

Birtley House Independent School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	James Henry

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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

Birtley House is a small independent primary school situated in the village of West Kingsdown, near Sevenoaks in Kent. The school was registered in August 2010 and opened in January 2011 and provides education for pupils aged five to 11 years. It admits pupils of all abilities, but especially those who have specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia and dyspraxia. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs. There are six pupils on roll aged between seven and 10 years. Currently, there are no children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's ethos is based on a system of positive reinforcement and recognition of each individual pupil's needs and abilities and it aims to develop the qualities of respect and responsibility in pupils so that they grow into secure, positive citizens. This is the school's first inspection.

Evaluation of the school

Birtley House Independent School provides a good quality of education and there are robust safeguarding arrangements to ensure that pupils are kept safe. The school meets its aims effectively and pupils enjoy coming to school. Pupils' behaviour is good, as is the provision for promoting their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils make good progress because teaching and the curriculum are good, with subjects linked together effectively and lesson planning matched to pupils' specific learning needs. The school meets all the regulations except two aspects relating to the information provided for parents and carers, although all the parents and carers who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they were completely happy with the school.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good because it is well adapted to meet the specific learning needs of individuals. There is an appropriate focus on developing pupils' basic literacy and numeracy skills but this is balanced with providing regular opportunities for pupils to extend their personal skills. For example, pupils worked well together in enjoying an activity based on a game that encouraged them to express and explain different

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

emotions. The curriculum covers the subjects in the National Curriculum and is designed to link subjects together, with topics often stimulated by trips or visits to places of interest such as museums. For instance, following a visit to the Tate Museum and subsequent discussions in lessons about the different art work seen, pupils successfully designed and built their own sculptures using natural materials found in the school's grounds. Practical activities, such as designing and then making a sandwich in cookery, are also important features in the curriculum that help foster pupils' organisational and physical skills. The curriculum is flexible in providing opportunities to develop pupils' coordination and cooperation skills; for example, pupils were learning the names of different parts of the body in French through playing a simple game in the school grounds. Due to the small numbers and pupils being taught in mixed-age classes, the curriculum is planned over a two-year programme. As the school has only recently opened, the impact of the curriculum on ensuring that pupils make consistently good progress on a termly basis has not yet been fully evaluated. A good feature is the flexibility of the thematic approaches used to meet pupils' specific learning needs. Staff are good at providing interesting and meaningful learning experiences that enable pupils to make good progress.

Teaching and assessment are good. Pupils make good progress in their academic and personal development, as was clear in lessons and observed in their work over time. Gaps in previous learning are being closed and pupils are starting to catch up and achieve according to their capabilities. The majority have had a negative previous experience of education. Now that pupils are settled and are being taught well, they are improving their reading, writing and mathematical skills and knowledge at a good rate.

Lessons are planned well and activities are suitably matched to pupils' differing capabilities in the mixed-age classes. Practical activities are often incorporated in lessons and this engages pupils in their work and promotes a positive attitude to learning. Relationships are very good, with staff constantly using praise to develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils who did not feel that they were benefiting from their education at their previous schools are now settled and enjoying their learning. Staff have good subject knowledge and a secure understanding of how pupils learn and, when necessary, use their expertise to correct pupils' misconceptions and move learning on in a positive and supportive manner. Effective use is made of an interactive whiteboard computer to capture pupils' interest and engage them in their learning. However, there are some missed opportunities in lessons to further develop pupils' abilities to learn independently and use more incisive questioning to promote and increase their understanding. Daily and weekly assessments are thorough. Marking is regular, often with oral feedback to pupils as to how they are achieving and how to improve further. There is a tracking procedure to monitor pupils' progress over time; however, this has yet to be fully embedded in the work of the school.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. They enjoy school, as shown by their good attendance and positive attitudes to all aspects of school life. This is a reflection of the success of the school in quickly promoting good relationships with pupils; as a result, they are welcoming and their behaviour is good. There is no bullying, as pupils have a good sense of right and wrong. Pupils cooperate and support each other well and make a positive contribution to the school and its wider community. For example, they confidently showed members of the local community around the school during a recent 'open day'. Due to the small numbers, all pupils are involved in an informal school council that enables them to suggest ideas for improving the school, such as forming a gardening club. School council membership gives pupils an awareness of the function of public institutions and services. Their personal skills and feeling of self-worth are developed effectively through being given roles and responsibilities in school, for example, feeding and caring for the pets that are kept in the school grounds. Activities such as celebrating Chinese New Year and studying life in an Indian village help pupils acquire an understanding of other lifestyles that promotes tolerance and an understanding of cultural diversity. Pupils' spiritual development is promoted through activities such as assemblies, where they are given opportunities to say a short prayer and sing a simple hymn. They also learn about other faiths through themes in the curriculum, links with the local church and visitors to the school, for example, to talk about Hinduism.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The strong commitment shown by staff to pupils' well-being ensures that they receive a high level of pastoral care. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils are robust. All staff have undertaken appropriate child protection training and are well aware of their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding pupils. The school provides a safe and pleasant environment with appropriate fire risk assessments and emergency evacuation plans in place. Good risk assessments are undertaken to ensure that pupils are safe and well supervised both in school and on out-of-school activities. The school has an appropriate plan in place to improve the accessibility of the premises and the curriculum for disabled pupils to fulfil its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

Pupils are aware of the need to have a healthy lifestyle and the school supports this through requests to parents and carers to send healthy snacks and avoid fizzy drinks in their children's lunch box. The school is also introducing swimming lessons to extend the opportunities for pupils to undertake physical activity.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

All of the required recruitment and vetting checks have been carried out on staff and others to ensure their suitability to work with children. All of the necessary information is recorded in the single central register as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The premises provide both good quality accommodation and a secure and pleasant learning environment for pupils. The proprietors have renovated and decorated a previously empty independent primary school building effectively and to a high standard. An independent engineer's report confirms the good structural condition of the main building, which comprises two floors. The ground floor provides appropriate space for small teaching groups and two offices. The upper floor is used for multi-sensory and practical activities that develop pupils' physical and personal skills. The teaching areas are well equipped and incorporate appropriate computer technology. There is also well-decorated teaching accommodation, adjacent to the main building that is used for activities such as drama and assemblies. The school has extensive grassed grounds which include a climbing and activity area. Outside areas provide a pleasant and safe rural setting for pupils' play and recreation. In addition, there is a well-maintained all-weather enclosed area available for play which is the emergency meeting point in the school's evacuation plan.

Provision of information

The school has an effective and useful website and prospectus that contain most, but not all, of the required information. The information about the school's provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language, and details of the number of staff at the school and a summary of their qualifications are not made available to parents, carers and others as required. Parents and carers who returned the inspection questionnaire were unanimous in their positive support for the work of the school.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has policies and procedures that meet all the regulations for dealing with complaints.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations'), with the exception of those listed below.³

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 24(1)(b))
- provide information about the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- embed the pupil tracking procedure in the work of the school in order to monitor and assess pupils' progress over time
- use the school's effective initiatives that promote pupils' self-esteem to further develop independence in their learning
- evaluate the impact of the curriculum on a termly basis to ensure that pupils make consistently good progress.

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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Primary day school		
Date school opened	4 January 2011		
Age range of pupils	5–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 3	Girls: 3	Total: 6
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)	£10,230		
Address of school	Fawkham Road West Kingsdown Sevenoaks Kent TN15 6AY		
Telephone number	01474 853192		
Email address	head@birtleyhouseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Emma Sillitoe		
Proprietors	Christine Brett Paul Mortimer-Lee		