

The German School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The German School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged three to 19 years of age. There are currently 764 pupils on roll; almost all speak English as an additional language. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs, and none are in receipt of UK government funding for nursery education. The school opened in 1971 and serves the German-speaking community in London. The German School London is part of a system of 140 German schools abroad. Most pupils come from Germany, Austria or Switzerland although, in all, 21 nationalities are represented in the school. The language of instruction is German and the school follows the Baden-Württemberg curriculum. The school is located in modern purpose-built accommodation set in extensive grounds in Richmond-upon-Thames. The school aims to provide a high quality education for its pupils, and to minimise the stress and disruption to their education which might be caused by their frequent mobility. An inspection by the agency for German schools abroad took place in November 2010. The school received an inspection from International Baccalaureate inspectors in September 2010, subsequently receiving permission to teach the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme in Years 11 and 12 from the next academic year. The last Ofsted inspection took place in February 2008.

Evaluation of the school

The German School provides an outstanding quality of education and meets its aims fully. Pupils are extremely happy, confident and enjoy their learning. An outstanding curriculum combined with excellent teaching and assessment results in outstanding progress for pupils. Regulations relating to safeguarding of children are met. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Improvements since the last inspection to the curriculum and quality of teaching and assessment have been good. Rigorous self-review reflects the school's good capacity to make further improvements. The school complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. It is thorough and detailed for each key stage and follows an agreed curriculum for German schools abroad. Pupils are taught a very wide range of subjects including modern languages, many from an early age. There is a good curriculum in place for the youngest children that takes close account of the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance. The development of basic skills is well mapped through the school so that pupils progress seamlessly. Highly effective adjustments for those entering at different points during the year ensure that any gaps in learning are closed. The vast majority of pupils participate in a very full programme of extra-curricular activities and cultural trips including sport, drama, music and art that contribute to the curriculum's rich diversity. There are strengths in all areas of the curriculum but the linguistic, scientific and sporting aspects are the most outstanding. Curriculum planning in all subjects ensures that higher ability pupils can be set work from the outset that challenges them fully. A comprehensive personal, health and social educational (PHSE) programme is in place and is taught as an integral part of the curriculum. The curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities in charity work, exchanges and links with other schools. There is an extensive programme of career and higher education advice on offer to Year 10 and upwards for entry to both German-speaking and English universities that supports the excellent preparation for pupils' future economic well-being.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding; it fulfils the school's aims to offer a high quality education for its pupils and to minimise the impact of moving between schools. Pupils of all ages ably acquire new knowledge and almost all make outstanding progress according to their ability, increasing their knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. In the best lessons, imaginative teaching styles including class teaching, pair work, group work, presentation of ideas and whole-class discussion encourage pupils to apply intellectual effort and rigour in their learning and offer many opportunities for independent and critical thinking. Pupils are prepared to ask questions and to take their ideas further. Teachers demonstrate excellent subject knowledge. They share their enthusiasm for their subjects and inspire their pupils to be inquisitive and curious learners. Lessons are well planned, taking needs and prior attainment into account to inform teaching. Time is well managed in lessons, where there is good pace and high expectations. Since the last inspection, significant work has been undertaken to train teachers in a range of methodologies to develop cross-curricular skills and communication.

Lessons follow the curriculum programme for each year group with regular class tests as in the German school system. Observations of children's learning and development in the Early Years Foundations Stage are regular although are not always used to plan the next steps in their learning. Throughout the school, there is a very clear and detailed framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly. This combines extremely effectively with a profile of each pupil's skills for learning. Not only does this combination aid a smooth and highly effective transition from primary to secondary but it is a significant reason for the rapid progress of

those pupils recently arrived. The special educational needs coordinator works closely with teachers and the school psychologist to monitor progress and provide good support for those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. These pupils make outstanding progress as a result.

Parents and carers are kept regularly informed on matters relating to their children's academic progress. The strength of this partnership is a contributory factor in the outstanding progress made by pupils. No pupils fail to pass the final examinations and all who leave the sixth form have gained the qualifications for entry to German universities.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' enjoyment is reflected in their outstanding attendance, their lively responses in lessons and their good participation in extra-curricular activities. Every care has been taken to provide each pupil with an opportunity to find something they can excel at and their individual gifts and talents are nurtured by the specialist teaching, cultural programmes and school clubs. In addition to the wide cultural experiences that foster their self-knowledge and self-confidence, pupils are well prepared for life in a multicultural society through religious education lessons, PHSE, assemblies and visits.

