

Alexandra School

Alexandra Avenue, Harrow, London HA2 9DX

Inspection dates	8–9 March 2016
Overall effectiveness	Outstanding
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Outstanding
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Outstanding
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Outstanding
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is an outstanding school

- Highly effective senior leaders work well together to ensure that pupils in this school make outstanding progress from their varied starting points.
- Teachers and leaders set ambitious targets for pupils, and pupils excel themselves in reaching these. Most pupils achieved their targets in both English and mathematics in 2015.
- Pupils are also set targets relating to their social development and life skills. Most pupils achieve these, ensuring that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education and life beyond.
- Teachers deliver lessons that are lively and interesting. Pupils respond enthusiastically to questions and tasks that are set.
- Adults promote pupils' communication skills effectively in a range of different ways but sometimes use too many visual materials for pupils to understand.
- Other adults in the classroom are positive role models. They support learning and encourage independence effectively.
- The small number of children in the early years provision make excellent progress as a result of high-quality teaching which prepares them well for Key Stage 1.
- Governors are clear about their responsibilities and those of the academy board. As a result, they can focus on ensuring that the education provided at the school is of the highest quality and that leaders are held to account for their work.
- Links with other schools in the academy provide opportunities for leaders to check the accuracy of their judgements and to share good practice. Members of staff value the training sessions held with their colleagues from other settings and improve their practice further as a result.
- The school's work to support pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils learn about a range of different faiths and cultures. They participate in a wide range of trips and visits.
- Pupils enjoy school and demonstrate this through their high levels of attendance. They behave impeccably in lessons, around school and in the playground.
- Leaders have ensured that pupils are safe in school. Parents are confident that their children are well looked after.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment further by checking that communication conveyed to pupils through visual means is consistently matched to their level of understanding.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is outstanding

- Senior leaders work seamlessly as a cohesive team to ensure that the quality of education provided at Alexandra School is outstanding. They are not complacent but continually strive to improve standards further for the pupils in their care.
- Leaders and managers have developed rigorous systems for tracking the progress of pupils in key subjects. They regularly review their systems in order to improve them further. Leaders have made sure that teachers make accurate judgements about pupils' progress. They have done this by enabling teachers to check their work with that of teachers in other classes and schools.
- Leaders have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. They believe every pupil will make more progress than would usually be expected in relation to their starting point. More than nine out of 10 pupils do so.
- Middle leaders take their responsibilities seriously. They make checks on the quality of work in their particular area through looking at work in pupils' books and teachers' plans. Middle leaders devise action plans to demonstrate how they will further improve provision and report back to governors on their progress annually. Occasionally, the targets identified in these plans lack precision so it is difficult to judge whether or not they have been achieved.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriately adapted to the needs of the pupils on roll. Leaders make sure that pupils receive similar opportunities to their peers in mainstream schools. These include camping trips, music tuition and residential visits to France.
- Additional funding provided to support those who are eligible for free school meals is spent wisely. As a result, there is no gap between the progress made by these pupils and others. Similarly, additional funding for physical education (PE) and sport has been used to extend the range of physical activities on offer. Pupils attend a wide range of after-school clubs, including those based around sports such as cricket and football.
- Leaders make excellent provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils learn about a range of different faiths, visiting places of worship and learning how to behave appropriately while there. They join in singing during assemblies with enthusiasm because a group of adults and pupils at the front show them how to participate appropriately.
- Pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain because they learn about different kinds of people, cultures and lifestyles. They learn the importance of respect and tolerance. They are taught about key historical events and experience democracy through elections for the school council.
- Leaders work collaboratively with other local schools through outreach work. They offer training, guidance and support for members of staff in other schools who are working with pupils with special educational needs or disability. This input has been well received and requests from other schools are increasing.
- Leaders have ensured that teachers and other adults are well trained to fulfil their roles. Members of staff say that they value the joint training sessions alongside colleagues from other schools within the academy. Leaders encourage members of staff to develop their careers through further study. Leaders set challenging targets for teachers and there are robust systems in place to check that teachers' performance meets leaders' high expectations.
- **The governance of the school**
 - There are clear guidelines which set out precisely the responsibilities of the local governing body and those of the academy board. Effective communication between these two bodies is secured through representation of the governors on the academy board.
 - Governors receive reports from a range of middle and senior leaders. They make visits to the school to see its work for themselves. They ask probing questions in meetings. For example, they asked if standards in writing could be improved through increased input from occupational therapists.
 - Governors know how well pupils are doing because they receive detailed reports that cover all areas of the curriculum and all groups of pupils.
 - Governors check on the impact of professional development by looking at the evaluations members of staff complete after attending training. Governors compile reports which are discussed during meetings of the full governing body.

