

Inspection of an outstanding school: The Pears Family School

4-8 Rodney Street, London N1 9JH

Inspection dates:

2 and 3 November 2022

Outcome

The Pears Family School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a truly unique school which makes a significant difference to pupils' lives. Before coming to this school, pupils have been through a wide range of challenges. For all sorts of reasons, their experiences of education have often not been positive. But this school helps them to turn things around.

Staff have high expectations. They are successful at providing pupils with the knowledge, confidence and skills they need to succeed. Most pupils move on to a mainstream setting within four or five school terms, but this is not something which is fixed. Things are flexible. Staff do whatever is in each pupil's best interests to make sure that transitions are successful and sustained.

Staff are well trained in supporting pupils to improve their attitudes to learning. Over time, pupils learn how to manage their behaviours and feelings. Staff build trusting relationships with pupils. This helps pupils to feel secure and enjoy school again. Pupils are safe. While bullying is rare, staff sort it out properly and quickly.

Pupils enjoy a wide variety of experiences during their time here, including exciting barge trips on the canal, visits to museums and spending time at the nearby farm.

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

Staff are highly skilled in supporting pupils' mental health and emotional well-being. They use their expertise to build pupils' resilience, confidence and readiness for learning. This therapeutic part of the curriculum works hand in hand with a rigorous academic curriculum, including in reading, writing, mathematics and science.

Leaders' work with parents and carers is highly effective. Parents are empowered to understand how they can support their children in school and at home to get back on track. For example, leaders provided focused and well-planned 'systemic focused workshops' for parents. Parents regularly work alongside their children in lessons. This

way of working between parents, expert staff and other professionals provides a strong network around the whole family. It helps parents as well as pupils.

The curriculum is well planned so that, from whatever starting point, pupils' knowledge builds securely over time. Staff checks on pupils' learning identify and address any gaps or misconceptions. Teachers set ambitious targets for pupils' learning and behaviour. These build up gradually so that pupils experience success. Pupils' individual learning plans ensure that everyone knows the best ways to help each pupil to reach their next steps.

Staff use the school's phonics programme very effectively in order to teach pupils to read. Staff have great success with this. Pupils quickly start to enjoy reading. They are also taught to realise the importance of reading. Leaders have considered carefully the texts that pupils study. These link to concepts which pupils can relate to, including some of the issues pupils might be facing, such as change, fear and conflict. Pupils appreciate this approach. For example, pupils in Year 8 said that exploring a character's feelings helped them to reflect on their own emotions.

As pupils' achievement through the curriculum develops, so too does their motivation. Staff are experts at getting pupils to a place where they are keen to learn. Pupils take pride in their work. Staff know when and how to step in when pupils become angry or upset. They are skilled at helping pupils to calm down and return to their learning. Over time, pupils' behaviour and attendance improve markedly.

Pupils take part in a range of activities, such as swimming, music, art and sports. They are taught about other people and to respect differences. In lessons, pupils cover topics such as consent and healthy relationships. Leaders make sure that pupils receive timely and relevant careers advice.

'Reflection time' is a powerful and positive way to end each day. Leaders build in time each day for pupils to reflect on their learning and behaviour. Pupils and staff take these sessions seriously and find them a positive and powerful way to end each day. Pupils hear praise from staff and each other. Pupils in Year 9, for example, reflected on how well one of their friends had 'turned the day around'. They spoke thoughtfully about the things which helped to make this happen.

When the time is right, pupils make the move back into a mainstream school or an appropriate special school. When this happens, everyone comes to a special assembly in order to celebrate this important milestone. As a result of this school's work, pupils are extremely well prepared for the next stages in education.

Parents value highly the impact this school has on their children's education and behaviour. They are extremely positive about staff's dedication, knowledge and kindness. Staff feel very well supported by leaders both professionally and personally.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Governors ensure that all the required recruitment checks are carried out to make sure that staff are suitable.

Staff get to know pupils and families very well. Staff attend regular, well-planned briefings during which they discuss pupils' well-being. This time is used to identify and address swiftly any potential problems, including those related to safeguarding. Leaders work diligently with local authorities to get pupils and families the help they need.

The curriculum is planned effectively to allow pupils to learn, in an age-appropriate way, about risks. Pupils are taught about keeping themselves safe online and in different situations outside school.

Background

When we have judged a school to be outstanding, we will then normally go into the school about once every four years to confirm that the school remains outstanding. This is called an ungraded inspection and it is carried out under section 8 of the Education Act 2005. We do not give graded judgements on an ungraded inspection. However, if we find evidence that a school would now receive a higher or lower grade, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection, which is carried out under section 5 of the Act. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the ungraded inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will deem the ungraded inspection a graded inspection immediately.

This is the first ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in June 2017.

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.

Further information

You can search for [published performance information](#) about the school.

In the report, '[disadvantaged pupils](#)' refers to those pupils who attract government pupil premium funding: pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years and pupils in care or who left care through adoption or another formal route.

School details

Unique reference number	141130
Local authority	Islington
Inspection number	10240100
Type of school	Alternative provision
School category	Academy free school
Age range of pupils	5 to 14
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	31
Appropriate authority	Board of trustees
Chair of trust	John Cape
Headteacher	Matthew Hillman
Website	www.thefamilyschoollondon.org
Date of previous inspection	21 and 22 June 2017, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Pears Family School is a free school alternative provision. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. The school caters for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional needs, such as autism spectrum disorders. Most pupils have education, health and care plans.
- Almost all pupils are dual registered between this school and a mainstream setting.
- The school does not make use of other alternative provision.

Information about this inspection

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors held meetings with the headteacher, the deputy headteacher and other senior leaders. They met with those responsible for governance, including the chair of governors.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: reading, mathematics, and personal, social, health and economic education. In these subjects, inspectors met with

leaders, visited a sample of lessons, spoke with pupils and staff and reviewed pupils' work. Inspectors looked at curriculum planning and pupils' work in science and English.

- Inspectors held meetings with groups of pupils. Inspectors observed pupils during social times. They also observed the arrangements for the start and end of the day.
- An inspector spoke with a representative of one of the local authorities which commissions places at this school.
- Inspectors scrutinised the single central record of staff suitability checks. They held meetings with those responsible for safeguarding and reviewed safeguarding records.

Inspection team

Gary Rawlings, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Una Buckley

His Majesty's Inspector

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

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Textphone: 0161 618 8524
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