

# Hydesville Tower School

Independent school standard inspection report

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| Inspection dates              | 2–3 May 2012         |
| Reporting inspector           | Anthony O'Malley 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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

Hydesville Tower School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged three to 16 years. It is located in Walsall in the West Midlands. The proprietor has owned the school since March 2005, although it has been open since 1952. Although the school is not selective, prospective pupils undertake assessments to ensure their suitability before being offered a place. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs.

The school is registered for 380 pupils. There are currently 291 pupils on roll aged three to 16 years. Provision for children aged three to five in the Early Years Foundation Stage is made in a Nursery class and two Reception classes. There are currently 40 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, of whom 30 are in receipt of nursery education funding. The school provides before- and after-school care for its pupils. The school was previously inspected by Ofsted in March 2009.

The school's mission is, 'to provide pupils with the academic, social and emotional skills necessary for them to become well-rounded and socially competent members of the world beyond Hydesville'.

## **Evaluation of the school**

The school provides a good quality of education for pupils of all ages. The curriculum and the quality of teaching and assessment are good, and pupils make good progress. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and safeguarding requirements are fully met. The school has acted well on the recommendations of the last report and all regulatory requirements are met, including those for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

## **Quality of education**

The quality of the curriculum from the Early Years Foundation Stage through to the end of Key Stage 4 is good. It provides a good balance between academic, creative

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

and active learning. The school's self-evaluation of its curriculum identifies that there is variability in the quality of schemes of work. However, robust leadership by the headteacher, and effective strategies detailed in the school development plan, are quickly securing improvements in the small number of subjects where programmes of study lack clarity. Nevertheless, schemes of work are satisfactory and suitably inform lesson planning.

In the Early Years Foundation Stage, curriculum plans include guidance on how to meet the range of children's skills and experiences effectively. Interesting themes help promote children's language development well and children use adventurous vocabulary confidently in their conversations with each other and with adults. 'We have had a marvellous morning,' one child commented during a playtime discussion before going on to explain why the activities had been so enjoyable. Provision for the development of early reading and writing skills is particularly strong and, by the start of Year 1, most children read and write well above the expected levels for their age. By the end of Key Stage 2, pupils are successfully prepared to enter the next stage of their education and typically over 50% gain places in local grammar schools. Key Stage 2 pupils benefit from subject specialists who teach subjects such as French, music and physical education effectively, and from external expertise, including a performing arts company that is helping prepare the pupils for a public performance of *'The Aristocats'*. In Key Stage 4, all pupils take at least nine GCSEs and they have the opportunity to study a very broad range of subjects, including astronomy, human biology and physiology. The senior pupils also receive an effective programme of careers guidance that helps them to choose and plan for either academic or vocational courses when they leave at the end of Year 11. Personal, social and health education is taught as a discrete subject and is also well integrated into all aspects of school life through assemblies, visiting speakers, educational visits and special events. As a result, pupils have a strong understanding of how to keep healthy and safe, and outstanding opportunities for social and cultural development are provided.

Teaching and assessment are consistently good throughout the school. Teachers use their knowledge of the pupils well to plan for the range of abilities within the small-sized teaching groups and, where required, they provide good quality individual support. As a result, pupils of all abilities make good progress. The standards attained by pupils in assessments at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage, Year 6 and in GCSE examinations are high. Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning and clearly respect their teachers. Teachers generally choose resources well and, in response to skilful questioning, pupils have many opportunities to explain their opinions and share their responses to the topics being explored. For example, in a Year 4 lesson, pupils showed exceptional levels of maturity as they reflected on the techniques advertisers use to elicit emotional responses to their campaigns.

Teaching is not outstanding because occasionally lessons focus more on what the pupils are doing than on what they are learning. This can be a result of weak subject knowledge, particularly when staff are teaching outside of their specialism. For example, in two art lessons, all pupils worked at the same task without opportunities for creating and developing their own ideas. In the Early Years Foundation Stage,

provision is good and there were examples of outstanding learning in both the Nursery and Reception classes. However, when children worked outside, assessment information about the children's earlier learning was not always used well to ensure that the activities extended their skills and knowledge. For example, when children used wheeled toys, the learning purpose was unclear and children in the Nursery and Reception classes engaged in the same activities so learning was consolidated rather than pupils being stretched.

There is a clear framework in place to assess and track pupils' progress from Year 1 to Year 11. Teachers act upon this information well to provide interventions if pupils are identified as being at risk of underachieving. For example, in Year 5, an alternative English curriculum helps any pupils falling behind their peers to gain essential reading and writing skills so that they can catch up. Throughout the school, the marking of pupils' work provides them with a good understanding of how well they have done and includes guidance to help them improve their work. The learning journey records, which indicate what the youngest children have achieved, include a good range of evidence across all areas of learning. However, the examples of the children's work and adults' notes in these records are not always dated, making it difficult to track the children's progress over time.

## **Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Staff place the highest importance on developing pupils' self-esteem and, throughout the inspection, pupils were welcoming, helpful and extremely articulate when asked their views about the school. Their behaviour is outstanding. Pupils have excellent attitudes in lessons and cooperate extremely well when working in groups. The high rate of attendance reflects their enjoyment of school and keenness to do their very best. Most pupils take advantage of the interesting range of after-school clubs and this means that all pupils have the opportunity to enjoy activities that interest them. Pupils are proud of their school and say that bullying is extremely rare and quickly dealt with. Senior pupils value the contribution of a theatre company that helps them consider issues of bullying and alienation through drama.

