

Inspection of The Bridge Special Education Needs School

148-150 & 167 Old Kent Road, London SE1 5TY

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Inadequate

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

The school puts in much thought and effort to ensure that every pupil's transition into this school is smooth and successful. Well-trained and caring staff build up strong and trustful working relationships with pupils. They pay close attention to pupils' individual needs and celebrate every small step of success that they achieve. This makes for a happy and positive working environment. Most pupils' attendance is remarkably high. Those very few who sometimes struggle to come in are supported through effective online learning.

Pupils who join this school tend to display challenging behaviours. This is especially the case when they get into a heightened emotional state. Staff are skilled in helping pupils to de-escalate their anxieties and calm down quickly. As a result, over time, pupils' behaviour improves and they are able to engage well with learning.

The school strives to help pupils to gain the social and communication knowledge and skills that they need to lead meaningful lives. They meet these goals through the bespoke education and pastoral support that they give to each pupil. Parents and carers who spoke with the inspector said that communication with the school is excellent. They described their children as changed, calmer and happier since joining the school.

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

The school has robust systems in place to assess pupils' starting points when they join. These checks find out about pupils' academic learning as well as their social development. Taking their findings into account and the information from pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans, leaders design a bespoke programme of learning for each pupil. In doing so, they draw on a well-sequenced curriculum covering the range of required areas in the independent school standards. Teachers and support staff are well trained. They have the expertise to adapt their teaching and resources to the needs of each pupil. Daily, they review each pupils' engagement and progress towards meeting their specific targets. They use this information well to make further adaptations as required. In small steps and with lots of repetition, pupils begin to embed new knowledge in their long-term memories.

The school prioritises the development of pupils' communication skills, applying a range of strategies, including visual images and sign language. These strategies are effective in helping pupils to communicate their thoughts and needs. Every day, staff read books to pupils for learning and pleasure. Staff use sensory prompts to aid pupils' understanding as appropriate. A few pupils are ready to start learning phonics. However, the school's phonics programme is not delivered as well as it should be. This means that those few pupils are not fully supported to build up their phonics knowledge.

Teaching staff and therapists work together to create a personal behaviour plan for each pupil. These define the triggers that may cause each pupil's dysregulation. They give guidance on how staff can anticipate these and take pre-emptive action. They also identify the strategies that pupils need to help them to quickly return to learning. Pupils are given sensory breaks, other support and therapies to help them to behave well. As a result, pupils follow staff's clearly set routines. Most of the time pupils engage positively in lessons.

The school teaches pupils a range of life skills aimed at supporting them to prepare for their future lives. For those pupils who need it, this can be learning about brushing teeth and taking care of personal hygiene. Pupils are taught a lot about relationships and respecting other people's personal space. They are encouraged to respect people with different characteristics. Staff help them to understand how to behave with good manners. Every week, staff take pupils into the community. For example, they go shopping in a supermarket and handle payments. They purchase ingredients for an agreed recipe and on return to school are taught to cook or bake. Pupils do daily exercise plus have fitness, yoga and swimming lessons. These all contribute to promoting pupils' physical and mental health. Enrichment activities include visits to places of interest like the maritime museum. Pupils, if ready, also study accredited vocational units. These are in personal, social and emotional development or personal progress.

Staff appreciate the openness of the proprietor and school leaders. They said that they are approachable and take care of their welfare. Staff feel that their workload is reasonable and manageable. They work closely together and support one another.

Following the last standard inspection, the proprietor took action to address the unmet independent school standards. This included the appointment of several external contractors to undertake a range of annual checks related to health and safety. The proprietor also appointed a governing body to support and advise the school and to scrutinise its work. The governing body brings a wealth of relevant expertise and experiences. The proprietor and governors visit the school regularly to check on all aspects of its work. As a result, the school is now consistently compliant with all the independent school standards.

The accessibility plan complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

The school's safeguarding policy is published on its website. It complies with the latest statutory guidance.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The school's approach to teaching phonics to the few pupils who are ready to learn to read is not strong enough. This means that those few pupils are not developing their early reading skills well. The school should ensure that all staff have the skills to teach the school's phonics programme. The school should also acquire books that match the sounds that pupils learn so that they can have regular practice to develop their reading fluency.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	147977
DfE registration number	210/6012
Local authority	Southwark
Inspection number	10286473
Type of school	Other independent special school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	14 to 25
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	12
Proprietor	Edith Eneanya-Bonito
Headteacher	James Nuttall
Annual fees (day pupils)	£60,000 to £100,000
Telephone number	020 7703 8587
Website	www.thebridge-school.co.uk
Email address	admin@thebridge-school.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	24 to 26 November 2021

Information about this school

- All pupils have EHC plans and are placed and funded by a range of local authorities. Pupils have a range of complex special educational needs and/or disabilities, including autism. Many pupils are non-verbal.
- The school caters for pupils of compulsory school age at its main premises at 148–150 Old Kent Road, London SE1 5TY. Students aged 18 to 25 attend the premises opposite, at 167 Old Kent Road, London SE1 5TY.
- The proprietor has purchased new premises at 2A Bensham Manor Road, Croydon CR7 7AA. Once refurbishment works are completed, subject to the proposed material change being approved by the Department for Education, leaders intend to relocate to these premises.
- The school has a sole proprietor. She has appointed a governing body who act in an advisory role.

- The school's previous standard inspection in November 2021 was its first full inspection. The school had its first progress monitoring inspection in November 2022 and its second in March 2023.
- The school does not make use of alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

The inspector carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- The inspector discussed any continued impact of the pandemic with leaders and has taken that into account in this evaluation of the school.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in these subjects: early reading and communication, mathematics and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, the inspector held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers and looked at samples of pupils' work. The inspector also considered other subjects as part of the inspection.
- The inspector spoke with the headteacher, the proprietor and chair of the governing body. He also spoke with representatives of two local authorities.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspector: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- The inspector scrutinised a range of documentary information and toured the school site to check compliance with the independent school standards.
- The inspector had a formal meeting with staff. He had telephone conversations with some parents. There were no responses to the Ofsted Parent View survey. He also considered the responses to the staff survey.

Inspection team

David Radomsky, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

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