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders and governors recognise the importance of safeguarding and therefore it is discussed at every meeting of the governing body. Leaders make sure that all members of staff are well trained in recognising possible indicators of abuse. Policies and procedures have been recently updated to take into account the risks associated with female genital mutilation, radicalisation and extremism.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is outstanding

- Teachers use carefully selected, interesting activities to gain pupils' attention and involve them in their learning. For example, in a design technology lesson pupils learned what 'waterproof' means by testing the properties of hats to see if they were waterproof. The use of real hats and real water created a sense of excitement as pupils carried out their investigations. This resulted in pupils using accurate descriptive language, such as 'it's dripping!'
- Teachers work closely with speech and language therapists to set targets for the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills. Therapists work in the classroom to ensure that there is a high level of consistency between all the adults working with each pupil. All adults working with pupils model positive behaviour and attitudes. They provide effective support while, at the same time, encouraging pupils to develop their independence skills.
- Adults adapt their spoken language so that pupils can understand and join in. For example, an adult was blowing up a balloon; after each blow she asked a pupil 'more or finish?' Each time the pupil responded 'more', she blew again into the balloon. As the balloon started to reach capacity, both adult and pupil became more animated in their anticipation of it bursting. Eventually, the pupil responded 'finish', delighted that they had communicated so successfully.
- Teachers and other adults use a range of resources to support their verbal communication with pupils such as photographs, symbols and text. Sometimes, however, there is too much of this visual information and its use does not support pupils' understanding effectively.
- Clear and consistent systems are in place to provide pupils with feedback on their work. Pupils understand these. They know that teachers record how well they have understood their work and how much effort they have put in. Pupils are rightly proud of the standard of work in their books and identified their favourite piece of work to show inspectors. One young pupil told an inspector the reason for her choice was 'because I did it all on my own without any help'.
- Teachers make accurate assessments about the progress pupils have made. They work in teams within the school and across the academy to check that their judgements are correct. They set ambitious targets for pupils and then deliver high-quality lessons which enable pupils to meet their targets.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Parents, pupils and staff are confident that pupils are kept safe and well looked after at school. Inspectors agree.
- Leaders consider social behaviour and life skills to be key areas of the curriculum. They measure pupils' progress in these areas through a firmly embedded system devised specifically to suit the context of this school. Pupils' progress in these aspects is outstanding over time.
- School leaders ensure that pupils' physical and emotional health needs are met. Therapists work closely with class teams to set targets and deliver programmes tailored to the individual pupil. Leaders have employed a play therapist to work with identified pupils who need additional help in this area of their development.
- Pupils understand what bullying means and what forms it can take. Pupils told inspectors that there is 'sometimes misbehaviour but no bullying'. They are adamant that any silly behaviour is quickly dealt with by members of staff. Adults record any incidents of misbehaviour carefully. This information is collated by leaders and any follow-up action noted. Pupils are taught about e-safety through an annual e-safety week.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils of different ages and backgrounds get on very well together. They enjoy breaktimes in the playground when they can choose where to play and who to play with. Some prefer to play alone; for example, one girl enjoyed playing with a doll while making an imaginary phone call.
- Around the school and in lessons, pupils treat each other and adults very respectfully. They know and understand the 'golden rules' such as 'do be gentle' and 'do be honest'. Pupils pay attention to their lessons and focus on tasks for prolonged periods of time. This is because they are interested in what they are learning and well supported by adults. Lessons are very rarely disrupted by poor behaviour. Pupils enjoy school and show this through their high levels of attendance. Leaders know exactly why any pupil is absent and follow up any concerns diligently.

