

Ofsted
Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T 0300 123 4234
www.gov.uk/ofsted



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Mrs Vijita Patel
Principal
Swiss Cottage School – Development & Research Centre
80 Avenue Road
London
NW8 6HX

Dear Mrs Patel

Short inspection of Swiss Cottage School – Development & Research Centre

Following my visit to the school on 3 May 2017 with Joanna Tarrant, Ofsted Inspector, I write on behalf of Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Education, Children's Services and Skills to report the inspection findings. The visit was the first short inspection carried out since the school was judged to be outstanding in January 2014.

This school continues to be outstanding.

The leadership team has maintained the outstanding quality of education in the school since the last inspection.

Your exemplary leadership style and the very good support from an excellent senior team have led to you sustaining the outstanding quality of education at the school. This comment from a member of staff accurately sums up the culture of the school: 'I'm proud to be a part of an inspiring school.' There is no doubt that your staff are committed to recognising the 'individuality of each pupil, working together, creating opportunities and celebrating success'. You all live the school's vision daily.

The school is highly effective. This is because you and your staff ensure that pupils can learn and develop their independent skills in extremely positive and stimulating surroundings that are very well ordered. The school's efficiency is linked to a number of outstanding features that you have all maintained. First, your appointment as the new principal has ensured continuity and stability. Second, the school promotes the importance of respect and tolerance for all pupils and staff, who come from a range of cultures and backgrounds. The leadership team is highly respected within the school, locally and nationally. Third, the strong teamwork among staff supports highly effective planning of lessons and personalised plans that are linked to pupils' education, health and care plans. This is a strength of the school's work. Leaders ensure that staff keep to the very clear framework for supporting pupils.

Swiss Cottage School maintains a distinctive position as a provider within the special school category; it is a centre of excellence. The school is highly effective, primarily because you use exemplary systems to coach staff, and to develop, refine and monitor the quality of teaching. Staff development is continuous and paramount to the school's work. As a research centre, you ensure that the school makes every effort to improve its practices. You listen to the views and research ideas of staff, and empower them to investigate and try out new ideas. Innovative practices persist and staff spread their expertise widely to local and neighbouring schools and further afield. The school is justly recognised for its work. You have skilfully integrated all aspects of teaching into the curriculum, pupils' personal development and the leadership and management of the school. The unified approach leads to pupils achieving extremely well in their personal development and independent skills. In addition, you and your leadership team have worked very well with the staff to develop an exemplary assessment system to track pupils' achievement, which parents and carers understand. However, you are keen to develop this further. You ensure that independent assessors critically challenge and evaluate the school's work. This comment from an interviewee, 'The headteacher and staff are always "hungry",' accurately captures the pioneering approach to seeking ways to support and develop the quality of life for pupils.

Governors are very well informed about the school's work. They provide an additional layer of challenge while providing advice and support. Planning for improvement is extensive, and symbolises the culture of the school, evident in the daily planning meetings, and pupils' achievements. You and other leaders are uncompromising in your drive to improve practices. The local authority recognises and supports the plans that you and other leaders have to change the school's status. The quest for increasing excellence means that the school is strongly placed to develop further.

Safeguarding is effective.

Safeguarding is effective. The school has exceptionally robust methods for safeguarding the welfare of pupils. Pupils' vulnerabilities mean that staff are very knowledgeable about risks they might face. As a result, they do all that they can to keep pupils safe from harm. For example, leaders' knowledge about local safeguarding concerns has led to them not shying away from tackling sensitive topics.

Thorough checks of all staff ensure that pupils are not at risk of harm. As a community special school, the school's partnership work with other services is extremely good. The integrated services work extremely well, as a 'one-stop shop'. Referrals, help and support from teams are therefore timely. Students in the sixth form say that they can turn to different members of staff if they have worries. Students' confidence in approaching their teachers illustrates the overwhelming view of parents who report in the online survey that their children are safe at the school.

Safeguarding training is thorough. Staff are well informed about national concerns such as child sexual exploitation, female genital mutilation and radicalisation. Training is continuous, and includes regular updates and briefings.