Pupils' behaviour is satisfactory. While pupils respond positively to their teachers in class a minority do not show sufficient kindness and courtesy to others, including supervisory staff. This is evident at break times and also reported in a majority of the negative comments in the responses from pupils, parents and carers to the pre-inspection questionnaires. Pupils report that they appreciate what the school offers them, saying, 'This is a welcoming and inclusive school; the school is very supportive, especially for new pupils' but are critical of those 'who lie, push and show no respect for others'. The staff have introduced measures to encourage pupils to take more responsibility for their behaviour and opportunities to discuss moral rights and wrongs are presented in the PHSE programme, as part of peer mediation and throughout the curriculum. These have had only limited impact on strengthening pupils' moral development and pupils do not consider they are sufficiently involved in determining behaviour policies and procedures.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is good. Pupils willingly take on additional responsibilities. The student council is influential in a number of areas including improvements to the curriculum and in addressing complaints about school meals. Pupils use their initiative in organising fund raising to support events such as the Prince William hand-in-hand Sentebale charity; organising a dinner event, discos and sponsored walks. They are effective in charity fund raising for local charities and community schemes. There are well established links with local and international schools that contribute to pupils' excellent cultural development.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Welfare, health and safety at the school are satisfactory and the confidence with which the pupils move around the school is a demonstration of the school's commitment to their safety and security. Child protection procedures are compliant with regulations and staff members are trained appropriately. Measures to deal with any conflicts that may arise include the election of two 'trusted teachers' and pupils report that they are 'always available for a listening ear'. Safeguarding arrangements are robust with regular reviews of the procedures. Health and safety procedures are good with effective, regular training in risk assessment and comprehensive record keeping systems. A few pupils raised concerns about the quality of school dinners. Inspectors found the lunches to be of good quality with a varied menu available.

There is adequate supervision during breaks and at the beginning and end of the day with both supervisory staff and teachers on duty. However, senior members of staff are not sufficiently engaged with monitoring the impact of the supervision or the behaviour that results. A satisfactory anti-bullying policy is in place that explains the school's expectations. It does not, however, set out detailed procedures to be followed in the event of bullying taking place. Expectations for behaviour in classes are high, with the pupils aware of what is expected of them. The respectful relationships between teachers and pupils in class promote a calm and effective learning environment. A satisfactory behaviour policy places emphasis on positive behaviour and respect. Pupils' behaviour is supported through the introduction of a regular programme of 'behaviour weeks' since the previous inspection. However, these are not yet having sufficient impact.

The school complies with the Disability Discrimination Act (1995), as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Effective checks and safeguards are in place to ensure that pupils do not encounter unsuitable adults. Staffing and recruitment procedures are secure and all checks undertaken are recorded on a single central register, as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The provision enables pupils to learn safely. A small minority of parents and carers brought to inspectors' attention a few matters related to site safety around the school grounds. The management board has acted swiftly and satisfactorily to remedy them. Good use is made of the specialist teaching rooms, including a well-resourced computer suite, to support teaching and learning. Liaison with parents and carers is effective in many areas, for example in developing arrangements for safe parking during the major building project.

Provision of information

The school provides a wealth of information for parents and carers. The prospectus, regular parent management board meetings and a bi-monthly magazine provide very good information on school procedures, policies and school developments. Parents and carers are kept exceptionally well informed of their children's progress through numerous opportunities to meet with teachers. A minority of parents and carers responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The majority of these were unhappy with how the school follows up their concerns about unacceptable behaviour.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

Although a significant proportion of parents and carers said in the pre-inspection questionnaire that they did not agree that the school has appropriate procedures for handling complaints, the school has a very clear policy. It is made available to parents and carers when their children are admitted to the school and is on the website. There have been no formal complaints over the past year.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children are good. Children enjoy and achieve well, and make good progress in their learning and development. They make exceptional progress in their bilingual skills in German and English because of the emphasis given to developing speaking and listening skills combined with their very positive attitudes towards each other during play. Children develop a good awareness and understanding of how to stay safe; for example, waiting patiently as they queue for equipment from the storage shed. They eat healthily and enjoy adventurous challenges on the various items of outdoor equipment. They respect each other, taking turns and sharing, and are very good at tidying away. They develop a good awareness of others in the community, successfully taking part in raising money for children in Africa and for local charities.

The provision is good. The quality of the learning environment both indoors and outside is good. Classrooms are attractive and resources are of good quality. Those for the creative and role-play areas are more limited for the older children. Adults' good knowledge of children's needs ensures that they rapidly build up good relationships with children and families and ensures there is a good balance of child-initiated and adult-led activities. While observations and assessments are regularly undertaken the next steps in children's learning and development are not always sufficiently challenging for the brightest and eldest. The use made of observation and assessment to tailor activities outside to children's identified needs and capabilities across the six areas of learning is not always in evidence in planning. Good leadership has ensured that the Early Year's Foundation Stage has continued to improve and meets all the care and welfare requirements. The partnership with parents and carers is good and they offer positive feedback on the questionnaire. Clear priorities for improvement are driven by effective self-evaluation procedures. The staff plan well for improvement and have identified assessment as an important

area for development and are trialling new systems. This, combined with good team working, appropriate training and guidance for newly arrived staff, demonstrates the good capacity to make continuous improvement.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve the behaviour of pupils outside lesson times
- consider reviewing current practice for managing unacceptable behaviour, re-visiting the behaviour and anti-bullying policy with pupils, parents and carers and implementing policy and procedures consistently
- further develop assessment systems in the Early Years Foundation Stage to support future planning for the brightest and eldest children with clear next steps in learning indicated
- improve planning for the use of the outside classroom so as to more fully reflect the six areas of learning.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education	√			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	√			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	√			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	√			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		√		
The behaviour of pupils			√	

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			√	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage		√		

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	All-age international co-educational day school		
Date school opened	1971		
Age range of pupils	3–19 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 390	Girls: 374	Total: 764
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,180		
Address of school	Douglas House Petersham Road Richmond TW10 7AH		
Telephone number	020 8940 2510		
Email address	info@dslondon.org.uk		
Headteacher	Marie-Luise Balkenhol		
Proprietor	German School Association		