them.
- All students engage in a range of voluntary activities in the community, such as helping in the library, at an airfield and on an organic farm. They are actively involved in organising fundraising events for charity. Nevertheless, they have too few opportunities to contribute to the running of the school, for example through the school council.

School details

Unique reference number	101175
DfE registration number	212/6408
Inspection number	10048713

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	9 to 19
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Gender of pupils in the sixth form	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	39
Of which, number on roll in sixth form	14
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Michael and Margaret Murphy
Chair	Duncan Rollo
Headteacher	Rachel Maddison
Annual fees (day pupils)	£27,600–£40,998
Telephone number	020 7738 2344
Website	www.centreacademy.net/london/
Email address	LondonSchool@centreacademy.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–14 May 2015

Information about this school

- Centre Academy London is an independent special school that caters specifically for boys and girls with a variety of learning challenges, including dyslexia or specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autism spectrum disorder. It is located in an Edwardian Grade 2 listed building in the London Borough of Wandsworth.

- Almost all pupils are referred to the school by 12 local authorities. It is registered for up to 60 pupils aged from nine to 19 years. Most pupils are taught in mixed-age classes.
- Currently, there are 39 pupils on roll, most of whom have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care plan. This total is made up as follows: two pupils in the primary phase, 23 pupils in the secondary phase and 14 students in the sixth form. There are more boys than girls. Many pupils have had very disrupted previous education, and some have not attended school for significant periods of time.
- Around a quarter of pupils are involved with the local child and adolescent mental health services because of their social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Around a half of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds, with the remainder being White British.
- Centre Academy was first registered in 1974 as part of the Centre Academy Group, which was based in the United States, but since 2002 it has been in private ownership in the United Kingdom. The group runs a sister school in East Anglia, and the schools share the same governing body.
- Off-site training is made available for pupils to extend their learning experiences. The school offers the following activities: swimming at Latchmere Leisure Centre, Burns Road, London SW11 5AD; sport and physical education at the Battersea Sports Centre, Hope Street, London SW11 2DA; and work-related courses at Carshalton College, Nightingale Road, Carshalton SM5 2EJ.
- The school was last inspected in May 2015, when it was judged to require improvement.
- The headteacher took up her post in September 2017.
- The school's aim is 'to provide excellence in education for students with specific learning difficulties'.

Information about this inspection

- This full standard inspection took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector observed teaching and learning across all year groups and subjects, in almost all cases jointly with senior staff. He spoke to pupils informally throughout the inspection.
- There were 12 responses to Parent View, as well as 10 text comments, two letters and two emails from parents. The inspector also took into account the 11 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The inspector held discussions with one of the proprietors and a governor, as well as with senior and middle leaders and staff.
- The inspector reviewed key documents and policies, including those relating to safeguarding, to check the school's compliance with the independent school standards. He scrutinised pupils' books and the school's information about pupils' attainment and progress.

Inspection team

David Scott, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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