

Inspection of Urban Mission School

1 Cornmill Lane, Elmira Street, Lewisham, London SE13 7FY

Inspection dates: 5 to 7 July 2022

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Many pupils who attend Urban Mission have had challenging experiences in mainstream schools. Typically, their self-esteem is low. Pupils enjoy the family atmosphere and the warm welcome they receive. They prepare and eat lunch with staff each day. Pupils make friends straight away. Older pupils look out for younger pupils. Pupils enjoy a strong professional relationship with their key worker. This helps them to settle quickly. Pupils feel safe. Being 'Montagues' or 'Capulets' as part of the house system gives pupils a sense of belonging.

Pupils have a strong understanding of equality. They learn to be respectful of each other's differences. Pupils celebrate cultural awareness days. They wear traditional clothing and share food. There is no bullying reported in the school. During weekly 'housekeeping' sessions, pupils hold each other to account for their behaviour. They do this in a mature fashion. Pupils are confident that any friendship issues will be resolved swiftly.

With the help of the school's trauma-informed approach, pupils improve their behaviour. They start to catch up on missed learning. Over time, pupils rise to teachers' high expectations of them.

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

Pupils experience a broad curriculum that prepares them well for their next steps. They learn English, mathematics, science, humanities, food technology, art, physical education and personal, social and health education (PSHE). Some pupils stay at the provision for the long term. Others attend as part of a turnaround programme. Pupils who do not return to mainstream education complete level one or level two qualifications.

On arrival, pupils sit baseline assessments in English and mathematics. These help teachers to plan appropriately. Teachers use follow up tests and continuous assessment to check pupils' understanding. In all lessons, teachers present information clearly. However, the curriculum in some subjects could build in more opportunities to revisit prior learning.

Teachers are flexible in their approach. They adapt their plans to plug gaps in pupils' knowledge. Staff begin by teaching fundamental concepts. For example, in science, pupils started by learning about cells, living organisms, classification and anatomy. In mathematics, pupils recapped the four operations of addition, subtraction, multiplication and division. They progressed to decimals, fractions and percentages.

Teachers emphasise the correct use of vocabulary in all subjects. In English, through the study of 'Macbeth', pupils learned terminology such as dramatic irony and soliloquy. Teachers encourage them to expand the vocabulary they use in speech and writing. The school has prioritised reading. Teachers have developed pupils' fluency and comprehension to build confidence. Leaders have provided phonics

instruction when pupils have struggled to read. They have invested in new books to encourage reading for pleasure.

Leaders have a strong track record of identifying pupils' special educational needs and/or disabilities. They ensure that teachers meet these needs. Staff use strategies such as fidget toys, white boards, breaks between tasks and clear boundaries around discussion times. Leaders provide one-to-one support for pupils where needed. Leaders have employed their own speech and language therapists and art therapists. These work with pupils and provide training for staff.

Pupils display good attitudes to learning. They concentrate better in this small setting. Typically, pupils have been out of education for some time. Many have been school refusers. They improve their attendance when they start at Urban Mission. Getting to school on time is still a challenge for some. Leaders recognise that this is an area for improvement.

The school provides a well-sequenced PSHE programme. British values and equalities underpin this. Pupils learn about topics such as physical and mental health, relationships, finance, drugs and alcohol, and digital literacy. They understand smartphone addiction, call out culture and fake news. This work is further enhanced through pupils' citizenship studies. Leaders are keen to expand pupils' experiences to prepare them for life after school. Pupils have visited the Royal Courts of Justice and the Houses of Parliament. They have also been to the seaside. Leaders ensure that pupils are well prepared for their next steps. They work with local employers and colleges to give pupils helpful advice about further education and apprenticeships.

The headteacher and proprietor are strong leaders who have a clear vision for the school and for their pupils. The proprietor has ensured that the independent school standards are met in full. He is proud of the school's therapeutic work. He plans to develop this further. Staff said that leaders are approachable. They provide high-quality opportunities for professional development. Teaching and support staff feel valued for their efforts.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

Staff are well trained to identify pupils at risk of harm. Meetings with referring schools help to flag up any issues early on. Staff understand the contextual risks to pupils. These include children missing in education, exploitation and grooming. The school works well with local agencies, such as local authority inclusion staff, social services and the youth offending team, to get help for pupils and their families. Pupils learn about the risk of gang violence through workshops with a charitable organisation. Leaders check that all staff are safe to work with children. They refresh staff safeguarding training throughout the year.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- Leaders have written detailed curriculum plans that meet the needs of learners. These plans should include more frequent opportunities for revisiting prior learning. This will help pupils to better remember what they have learned and to further embed valuable knowledge and skills.
- Leaders have robust procedures for getting pupils to attend school each day. They have been less successful in encouraging pupils to arrive on time. Leaders should research and implement strategies to improve pupils' punctuality. This will ensure that pupils maximise their time in school.

How can I feed back my views?

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The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

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

School details

Unique reference number	143838
DfE registration number	209/6002
Local authority	Lewisham
Inspection number	10226784
Type of school	Other Independent School
School category	Independent School
Age range of pupils	11 to 16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	17
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Efrem Buckle
Chair	Efrem Buckle
Headteacher	Justina Asafu-Adjaye
Annual fees (day pupils)	£22,571 to £29,341
Telephone number	0208 318 6133
Website	www.umschool.uk
Email address	info@umsc.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	20 to 22 March 2018

Information about this school

- Urban Mission is an independent school and alternative provider in the London Borough of Lewisham. It has a registered capacity of 18 places for boys and girls aged 11 to 16.
- Pupils attend full time. Some attend for short periods while remaining on the roll of their mainstream school.
- The school was part of the nationwide TLG charity. It became Urban Mission from January 2022.
- The school is run in partnership with Ecclesia Church. It has a Christian ethos. The school is located within the church's buildings but has sole use of these when in operation.
- The school meets the requirements of the Baker Clause. This means that pupils receive information about the range of education and training options open to them.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. The inspector discussed the impact of the pandemic with school leaders and has taken that into account in her evaluation.
- The inspector met with the proprietor, the headteacher, who is also the deputy designated safeguarding lead, and a range of teaching and support staff.
- The inspector carried out deep dives in English, mathematics, science and humanities. She looked at curriculum plans, visited lessons, reviewed pupils' work, met with pupils to discuss their learning, and met with teachers.
- The inspector also looked at the curriculum plans of the other subjects taught at Urban Mission.
- Through discussions with leaders, staff and pupils, the inspector considered the effectiveness of safeguarding.

The inspector toured the site. She scrutinised a range of documentary evidence to check on the statutory requirements of the independent school standards. This included checking the school's admissions register, risk assessments, attendance information and safeguarding training.

Inspection team

Lisa Strong, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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