

Inspection of a school judged outstanding for overall effectiveness before September 2024: Royal Free Hospital Children's School

Floor 6 - 6 West B, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG

Inspection dates:

4 and 5 February 2025

Outcome

Evidence gathered during this ungraded (section 8) inspection suggests that aspects of the school's work may not be as strong as at the time of the previous inspection. The school's next inspection will be a graded inspection.

What is it like to attend this school?

This is a school where each pupil is valued and celebrated for who they are and what they can do. Most have had a turbulent time in education and they often join the school feeling that education has little to offer them. Staff work hard to change this view.

Staff have created a safe space, where pupils can learn. Consequently, pupils typically enjoy school and are proud to attend. After spending time at The Royal Free Hospital School, even pupils who have previously spent one or two years in their bedrooms often thrive when they return to a mainstream school.

Pupils' behaviour is exemplary, both in class and throughout the school. They are polite, welcoming and cooperative. The positive, well-staffed environment limits any potential for bullying. Low-level disruptive behaviour does not hinder other pupils' learning. They are confident that staff will help them with any problems they encounter.

The school has high expectations for all pupils. However, the curriculum is under review. At the time of this inspection, the curriculum was not sufficiently developed. Parents and carers are positive about the school. Several parents spoke of seeing changes in their children that they had never dared to dream of, such as achieving GCSEs, or just talking to a neighbour.

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

Recently, the school has experienced several changes. These include relocating to a new site, appointing a new headteacher and addressing a significant shift in the needs of the pupils.

The pupils at the school are proud and happy here. Depending on their medical requirements, pupils may stay at the school for either short or long durations. When pupils join, the staff promptly establish a connection with the pupils, making every effort to comprehend each pupil's personality, interests, talents and future aspirations. Pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities are accurately identified and understood. The staff also reassure pupils admitted to the wards that they can continue their education and stay on top of their schoolwork.

The school has outlined a compelling vision for the next phase of the curriculum, aiming to ensure it better addresses the diverse needs of the pupil cohort. However, the school is in the early stages of this work. This means that sometimes, pupils are not taught ideas in a logical order, and they do not progress through the curriculum as well as they should. Pupils work towards a range of qualifications, including GCSEs in English and mathematics, and achieve some success.

The curriculum is enriched through a range of additional subjects and therapies. This includes equine therapy, art therapy and drama therapy. These help pupils to develop social skills and resilience strategies to deal with previous trauma.

Staff ensure that pupils explore a range of diverse and demanding texts, both as part of the curriculum and for pleasure. The school identifies pupils who may need support with their reading. Staff have various support strategies at their disposal, which they can use to help individual pupils. Consequently, these pupils learn to read with accuracy and fluency.

The school is tenacious about ensuring pupils' attendance at school improves. Every effort goes in to help pupils engage with learning. Even the structure of the school day has been carefully designed to re-engage and enrich pupils' lives beyond the academic curriculum. As a result, most are keen to attend.

A strength of the school is the way it develops pupils' personal skills and gets them ready for adulthood. Significant efforts have been made towards helping pupils positively consider their future, particularly those concerned about their medical diagnoses. The careers programme helps pupils to know about the variety of options available to them when they leave school. When pupils leave Year 11, they move on to a range of colleges and training opportunities. The school goes out of its way to remain a source of support for pupils after they have left.

The school and hospital are highly integrated, with the school staff regularly attending and contributing to daily clinical meetings. The school's work helps normalise the hospital experience for pupils, and this sense of familiarity supports pupils during difficult times.

Leaders, staff and governors share an unwavering vision for every pupil to thrive. The school and governors work well together and are clear about what needs to be done to improve the school's performance.

Leaders and governors recognise the dedication of staff. They make sure their well-being is prioritised. The culture of openness, collaboration and support is highly prized by staff. Consequently, staff feel listened to and supported. They are consulted on any changes, and they value leaders' understanding of their well-being and workload.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and appropriate authority)

- Because the school is at the early stages of designing a curriculum that responds to the recent changes it has seen in the needs of the pupils, the delivery of the curriculum is not yet consistently effective. As a result, in some subjects pupils do not build their knowledge well enough over time. The school should ensure that all subject curriculums are implemented as intended.

Background

Until September 2024, on a graded (section 5) inspection we gave schools an overall effectiveness grade, in addition to the key and provision judgements. Overall effectiveness grades given before September 2024 will continue to be visible on school inspection reports and on Ofsted's website. From September 2024, graded inspections will not include an overall effectiveness grade. This school was, before September 2024, judged to be outstanding for its overall effectiveness.

We have now inspected the school to determine whether it has taken effective action to maintain the standards identified at that previous inspection. 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's work has improved significantly or that it may not be as strong as it was at the last inspection, then the next inspection will be a graded inspection. A graded inspection 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 outstanding for overall effectiveness in October 2019.

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	100094
Local authority	Camden
Inspection number	10345623
Type of school	Special
School category	Maintained
Age range of pupils	5 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Appropriate authority	The governing body
Chair of governing body	Dr Nicky Rogal
Headteacher	David Wilson
Website	www.royalfree.camden.sch.uk
Dates of previous inspection	9 and 10 October 2019, under section 5 of the Education Act 2005

Information about this school

- The Royal Free Hospital Children's School caters for pupils with a range of medical and mental health needs. Some pupils have additional needs, including some with education, health and care plans.
- The headteacher started at the school in September 2024.
- The school includes three different types of provision. The school provides education for children who are in-patients or day patients on the paediatric wards of the Royal Free Hospital. The address of this provision is 6 West B, The Royal Free Hospital, Pond Street, London NW3 2QG. The school provides education for the Royal Free Hospital child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) eating disorder service. This provision is at Queen Mary's House, 124 Heath Street, Hampstead NW3 1DX. The GCSE day school is for pupils who are not currently in-patients at the hospital but who would benefit from attending the school on a full- or part-time basis. This provision is at The Konstam Building, 75 Chester Road, London N19 5DH.
- The school does not use any providers of alternative provision.

- The school meets the requirements of the provider access legislation, which requires schools to provide pupils in Years 8 to 13 with information and engagement about approved technical education qualifications and apprenticeships.

Information about this inspection

- Inspections are a point-in-time evaluation 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 the headteacher and other leaders in the school. Inspectors spoke with members of the governing body and a representative from the local authority.
- Inspectors visited a sample of lessons, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- 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.
- During the inspection, inspectors reviewed a range of documentation, including in relation to safeguarding and SEND.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders and staff to understand how workload and well-being are considered in the school.
- Inspectors considered the responses to Ofsted's online surveys for staff and pupils. They also considered the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text comments.

Inspection team

Francis Gonzalez, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

Martyn Patterson

Ofsted Inspector

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, further education and skills, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for children looked after, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 1231, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may reuse this information (not including logos) free of charge in any format or medium, under the terms of the Open Government Licence. To view this licence, visit www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/, write to the Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU, or email: psi@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk.

This publication is available at <http://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/>.

Interested in our work? You can subscribe to our monthly newsletter for more information and updates: <http://eepurl.com/iTrDn>.

Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.gov.uk/ofsted

© Crown copyright 2025