Right from the Nursery class, pupils learn how to understand and respect the views of others, and this successfully promotes harmony between pupils from wide-ranging backgrounds, cultures and religions. In lessons and assemblies, pupils learn about all of the major faiths and have good opportunities to reflect on moral issues. Students in the senior school visit places of worship including a synagogue, a cathedral and a temple.

Throughout the school, there are plenty of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities which help them develop maturity and independence. These include junior and senior school councils, which give pupils opportunities to participate in decision-making and be involved in determining the development of the school. Pupils in Year 6 particularly enjoy the Hydesville Challenge where they raised funds

which enabled them to participate in many exciting activities including a residential camp. In the senior school, the positions of head boy, head girl, prefects, monitors and house captains are all elected by pupils.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Class sizes are small and good staffing levels ensure good supervision at all times. The school has acted well on the recommendations from the previous inspection. For example, it prepares detailed risk assessments for activities on and away from the school site and there are now showering facilities for the older pupils. Minor omissions in a small number of policies were immediately responded to during the inspection. There are rigorous procedures for testing portable electrical equipment. The school has sought professional advice about fire safety and a suitable fire risk assessment has been completed. It has followed up the recommended actions from past fire audits and appropriate routine checks for fire safety are regularly carried out.

All staff, including the designated person for child protection, are appropriately trained in child protection and work well with external agencies to support any individuals identified as being at risk of harm. Pupils of all ages confirmed that they have excellent relationships with the staff and know that adults will always act in their best interests. All staff are trained in first aid procedures and there are sufficient first aiders on site at all times. The recording of accidents is well organised and comprehensive.

The school has recently reviewed its behaviour policy in consultation with the pupils. The policy reflects the school's core values and outlines clearly how the school will respond in the event of pupils misbehaving. Procedures are implemented very effectively. Questionnaire responses from parents, carers and pupils are positive about how successfully the school deals with matters concerning the pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school fulfils the requirements of the Equality Act, 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

The school complies fully with the regulations in respect of the required checks made on staff and others to confirm their suitability to work with children. The details of these checks are recorded accurately in the school's single central register.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school is housed in a series of buildings on one site. These buildings have been suitably adapted to provide adequate accommodation. They keep pupils safe and secure and enable effective learning. On-site facilities for physical education are limited; however, there is satisfactory outdoor space for play and recreation. Good

use is made of the nearby arboretum and excellent sports facilities at a local university to enhance provision for physical education.

## **Provision of information**

The school has good links with parents and carers, and they are kept well informed about their children's progress through written reports, informal meetings and telephone discussions. All of the required information is provided, or is made available, to parents, carers and others. Annual reports are comprehensive and include a helpful summary of children's progress and attainment in the key areas of learning. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school. One comment represented the views of many, 'Thanks to all of the staff at Hydesville, we have a child who is confident, happy and enjoys all aspects of school life.'

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The complaints procedure meets regulatory requirements.

## **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 use of assessment information to ensure that the children in the Nursery and Reception classes learn as successfully when they are working outside as they do when they are working in their classrooms.
- Ensure that the subject knowledge of teachers is sufficiently strong so that they are able to promote good and outstanding learning even when they are teaching subjects outside of their specialisms.

## Inspection judgements

|             |      |              |            |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

### 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 |  | ✓ |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|



## School details

|   |  |            |            |
|---|--|------------|------------|
| <b>School status</b>  | Independent  |            |            |
| <b>Type of school</b>   | Primary and secondary day                                |            |            |
| <b>Date school opened</b>   | 1952   |            |            |
| <b>Age range of pupils</b>  | 3–16   |            |            |
| <b>Gender of pupils</b>   | Mixed  |            |            |
| <b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>                              | Boys: 172  | Girls: 119 | Total: 291 |
| <b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>                              | Boys: 0  | Girls: 0   | Total: 0   |
| <b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b> | Boys: 0  | Girls: 0   | Total: 0   |
| <b>Number of pupils who are looked after</b>                          | Boys: 0  | Girls: 0   | Total: 0   |
| <b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>                                       | £6,345–£10,080   |            |            |
| <b>Address of school</b>  | 25 Broadway North<br>Walsall<br>West Midlands<br>WS1 2QG |            |            |
| <b>Telephone number</b>   | 01922 624373   |            |            |
| <b>Email address</b>  | info@hidesville.com                                      |            |            |
| <b>Headteacher</b>  | Fiona Hims   |            |            |
| <b>Proprietor</b>   | Cognita Schools Limited                                  |            |            |

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



4 May 2012

Dear Pupils

### **Inspection of Hydesville Tower School, Walsall WS1 2QG**

Thank you for the welcome you gave the inspection team when we inspected your school recently. We enjoyed being in your school, seeing you working in lessons, looking closely at the questionnaires many of you completed and meeting some of you. You made a very important contribution to the inspection. For example, you told us that you feel safe, that you all get along happily together and that you enjoy the wide range of clubs and activities.

Your school is providing you with a good quality of education and all government requirements are met. By the time you leave Year 6 and Year 11, your attainment is high. This is because your teachers mostly take care to plan lessons so that they offer you the right amount of challenge and provide additional help when they identify that you are at risk of underachieving.

Your headteacher and her senior staff are steering improvements successfully. They have clear ideas about how to build on the school's current strengths and make it an even better place to learn. There are two main areas for your school to improve. They are to:

- improve the use of assessment information to ensure that the children in the Nursery and Reception classes learn as successfully when they are working outside as they do when they are working in their classrooms
- improve the subject knowledge of teachers so that they always promote good or outstanding learning, even when they are teaching subjects outside of their specialisms.

Please continue to work hard and keep up your excellent attendance. I wish you all the very best for the future.

Yours sincerely

Anthony O'Malley  
Her Majesty's Inspector