

The New 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 New School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and seven years of age. It was opened in September 1992. It is situated in Exminster on the outskirts of Exeter in Devon. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. At the time of the inspection there were 56 pupils on roll, 33 of whom are in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Twenty four children are in receipt of nursery funding. The school's aim is to provide, 'a solid grounding in the key skills without losing sight of the child-centred creative aspect of an infant environment'. The school was last inspected in December 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The New School continues to exceed its aims and provides an outstanding education for its pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2. The good quality curriculum ensures a varied and interesting learning experience is provided which is tailored to meet the needs of all pupils. Teaching is outstanding and, as a consequence, pupils of all abilities make outstanding progress. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding and pupils develop tremendous self-confidence and awareness of others. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils are good and the school now meets all regulations relating to safeguarding children. Improvements since the last inspection have been good and the school now meets all but two of the regulations.

Quality of education

The good quality curriculum provides a wide range of experiences which includes all the required areas of learning. The curriculum takes close account of the Early Years Foundation Stage guidance and the National Curriculum framework. In keeping with its aims, there is a strong focus on encouraging independence and cooperation. The school has improved the provision for basic skills, to be developed within topics and themes, and this is now a significant strength of the curriculum. There is a seamless transition between the Early Years Foundation Stage and Years 1 and 2 with provision tailored to follow the interests of the children as they move through the

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

school. A study of penguins in Antarctica sparked an interest in Year 1 pupils in the lives and habitats of penguins across the southern hemisphere. The depth of study that ensued strengthened the pupils' understanding of diversity, fed their imaginations and expanded their repertoire of reading, writing and research skills. The whole-school weekly planning is much more focused than at the time of the last inspection on what pupils of different ages and abilities will learn. The regular evaluation of whole-school topics secures considerable continuity in the depth of study undertaken. Many parents and carers mentioned the effort the teachers put into topics such as the Tudors and the 'take-one-picture' project 'that have ignited the children's interests in a broad and varied curriculum'. Visits are a regular feature of the curriculum which, alongside high quality resources, expand pupils' horizons. The recent focus on *Darius* resulted in some outstanding work from pupils in design and technology, art and design, drama and literacy. The strong daily emphasis on speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy contributes to the pupils' outstanding progress and achievement in these areas. Planning takes good account of the needs of pupils who have learning difficulties and ensures that all pupils, including the more able, have opportunities to work at a challenging level. After-school lessons in French, speech and drama club, tennis and ballet further enrich provision. The two weaker areas in the curriculum are: the relatively limited access to information and communication technology (ICT) resources to support learning to further develop skills in this area of study; and, although the provision is satisfactory, there is limited teaching time provided for physical education during the school day. The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding, resulting in outstanding progress by the pupils. The teachers display a high level of professional expertise and a thorough knowledge of the subjects taught. They build well on the outstanding provision in the Nursery and Reception class. Their classroom organisation and management are of a high quality resulting in a brisk pace for lessons, productive use of time and rapid progress for pupils. Teachers evidently enjoy their work and believe that pupils should enjoy their learning. This enthusiasm is infectious and results in pupils who love coming to school and are able to work with unusually high levels of concentration and motivation. Teachers give time to listen to pupils, help them shape their thinking and probe with tremendous skill. This is a joy to observe and provides an exemplary model for other pupils in the class, resulting in some excellent collaborative working.

Systems for assessment are robust, well suited to the aims of the school and very effectively implemented. Here too there has been further refinement since the last inspection with a greater emphasis given to tracking pupils' progress from the start of each year. Teachers are very aware of the age-related expectations but also the extent to which pupils can apply their skills in different contexts. Assessment is much more focused on identifying gaps in skills and addressing these during the lesson through activities which are extremely well matched to the pupils' levels of ability, with suitably matched resources which capture their particular interests. Comments on pupils' work make clear to them why their work is good and tells them what they need to do next to improve it. In discussion, pupils said they knew they were making

good or better progress because teachers told them so, marked their work and gave them stars for doing well.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The quality of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils' cultural and multicultural development has benefited from improved provision. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the diverse cultures represented in the school and respect and value their friendships. As a result, they say the school is entirely free of any bullying or racism. Attitudes to learning are outstanding and all pupils are really positive about the relationships they have with the staff and with each other. In discussions with the inspector they often said they would not want to be anywhere else other than school because it is like a big family. It is unsurprising that attendance is consistently well above average. Pupils' spiritual needs are well met by using the opportunities provided for reflection such as in circle time and assemblies. They express genuine wonder at the natural world which is encouraged through well-planned activities in the school grounds.

Robust procedures reinforce outstanding behaviour and pupils contribute enthusiastically in celebrating the successes of others. From an early age, pupils display a strong sense of belonging, possess confident social skills and are polite and courteous. Their appreciation of how teachers plan to meet their interests is reflected in the rapid development of their self-confidence and self-reliance, with them being increasingly able to take responsibility for their own learning. This lays a strong foundation for their future development and economic well-being.

Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is well developed through a range of responsibilities that they take on including maintaining a tidy and safe environment. Their contribution to getting ready for lunchtimes, putting away toys and playtime equipment all take place almost unnoticed. They take their responsibilities for gathering and sharing other pupils' views seriously which has resulted in guidance sheets on how to play safely outside. The termly presentations of their work in music, song and dance are eagerly awaited by parents and carers and others from the community.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Pupils are extremely well known as individuals by the staff, and parents, carers and pupils say that staff show exceptional care and concern. There is a real 'sense of family' in the way that all adults care for and understand the pupils. Relationships between pupils and staff are excellent and pupils are supervised well. Pupils feel safe from bullying and have confidence that it will be dealt with constructively should it occur.

All the regulations relating to child protection are now met and the school is diligent in providing the required training for all staff at the required intervals. Risk assessments are carried out appropriately. Accidents or incidents of a minor nature during the school day are recorded adequately but are not always completed in the format consistent with the school's policies.

The exciting play areas give plenty of encouragement for pupils to follow active and healthy lifestyles and they appreciate the benefits of healthy eating at lunchtimes. Accurate records are kept of regular fire drills and testing of fire equipment. The very positive code of conduct underpins the high expectations contained within the behaviour policy, and staff are good role models in this respect. Pupils say that teachers are fair with rewards and punishments. The school now fully complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

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 very effectively and safely. The school premises are in a Grade II Victorian church which has been remodelled and extended with sensitivity and skill to provide suitable accommodation. Good use is made of the nave to provide a hall, ICT area, sick bay and library. The sick bay provides some but not all of the required facilities as there is still no toilet nearby. The classroom space is used imaginatively to create stimulating learning environments in which pupils' work is displayed and celebrated. Classrooms for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage provide easy access to outside areas. The outside area is attractive and provides a rich source of stimuli for play and learning. Pedestrian access to the school is via a driveway, set back from the road that affords no pavement or separate gate. While vehicles are not meant to enter the school grounds the gate is open at the start and end of the school day and there is a potential safety risk to pedestrians.

Provision of information

The regulations are fully met. All the required information is provided or made available. The annual pupil progress report provides a well-balanced commentary on the year's activities and how well an individual child has achieved. The parents and carers spoken to all agreed they offer an insightful view into their children's learning and development.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The regulations are fully met. There is a robust system for responding to parental concerns or complaints at an early stage and all parties concerned are kept well informed. There have been no formal complaints in the last year.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The outcomes across all areas of learning are outstanding due to the outstanding provision that combines excellent teaching with stimulating learning experiences. The classrooms and outside areas are used fully to foster and feed children's imaginations and the detail that goes into the planning is exemplary. In the nursery, 'jungle children' use their binoculars to explore for animals, listen to the sounds of the animals and they learn about the tracks and signs to help identify the species. They venture outside to discover elephant droppings and a place where the lion has spent the night. It is no wonder that they are then keen to help with writing to the zoo keeper to help him in his search for his lost animals.

Imaginative role-play areas encourage children in the Reception class to read about spiders and mini beasts. The discovery of a 'mixed-up spider' helps them apply their rapidly-developing appreciation of number. The adults really enjoy creating environments that challenge the children and ensure there is something for everyone to discover each day. This is a consequence of their exceptional knowledge and understanding of the needs of each child, gathered through careful observation combined with the regular flow of information provided by parents and carers. Daily routines ensure high levels of care and children's safety. The daily reviews of behaviour with the class help the children secure an appreciation of what is right and wrong. Children feel safe and have a good grasp of how to look after each other. Their contribution to each other's learning is impressive in what is a highly supportive environment. Consequently, children make rapid progress in their confidence and their enthusiasm to try out new experiences.

Leadership and management are outstanding and there is a determination to always improve. A clear commitment to child-centred learning is provided by leaders and managers. The monitoring and evaluation of provision is regular and very effective and careful record keeping ensures that the pace of learning and development never slows. Adults work well together across the two classes, sharing skills and experience, and demonstrate a keen commitment to ongoing improvements and training in the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises of and accommodation at schools (standards in part 5) and must:

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

- provide access to the school such that it allows all pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities, to enter and leave the school in safety (paragraph 23(h))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with regulation 5 of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 23k).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Ensure sufficient time is made available during the school week to provide for a full physical education programme.
- Ensure that all incident books are maintained fully in accordance with the school's policies.

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 (*delete table if there is no such 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	Pre-preparatory		
Date school opened	16 September 1992		
Age range of pupils	3–7 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 23	Girls: 19	Total: 42
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 5	Girls: 9	Total: 14
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,100		
Address of school	The Avenue Exminster Exeter, Devon EX6 8AT		
Telephone number	01392 496122		
Email address	headmistress@thenewschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Michelle Taylor		
Proprietor	Michelle Taylor		