

# Centre Academy London

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

**Inspection dates** 12–14 May 2015

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Requires improvement</b>	<b>3</b>
Leadership and management	Good	2
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Requires improvement	3
Achievement of pupils	Requires improvement	3
Sixth form provision	Good	2

## Summary of key findings

### This is a school that requires improvement. It is not good because

- Achievement and the quality of teaching, particularly in mathematics, require improvement. Standards in mathematics have declined since the last inspection.
- Teachers do not consistently provide work at the right level or give written feedback that helps students to move to the next step.
- Basic skills in numeracy and literacy are not promoted well enough.
- Not all teachers are skilful in the way they question students, or in their use of progress information to plan lessons.

### The school has the following strengths

- The new senior team accurately identified weaknesses in teaching and achievement. Good leadership has quickly brought about improvement in those areas.
- Leaders and governors have made sure that behaviour is good. Arrangements to keep students safe are outstanding.
- Achievement in literacy is good because of the effective teaching and good leadership in that department.
- The leadership team has made sure that the sixth form provides a good springboard for students to have a successful future.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that all the independent school standards are met.

### Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school fully meets schedule 1 of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended, and associated requirements.

## Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice. The inspector observed teaching in 10 lessons jointly with the Principal, headteacher or deputy headteacher.
- The inspector looked at students' work and spoke to students about the school. He held discussions with the Chair of the Governing Body, the Principal, the headteacher, senior leaders, staff members, parents and students.
- The inspector scrutinised the school's website and documentation including policy statements, schemes of work, teachers' planning and records of students' progress, and of staff training, in order to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- There were insufficient responses to Ofsted's online questionnaire Parent View to allow an analysis to be carried out. The inspector held meetings with the parents of two students and looked at the school's surveys. Eight questionnaire responses from members of staff were taken into consideration.

## Inspection team

Mick Megee, Lead Inspector

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Centre Academy London is an independent day school which provides education for up to 60 boys and girls who have special educational needs, including dyslexia/specific learning difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and autistic spectrum disorders. Many students come to the school following an experience of educational failure at one or more previous schools.
- The school is registered for students from nine to 19 years old, although virtually all are of secondary school age. There are currently 47 students on roll, of whom 41 students have a statement of special educational needs. There are 10 girls and 37 boys currently attending.
- 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.
- The school shares its governing body with its sister school, and the Principal is the line manager to both headteachers.
- The school is situated in an Edwardian Grade 2 listed building in the borough of Wandsworth, with students coming from all over London and beyond. The large majority have been placed by their local authority in order to meet their special educational needs. The school was last inspected in February 2012 when it was judged to provide a good quality of education.
- The school's aim is 'to provide excellence in education for students with specific learning difficulties'.
- The school does not use alternative provision, although students undertake swimming and physical education lessons at the local leisure centre.
- Since the last inspection, a new headteacher, deputy headteacher, literacy coordinator and mathematics coordinator have been appointed.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching to raise students' achievement, particularly in mathematics, by making sure that teachers:
  - always match teaching activities to the full range of individuals' needs
  - always make good use of progress information when planning lessons to make sure that no student, especially those of lower ability, is overlooked or left behind
  - consistently promote basic skills of communication, literacy and numeracy
  - use skilful questioning to check for understanding, promote thinking and keep students engaged
  - provide feedback that informs students, in a way they can understand, of the next steps they need to take to make progress.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are good