Outcomes for pupils

are outstanding

- Pupils make outstanding progress in all aspects of English and mathematics. Leaders and teachers agree highly aspirational targets for each pupil and make sure that they achieve these. In 2015, more than nine out of every 10 pupils achieved or exceeded their targets in both English and mathematics. Consequently, they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- When pupils join the school, teachers assess exactly what they can and cannot do in aspects of English, mathematics, science and computing. They also assess pupils' level of social and emotional development and their life skills. Highly ambitious targets are set in each of these areas and pupils make exceptional progress in achieving these.
- Rigorous systems identify any pupil at risk of not achieving their target and leaders quickly put plans in place to ensure that they are able to catch up. In mathematics in 2015, for example, a small number of pupils were identified as being at risk of not meeting their challenging target. More than half of the group who received carefully targeted support met their target by the end of the year.
- Most-able pupils are set similarly challenging targets. These are changed if a pupil is on track to achieve or exceed their target in order to ensure that pupils make as much progress as they possibly can.
- Pupils eligible for pupil premium funding (additional government funding) make similar progress to others in the school because each pupil receives exactly what they need in order to reach their potential. In 2015, leaders identified that pupils who spoke English as an additional language in Year 6 made less progress in English than their peers. As a result of swift and incisive action, those currently in the school who speak English as an additional language are now making similar progress to their classmates.

Early years provision

is outstanding

- The number of children on roll in the early years provision is small because most pupils join the school in Years 1 to 3. Some children spend only a short amount of time in the early years provision because of when they join the school. Others remain within the early years class for some or all of their Year 1 education because leaders recognise that they are not yet ready for the Key Stage 1 curriculum. Children make excellent progress in the early years provision and transfer to the Key Stage 1 curriculum when they are ready.
- Adults plan activities which are precisely focused to meet children's individual needs. Teachers and other adults are continually assessing the small steps of progress made in each area of learning and record these meticulously. Consequently, children make outstanding progress in each area of learning.
- The environment is inviting, both indoors and outdoors. The indoor environment has a series of separate pods for different activities around a central area. One is set out as a sensory room and another for imaginative play. Despite very cold weather during the inspection, children and adults participated in physical and creative activities outdoors. However, due to the unusual layout of the learning environment, children sometimes need adults' help to move in or out of the pod areas. This limits their independence when choosing play activities.
- The early years leader took on these responsibilities in September 2015. She has a clear vision of how she wants to improve the provision further and a coherent plan in place which sets out how she intends to do so.

- Children in the early years respond very well to the opportunities they are given to take on responsibilities, such as taking the register to the office each day. They behave extremely well because of the positive relationships they have with members of staff.

School details

Unique reference number	140122
Local authority	Harrow
Inspection number	10010972

This inspection was carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. The inspection was also deemed a section 5 inspection under the same Act.

Type of school	Special
School category	Academy special converter
Age range of pupils	4–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	75
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair	Sue Stalley
Headteacher	John Ayres (executive principal), Perdy Buchanan-Barrow (head of school)
Telephone number	020 8864 2739
Website	www.alexandra-school.co.uk
Email address	office@alexandra-school.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	Not previously inspected

Information about this school

- Alexandra School converted to become an academy school on 1 September 2013. It is one of five special schools in north-west London which make up Eden Academy. When its predecessor school, also known as Alexandra School, was last inspected by Ofsted in March 2013 it was judged to be outstanding.
- There are 75 pupils on roll, all of whom have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. Pupils have a wide range of needs, including moderate learning difficulties, social and emotional difficulties, and autistic spectrum conditions.
- Around a quarter of the pupils are eligible for additional pupil premium funding. This is the additional government funding for pupils entitled to free school meals or looked after by the local authority.
- Pupils join the school at various stages of their education. The number of children joining the school in the early years is small in comparison with other year groups.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed teaching and learning in 10 lessons. These were carried out jointly with senior leaders. They also looked at the work in pupils' books. An inspector observed an assembly.
- Meetings were held with senior leaders, middle leaders and a group of staff. Inspectors also met with the executive principal of Eden Academy and the Chair of the Governing Body.
- A wide range of documentation was considered including: information about safeguarding; minutes from governing body meetings; information about pupils' progress; and leaders' plans for improvement.
- Inspectors carried out a detailed scrutiny of work relating to a group of pupils and related this to reports written by professionals and the school's information about their progress.
- Inspectors met with two groups of pupils to talk about their work and their life at school. They also heard some pupils read.
- Inspectors took into account 33 responses to the online questionnaire, Parent View, and spoke to some parents at the start of the school day.

Inspection team

Gaynor Roberts, lead inspector

Rosemarie McCarthy

Her Majesty's Inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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