

Inspection of an outstanding school: Stephen Hawking School

Brunton Place, London E14 7LL

Inspection dates:

1–2 October 2019

Outcome

Stephen Hawking School continues to be an outstanding school.

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils arrive happily each morning. They smile and move excitedly as they get off the school bus and notice the familiar faces of their teachers and support staff.

All staff have very high expectations of themselves and the pupils. They do not allow pupils' needs to become barriers. Leaders have established very effective partnerships with a wide range of professionals, including therapists and nurses. Everybody works together well to make sure that pupils succeed in all areas of their learning and development.

Staff are excellent at using each pupil's individual way of communicating. They check that pupils are happy, safe and engaged in their learning. Staff make lessons fun and exciting because they know each pupil's likes and interests.

Every pupil is involved in whole-school events because staff know exactly how to adapt things to match each pupil's needs. Staff told us that they always find a way to include pupils in activities the school offers. Pupils take part in cooking, swimming, sports and music sessions.

Pupils enjoy times when they learn alongside or with their classmates. Staff help pupils to interact with their friends. They are always looking for ways to increase pupils' independence. Bullying is not a problem in the school. Pupils always behave well.

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

Leaders and all staff are highly ambitious for every pupil. They are united as a team and share very high expectations for pupils' academic and personal development.

Staff are highly skilled in supporting pupils with profound and multiple learning difficulties. Teachers and support staff work closely with other professionals. Together, they create individual plans for pupils which include all aspects of their learning and development.

Teachers plan a broad range of subjects for pupils to learn. Teachers design activities very carefully. They make sure that each lesson builds on what has been learned previously. Pupils make strong progress towards meeting their targets. Teachers consider each pupil's individual needs and method of communication. This means that all activities and lessons are purposeful and appropriate.

Staff develop pupils' communication skills exceptionally well. They find ways of helping pupils to communicate in a range of scenarios and places. For example, we saw pupils using communication books to make choices about what activity to do next. We saw others using pictures to choose snacks at breaktime. Other pupils showed their excitement and choices through eye pointing or grasping. Staff measure every small step of pupils' achievements and share these with parents and carers. We saw pupils of all abilities achieving success in their communication. For example, some pupils were successful at making eye contact. Others were able to recognise a photograph of themselves. Some pupils used their voices to identify or repeat words.

Reading is very well planned. Pupils of all abilities access reading in some way. They experience a range of stories and rhymes. Staff promote pupils' listening and attention skills very well. We saw pupils creating and responding to different sounds as part of a musical story session. When pupils are ready for more formal phonics teaching, staff assess pupils' needs carefully. They write specific plans to help pupils to learn how to read. As well as the excellent programme of phonics teaching at this school, some pupils go to a mainstream school for their phonics lessons.

Staff enrich pupils' experiences with activities beyond the classroom. For example, some pupils take part in kayaking and ice skating. Pupils celebrate religious festivals throughout the year. They develop an understanding of the world around them. Pupils demonstrate excellent attitudes to learning.

Leaders provide parents with advice and strategies to help their children at home. Leaders also find ways to help parents with other aspects of pupils' welfare. For example, they organise annual clinics for pupils. Doctors come into school to check pupils' eyes, teeth and hearing.

Children in the early years, including the two-year-olds, thrive in the excellent care of the adults who work with them. Children's learning is meticulously planned. Teachers' use of resources and the vibrant learning environment support children's needs. Staff work closely with parents to ensure that there is consistency between home and school.

Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the school. The partnership with a mainstream primary school is making a difference for staff and pupils. Leaders take staff well-being seriously. Staff feel very well supported. They told us that strong teamwork and the desire to see every pupil achieve are the reasons they enjoy working at the school so much. Staff typically described the school as 'a family'.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Leaders make sure that the well-being of every pupil is of highest importance. Staff are very well trained in all aspects of safeguarding. Staff work closely in class teams and get to know pupils very well. They discuss pupils every day and are alert to the signs that a pupil may be unhappy or unsafe. All incidents are recorded, and any concerns are dealt with swiftly and effectively.

Pupils' safety and welfare are key parts of their individual plans. Leaders seek advice from other professionals, including social services, to keep pupils safe.

Background

When we have judged a special school, pupil referral unit or maintained nursery 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 a section 8 inspection of a good school or non-exempt outstanding school. We do not give graded judgements on a section 8 inspection. However, if we find some evidence that the school could now be better than good or that standards may be declining, then the next inspection will be a section 5 inspection. Usually this is within one to two years of the date of the section 8 inspection. If we have serious concerns about safeguarding, behaviour or the quality of education, we will convert the section 8 inspection to a section 5 inspection immediately.

This is the second section 8 inspection since we judged the school to be outstanding on 5 March 2013.

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 Ofsted Parent View information 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.

If you are not happy with the inspection or the report, you can [complain to Ofsted](#).

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	131023
Local authority	Tower Hamlets
Inspection number	10110433
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	102
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Susy Gilvin
Headteacher	Jennie Bird (executive headteacher)
Website	www.stephenhawking.towerhamlets.sch.uk
Date of previous inspection	23 February 2016

Information about this school

- Stephen Hawking School caters for pupils with severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties. It is a split-site school with the early years and Year 1 located in St Jude's Road, Bethnal Green. All other year groups are located at Brunton Place, Limehouse.
- At the start of this academic year, the executive headteacher took up her post. She is supported by a head of school for each of the sites. The previous headteacher left his post in July 2019.
- The school has provision for two-year-old children as part of its early years department.

Information about this inspection

- We held meetings with the executive headteacher and other senior leaders. We met with the chair of governors and one other governor. We met with a representative of the local authority and spoke with another representative on the telephone. We spoke to staff and pupils and reviewed the free-text responses to Ofsted Parent View.
- We considered communication, reading and 'discovering my world' in depth. In each of these areas of learning, we visited lessons, reviewed pupils' files and plans, spoke with

members of staff and held discussions with curriculum leaders. We heard pupils read and spoke with staff about pupils' reading and communication skills.

- To inspect safeguarding, we reviewed the single central record of staff suitability checks, met with the designated safeguarding lead and looked at child protection procedures. We also met with the home-school support worker and asked different members of staff about the safeguarding arrangements.
- We observed pupils arriving at the start of the day, during lunchtimes and in transitions between lessons. We all spent time on both sites.

Inspection team

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