- Good leadership and management are rapidly improving teaching and achievement. The senior team has created and maintained a friendly, peaceful school where students behave well and their attendance is high.
- The recently appointed headteacher's enthusiasm and dedication to the students is shared by staff at every level throughout the school. The confidential staff questionnaires completed during the inspection showed 100% support for the new leadership team.
- There is very close collaboration between the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and the Principal which has brought about much-needed, speedy improvement.
- The school's appointment of skilful middle managers has enabled good practice to be disseminated through the teaching staff. There is now strong leadership of teaching that is driving through rapid improvements in classroom practice.
- Senior leaders make frequent visits to all classrooms in order to maintain a strong culture of learning, enjoyment and intensive work. They identify areas where improvement is required through formal and informal lesson observations and focused learning walks.
- Leaders effectively manage and organise the way students are grouped and supported. As a result, classrooms are calm and happy places where students can develop their academic skills, particularly in literacy and numeracy, without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.
- The new leadership group has made it a priority to develop an accurate view of the school's effectiveness. They have begun well by introducing new systems for establishing precise baselines and for assessing progress throughout the year.
- Leaders are providing good support to weaker staff through close individual monitoring. As a result, these staff are now providing more consistently relevant, exciting and appealing opportunities to learn.
- Governors and leaders recognise that teaching and the achievement of students require improvement before they can be judged as good.
- Governors and leaders have not shied away from making difficult decisions where they have been necessary to improve the achievement of students. For example, they have replaced staff where this was necessary to tackle the ineffective teaching and relatively slow progress made in mathematics.
- Leaders give a high priority to developing the staff through relevant training. They arrange a good number of opportunities for staff to develop their skills, including enrolment in postgraduate degrees, in line with both their individual needs and the requirements of the students.
- Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is supported well by the school through its comprehensive curriculum. All teachers effectively deliver the personal, social and health education programme through daily sessions and through their subjects. As a result, students' behaviour and personal development are good.
- Students discuss and learn about British values such as democracy and acceptance of the rule of law in many different subjects, such as in history lessons on Roosevelt.
- Leaders see to it that students are well equipped for life in modern multicultural Britain. They promote inclusiveness and equality of opportunity at every turn, for example through the vibrant art and work displays in the corridors. Staff, students and parents say that there is absolutely no discrimination.
- Leaders make sure that all adults cultivate a deep respect for members of all communities. A prime resource is the students themselves and their families, many of whom come from across the world. In art and history lessons, students are invited to discuss and think about the multicultural nature of Britain.
- Through educational visits, students experience the rich diversity of cultures within the city and further away. Leaders make certain that students are not exposed to extremist views through developing and implementing highly effective policies.
- The school works very well with parents and external agencies to the benefit of the students. Parents say that they are so glad and relieved to have found the school. They cite the sometimes dramatic improvements that the school has brought about, especially in students' self-esteem and confidence.
- One parent, speaking for others, said: 'This new leadership team is really wonderful. I have absolute trust in them.'
- Leaders have brought in external specialist support so that students receive independent high-quality advice about further education and careers. The school works closely with local and more distant providers of further and higher education. As a result, there are very few students who have not moved on to further education, apprenticeships or vocational training after leaving school.
- Leaders and governors have ensured that the school's arrangements for safeguarding meet all requirements and are very effective. They conscientiously ensure continued and improving compliance with all the independent school standards through regular checks and updates.

### ■ The governance of the school:

The arrangements for governance work well. The governors, mainly through the Principal, provide the school with continuous guidance, critical friendship and challenge, and play an effective role in its work.

Governors possess a wide range of skills and experience that they use skilfully to hold the school to account and to make strategic decisions.

The Principal plays a key role on behalf of the governors in checking that the school makes good decisions, for example about staffing, accommodation and finance, and that it provides value for money.

Governors visit the school regularly to see for themselves how the school is doing.

Governors receive regular reports on the quality of teaching from the headteacher and the Principal, and have a good understanding of what the school's new data tracking system shows about students' achievement.

They have a good understanding of how well the teachers and students are performing. They consider the effectiveness of the school's action plans.

Governors see to it that high performing staff are suitably rewarded and underperformance is robustly tackled.

