

Inspection of an outstanding school: Northway School

The Fairway, Mill Hill, London NW7 3HS

Inspection dates:

28 and 29 February 2024

Outcome

Northway School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils are very happy at this school. Pupils' learning activities are often based on their interests, which helps them to enjoy their lessons. Pupils learn to express more of what they want and how they feel. Staff know pupils exceedingly well. They respond to pupils' expressive communication in the right way, thus enabling a meaningful interchange.

The school's curriculum is sharply focused on the most important things for pupils to learn, remember and be able to do. For example, the outcomes outlined in their education, health and care plans, including those related to communication, independence and well-being. Pupils achieve well because ambitious long-term targets are broken down into small learning steps. Staff use assessment information well to plan suitable learning activities. Pupils are not over assisted and are taught to do more for themselves. As a result, they are extremely well prepared for the future.

The school's approach to collaborating with therapists helps ensure that pupils' needs are well met. Staff skilfully help pupils to understand their daily schedules, thus diminishing any anxiety. Pupils' behaviour is excellent. There is a calm environment at both sites as pupils are well supported with their emotional regulation.

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

The school's curriculum design and delivery is excellent. Pupils enjoy a wide range of subjects, including art, swimming, and physical education. The school prioritises the development of pupils' communication knowledge and skills. Training gives staff the expertise they need to teach effectively. They improve pupils' sign, symbol, image, object, and language communication skills. Consequently, pupils gain the tools they need to learn to do more. For instance, because of improved communication, pupils learn to initiate interactions with others and to move to different areas of the school.

The school's system for gathering and using assessment information helps teachers set the right level of challenge in future lessons. Teachers ensure that pupils practise

repeatedly the most important knowledge until they master it securely. For example, pupils practise exchanging a symbol for a preferred item in a variety of settings, with decreasing adult support and with a variety of partners. Children in the early years gain the knowledge and skills they need for Year 1 and beyond. For example, children may begin by completing one or two motivating and achievable learning activities at a time. This means they are well prepared to tackle a series of more difficult learning tasks later on. The youngest children make a great start because they build trusting working relationships with staff.

From the start, pupils develop an interest in and affection for stories and books. Pupils engage, listen, and join in with familiar rhymes and songs. When pupils are ready, they learn letter sounds through the school's phonics scheme. Pupils are supported to break words down into their component sounds and blend them back together. Pupils show determination and enjoyment when practising reading. They read books that match the sounds and words they know, helping them to read more fluently and with increasing confidence. At the right time, teachers help pupils to understand what they read.

Pupils are rarely emotionally dysregulated. Any incidents of dysregulation are skilfully managed by staff to restore calm. The school works with families and external professionals to make sure pupils receive the right support for their emotional needs. For instance, the child and adolescent mental health services help the school design pupil-specific behaviour support plans. Staff help pupils to be calm through teaching them to communicate what they want and how they feel. Teaching carefully balances learning demands to both maximise learning and avoid dysregulation. Strong, caring working relationships between adults and pupils help pupils to feel secure. The school identifies the causes of absence. Collaboration with families and external partners helps improve attendance. For example, by making school as appealing as possible and reducing any school-based anxiety.

The school provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils' personal development. The curriculum is enriched through dance sessions, horse riding, supported work at a local farm and sporting events. Inspectors saw pupils learning to repeat simple dance movements with fading adult support. They were having fun.

Staff feel exceptionally well supported by leaders. They appreciate leaders' close involvement in the day-to-day life of the school. They report that leaders' decisions consistently align with the school's values. Staff are given support and training to extend their knowledge and skills. Through doing so they become able to take on additional responsibilities. Governors understand their strategic leadership role. Their engagement with leaders has positively steered the school's expansion decisions.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

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 second ungraded inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding in March 2015.

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](#)' is used to mean pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND); pupils who meet the [definition of children in need of help and protection](#); pupils receiving statutory local authority support from a social worker; and pupils who otherwise meet the criteria used for deciding the school's [pupil premium funding](#) (this includes pupils claiming free school meals at any point in the last six years, looked after children (children in local authority care) and/or children who left care through adoption or another formal route).

School details

Unique reference number	101395
Local authority	Barnet
Inspection number	10296699
Type of school	Special
School category	Community special
Age range of pupils	4 to 12
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	154
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Matt Dreisin
Headteacher	Danielle Barker
Website	www.northway.barnet.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	31 October 2018, under section 8 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- From September 2022, the school has provided for secondary-age pupils. To enable increased pupil numbers, the youngest pupils are educated at a second site located at Grasvenor Avenue, Barnet, EN5 2BY. The oldest pupils attending the school are currently in Year 8.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- All pupils have an education, health and care plan. The school mostly caters for pupils with autism spectrum disorder.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with the school and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.

- Inspectors met with a group of school governors, the headteacher, deputy headteachers and designated safeguarding lead. Inspectors also met with a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: communication and interaction, cognition and learning and personal, social and health education. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, visited a sample of lessons and spoke to staff. Inspectors also discussed the curriculum in some other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: 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.
- Inspectors reviewed a range of documentation and had formal meetings with groups of staff.
- Inspectors met with a group of pupils while staff were present. Inspectors listened to some pupils read to staff.

Inspection team

Barney Geen, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Emma Watford

Ofsted Inspector

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