Inspection findings

- The first line of enquiry that we jointly agreed that I would investigate was the quality of the three curriculum models and their impact on preparing pupils for the next step of their education.
- The curriculum models are extremely well planned and they meet the differing needs and age ranges of pupils very well. Each model is carefully linked to internal and external research and evaluation. In addition, they reflect the specific skills that pupils need at different stages of their learning and development. Planning is imaginative and ensures that every course is responsive to pupils' needs and the increasing number of pupils who have complex learning needs. While the informal curriculum focuses on developmental needs, the more formal models reflect life skills and excellent opportunities for pupils to develop their voice. All models enhance pupils' learning and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, as well as British values.
- The quality of teaching is integral to the curriculum models. Teachers plan sessions very carefully, drawing on a range of resources to stimulate pupils' minds and movements and to ensure that each pupil has a personalised plan that is linked to their specific needs.
- The curriculum is innovative, varied and stimulating. Opportunities abound for pupils to gain experience when using public spaces, and to resolve risks they may face. The three models are exemplary and provide staff with comprehensive guides, as well as parents with insight into supporting their child's learning. Sixth-form students say that they enjoy the courses offered and the opportunities they have to develop their independence.
- The second line of enquiry that the inspection team considered was the quality of provision for sixth-form students since the previous inspection.
- Improvements to the sixth form have been rapid. The breadth and depth of the curriculum promote independent living and the school offers a range of vocational courses that lead to students gaining relevant qualifications. Since the previous inspection, all students have gained vocational awards at entry levels 1 to 3 in a range of courses and social enterprise projects offered. Students make exceptional progress from very low starting points to gain recognised accreditation in basic core skills, English, mathematics and information and communication technology.
- Students pursue a range of work-related courses that lead to them being well prepared to enter employment and manage their growing independence. Students told inspectors that they enjoy work experience. Evidence shows that a few students successfully gained internships and permanent employment. Students receive a good grounding on keeping safe as part of the process of becoming more independent. For example, themes on relationships, keeping safe online and using technology such as mobile phones, alert them to potential dangers and behaving responsibly.

- The third line of enquiry that we discussed was the use of assessment information to demonstrate the progress that pupils make and the standards they achieve over time.
- The assessment system is innovative. You have skilfully combined a range of measures to reflect the standards that pupils reach in their work, and the progress they make in their personal development. The school successfully captures the progress that pupils make in their learning. Evidence shows that pupils make strong progress and achieve very well from extremely low starting points.
- Parents understand how you have unified the different strands of assessment data and wide-ranging targets set to develop a single assessment system. You use a range of information to check and analyse pupils' achievement. The leadership team uses the resulting information to assess the school's effectiveness, and to make changes to personal learning intention maps (PLIMs). This ensures that every pupil receives an equal opportunity to achieve very well in his or her work and personal development.
- The assessment system is widely acclaimed. However, as leaders, you recognise that there is more to do in relation to clarifying how the different benchmarks work to form a unified assessment system.

Next steps for the school

Leaders and those responsible for governance should ensure that they:

- bring together all of the information used to check pupils' progress by ensuring that information related to standards and general targets is accessible and easily understood.

I am copying this letter to the chair of the governing body, the regional schools commissioner and the director of children's services for Camden. This letter will be published on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

Carmen Rodney
Her Majesty's Inspector

Information about the inspection

During this inspection, the inspection team held a number of meetings with you and other senior leaders. You and other senior leaders accompanied the inspectors on a series of short visits to lessons in all key stages. The inspection team held discussions with different leaders and focused on each of the key lines of enquiry. These covered safeguarding, the curriculum, the sixth form and pupils' progress over time. Meetings were held with the chair of the governing body and one other governor and with two representatives from the local authority, the director of education and the special educational needs and/or disabilities adviser. A meeting was also held with a group of sixth-form students. The inspection team worked with senior leaders to scrutinise pupils' work and the assessment information on pupils' progress. The inspectors looked at a range of documentation. This included the school's self-evaluation and summary improvement plan, a review of the school's work, minutes of governors' meetings, records of pupils' progress and behaviour, and evidence of records to keep pupils safe and on their attendance. The inspection took into consideration 27 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online survey for parents.