## The behaviour and safety of pupils are good

### Behaviour

- The behaviour of students is good, as is their social development. A strength of the school is how well it renews the students' self-belief and confidence.
- Almost all the students who join the school have experienced serious difficulties in learning in the past. When they arrive, they are often feeling undermined, lacking in confidence and many have lost enjoyment in learning.
- This negativity disappears very quickly because of the kindness, security and individualised personal attention they receive. Unsurprisingly, there is excellent improvement in attendance over time for individuals and different groups. Attendance is well above the national average.
- The students' behaviour and their feelings towards schooling quickly improve. They regain their self-esteem because members of staff take every opportunity to commend and encourage students on their successes. Staff members communicate these triumphs to parents so that they can make positive comments when the students arrive home, and celebrate their children's accomplishments.
- Parents speak delightedly about the personal changes that the school has brought about. A typical comment was: 'My son was very unhappy at his previous school. He was completely turned off by the demands that he just couldn't meet. He never wanted to leave the house. He's made incredible progress here, not only academic, but in his temperament. He comes to school now on his own and never misses a day.'
- Students are courteous and show respect towards adults and visitors. Staff and students have a solidly good rapport. As they move through the school, the students show increasing maturity in their attitudes towards learning and life.
- All staff enthusiastically implement the school's policy on spiritual, moral, social and cultural development so that there is a very friendly, calm and orderly atmosphere all around the school. This makes a strong contribution to students' academic progress.
- In many lessons, students concentrate well and show enthusiasm for the activities. However, where tasks are not well matched to students' capabilities, students become disinterested and lose their focus. Nevertheless, incidences of low-level disruption in lessons are rare, and staff are appropriately trained to deal with this, intervening quickly where it occurs.
- Students speak fondly of the school and the staff. One student said: 'You can trust all the teachers here. Some teachers are strict and have a firm approach but they're all great. We know we have to be pushed hard if we want to be successful.'
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards relating to students' behaviour are met.

### Safety

- The school's work to keep students safe and secure is outstanding.
- The school ensures that students feel safe and act safely. Excellent security arrangements are in place and staff provide vigilant supervision and guidance throughout the day.
- Staff formally assess risk for every activity and undertaking, and take effective measures where necessary

to reduce or eliminate any identified hazard.

- The school has very effective anti-bullying and e-safety policies that are unfailingly implemented by all staff. As a consequence, students say that they feel very safe in school and that bullying is non-existent.
- They understand very well the different forms of bullying and how to stay safe. They know who to go to if they are in trouble, feel upset or have personal difficulties. They talk about how much they trust the teachers and the counsellors to help them if they are in need.
- Leaders and governors have made sure that all staff have received extensive training in safeguarding. The headteacher is the person designated to lead safeguarding, and has been trained to the required level. Training has been arranged for a second lead person as a back-up.
- Leaders and governors apply rigorous arrangements to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children. Staff carry out all the required checks and record them assiduously.
- Most of the classroom staff are trained and qualified to administer first aid. Numerous staff are qualified to act as fire marshals. The school sees to it that fire equipment is regularly inspected and maintained. The school carries out regular and frequent fire drills.
- The school meets all regulatory requirements in relation to welfare and safety, ensuring sustained compliance with all the independent school standards through regular checks and updates.

### The quality of teaching

### requires improvement

- Although improving quickly, teaching requires improvement because it is not consistently good, particularly in mathematics. As a consequence, achievement over time, particularly in mathematics, is improving, but is not good.
- Teaching in literacy and reading is good and as a result, students make good progress in these areas.
- School leaders have seen to it that all teachers have accurate assessment information so that they know precisely what each student has to do to move forward. Many teachers skilfully use this information to plan activities that match up with the capabilities and needs of all the students in the very small classes. However, a small proportion of teachers are not yet sufficiently skilful in doing this, particularly with those who are of lower ability. As a consequence, those students get left behind and do not make good progress in the lesson.
- Many teachers provide lively activities that stretch students' thinking and help them gain new skills quickly. They explain the key learning points in order to help students to deepen their understanding. However, students' interest begins to fade in some lessons when the teacher moves the activities along too slowly.
- One of the key strengths of teaching is the positivity and good humour that pervades most lessons. Classroom staff manage students' behaviour with kindness and sensitivity, for example by drawing a student back into the activity with a glance, touch or quiet word.
- Classroom staff make very effective use of rewards and sanctions, especially for the younger students. A good example of this was seen in an individual literacy lesson where the student worked hard and made a tally of reward points as she worked through her questions.
- Leaders emphasise the importance of prioritising the development of basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics lessons. At its most effective, teaching incorporates this requirement. Where teaching is weaker, this element is omitted, despite having been included in teachers' plans. This means that the students are not developing these basic skills, particularly in mathematics, as quickly as they might.
- There are very good arrangements for teaching exceptionally able students. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects, and demonstrate their high expectations of students by setting them challenging targets.
- Teachers' use of questioning is too variable. Where it is effective, the teacher asks different questions to different groups of students to ensure that they understand and are participating fully.
- The comments teachers write in students' books let the student know how well they have done, but they do not always point out clearly enough how to improve the work. This is particularly the case in mathematics.
- Leaders and governors ensure that the school fully meets the standards relating to teaching and assessment, through close monitoring and by developing action plans where required.

### The achievement of pupils

### requires improvement

- The achievement of students requires improvement because progress in mathematics is not good.
- Students' workbooks, assessment information, the school's tracking data and case studies show that students achieve well in literacy over their time in school, but they achieve less well in numeracy.
- There is no difference in the overall achievement of different groups, including boys, girls and

disadvantaged students.

- Students join the school with skills that are typically well below those of other students of their age in other schools. This is often because they have not received the specialist support that was necessary when they were younger and have not made good progress, especially in their basic skills. Many students have a history of low attendance.
- From their individual starting points, students' progress across year groups in English is consistently good. For many, their progress is similar to other students nationally.
- Progress in mathematics requires improvement, because teaching of the subject has been less effective. The school has recognised this and has appointed a new subject leader, who is spreading good practice throughout the department. Achievement is beginning to rise quickly.
- The most-able students, especially those in the sixth form, achieve relatively well and, in some cases, reach standards typical for their age. This is because their learning targets are sufficiently challenging.
- Those students who are exceptionally able do well and an increasing number now go on to university. A few students competed recently in a national mathematics competition and gained high positions, one winning a bronze medal.
- Staff carefully plan individual homework tasks so that, away from school, students can work alone to gain even more understanding and knowledge. This enables parents to support and encourage their children and to see their progress.
- Students make progress and learn how to develop and apply a wide range of skills, particularly in reading, writing, and communication. In mathematics, progress is slower, although the gap between achievement in the different subjects is now closing fast.
- In all subjects, most staff encourage students in their reading. They are given opportunities to read out loud and undertake research activities involving reading. Students show confidence and willingness to take up these opportunities.
- Leaders have introduced a daily distinct reading time for all students, and the speech therapist provides excellent support to individuals where required. These strategies enable students to rediscover a joy of reading. Students and parents say that they now read much more widely in school and at home.
- Students who are less able to access written books have listening books. This helps them to access higher-level literature for their enjoyment and for information.
- Students are encouraged to develop their writing skill in different subjects other than English and this too, helps to raise standards.
- The school prepares students well for the next stage of their lives. Last year, most school leavers were successful in obtaining qualifications in a number of subjects at GCSE, and work-related qualifications. Many achieved grades in line with their ability. Almost all of them took up places in further or higher education, apprenticeship or vocational training.
- The school does not enter students early for examinations.
- Leaders have ensured that all the independent school standards relating to students' achievement are met.

### The sixth form provision

is good

- Good leadership and management, consistently good teaching and high expectations from staff characterise the sixth form. As a result, students make good progress overall. Most students achieve good results in courses that lead to qualifications.
- Almost all students in Year 11 move on to the sixth form, and some new students join the school at this juncture. They are offered a very strong individual programme based on their ability, preferences and aspirations for the future.
- Those students who would benefit from a more academic curriculum are offered a blend of BTEC programmes and the American High School Diploma. This blend is carefully designed to draw on the different strengths of individual students.
- Students are able to go on to university or higher education from either vocational or diploma courses. Every student that has applied has been accepted, and a small number of students this year are going on to university or college.
- Students who would benefit from a more vocational approach are offered a Foundation Learning Curriculum that comprises basic literacy and numeracy, vocational studies, and personal and social development.
- All students are given professional support in deciding on the next stage beyond school so that they and their families can make informed decisions.
- Students in the sixth form take on extra responsibilities such as becoming a prefect. They carry out routine duties as well as supporting and mentoring younger students.
- Sixth form students continue to have access to the school support staff such as the occupational therapist

and the counsellor.

- Almost all students have moved on successfully to productive lives and careers.
- The school meets all the requirements of the independent school standards relating to the sixth form.

## What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: [www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	101175
<b>Inspection number</b>	462855
<b>DfE registration number</b>	212/6408

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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Co-educational day special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	9–19
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Gender of pupils in the sixth form</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	47
<b>Of which, number on roll in sixth form</b>	19
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	0
<b>Proprietor</b>	M & M Murphy Partnership
<b>Chair</b>	Sean White
<b>Headteacher</b>	Natalia Ambridge
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	1–2 February 2012
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£26,100 – £38,775
<b>Telephone number</b>	020 7738 2344
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