

The Village School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi

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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 Village School is a non-denominational and non-selective independent day school for girls aged from three to 11 years. It was established in North West London in 1985 and has been under the ownership of the current headteacher since September 2007. There are 97 pupils on roll, none of whom has a statement of special educational needs. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, there are nine children in the Nursery who attend part time and 16 children in Reception. The Nursery class opened in September 2010. No children receive free nursery education funding. Throughout the school, pupils have diverse heritages and there are three pupils who are at various advanced stages of learning English as an additional language. The school supports a number of pupils with moderate learning difficulties. The school was last inspected by Ofsted in October 2009.

The school aims to provide pupils with 'high quality teaching and learning, delivering a curriculum for the development of the whole child in a safe, secure, happy, caring and stimulating environment'.

Evaluation of the school

The Village School has made good progress since the last inspection and, as a result, it provides an outstanding quality of education. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly positive about the school and are delighted with the outstanding progress made by their daughters in their academic learning and personal development owing to outstanding teaching. A good curriculum with exemplary features enables girls to become well-rounded individuals, promotes their outstanding spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and prepares them extremely well for their future. Throughout the school, pupils' outstanding behaviour contributes significantly to their successful learning and to the exceptionally positive and nurturing school ethos. Robust safeguarding arrangements and commitment to consistently high levels of care ensure outstanding provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school meets all of the regulations for independent schools.

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good overall, with elements that are outstanding. It is exemplary in that it enables pupils to make exceptional progress in their personal development as well as in their basic skills.

The school has worked hard in the last three years to improve its provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage, which is now good. Children enjoy a successful mix of self-initiated and adult-led activities. Their curriculum is planned and resourced well to ensure that children have a good breadth of learning opportunities both indoors and outdoors to help them to acquire a broad range of skills. Provision for their reading, listening, speaking and numeracy skills is strong and their language development is enhanced well by Spanish lessons from Reception onwards. However, the development of handwriting skills is satisfactory rather than good because not all children's fine motor skills are sufficiently extended. While children benefit from gymnastics lessons taught by a specialist and develop their large muscles well, not all develop sufficiently strong hand muscles to support their handwriting. There are also a few occasions when the curriculum is not sufficiently individualised to challenge the more able children in Reception.

As pupils move through the school, the curriculum evolves to offer an exceptional breadth of learning experiences that are relevant to their needs while maintaining a good balance between academic subjects and creative, physical and technological areas of learning. Personal, social, health and citizenship education, taught as a discrete subject from Year 5, permeates the curriculum and contributes extremely well to pupils' personal development and prepares them well to become responsible citizens. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in many subjects and provision for all subject areas ranges from good to outstanding. Residential visits for Year 6 pupils focus on developing their leadership and cooperative skills. Pupils show a growing awareness of sustainable development and the school has gained the Eco School silver award. The varied programme of educational visits and extra-curricular activities enhances all areas of the curriculum effectively and enriches pupils' learning extremely well. As a result, the curriculum succeeds in meeting the school's aim of 'developing the whole child' and in preparing pupils for the demands of entrance examinations to selective secondary schools without 'hot-housing' them.

Long- and medium-term plans clearly indicate how pupils will progress in their knowledge, skills and understanding. The school makes good provision for pupils who have special educational needs and those who have English as an additional language. Child-friendly individual educational plans support these pupils very effectively and they make at least good progress. A coherent whole-school approach to developing literacy in all subjects, coupled with excellent teaching of reading skills, serves the needs of all pupils extremely well, especially those who are at various advanced stages of learning English.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. The staff form a very cohesive team driven by a strong desire to achieve excellence. They establish positive relationships based on mutual respect with effective use of humour. They share a common

understanding of how to release each pupil's potential. Small class sizes and a high adult to pupil ratio ensure that staff know their pupils well. Teachers work closely with highly skilled teaching assistants who support individual pupils extremely well. Teaching is characterised by secure subject knowledge and good understanding of pupils' prior attainment, needs and aptitudes, although this is not always reflected in lesson plans. It is often imaginative and inspirational, making very effective use of resources and a wide range of methods that match pupils' various learning styles, and promote their independence and creativity. Teachers are very skilful at building up and deepening pupils' understanding through very effective questioning which often enables pupils to work at an exceptionally high level.

The school has improved its assessment framework since the last inspection and developed formative assessment. Baseline assessments suitably inform teachers of pupils' starting points throughout the school. Well-established procedures enable teachers to assess pupils' learning continuously and to review each pupil's progress every half term. All staff are involved in the tracking of pupils' progress. Pupils gain a clear picture of how to improve their work through daily constructive verbal feedback and helpful marking comments. High quality marking in English focuses pupils on how to improve their writing by refining their use of language and expanding on their ideas. However, occasionally marking in English solely refers to punctuation, which limits pupils' scope for improvement. Pupils are set challenging learning targets in most, but not all, subjects. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, continuous assessment is used rigorously to track children's progress towards the expected goals although the recording of results of the assessment lacks a little clarity.

As a result of the good curriculum and outstanding teaching, pupils make outstanding progress in relation to their starting points. By the end of Reception, most children reach a good level of development. By the end of Year 6, pupils achieve exceptionally highly in mathematics, science and English, although their achievement is relatively lower in writing than in reading. Nearly all gain entry to a selective school of their first choice.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Throughout the school, their development is underpinned by an ethos strongly centred on promoting moral values and a lifelong enjoyment of learning. A Year 6 girl echoes the views of many peers when saying, 'My school is a fun place for learning and it feels like a home to me.' Pupils are enthusiastic learners and attend regularly. They have daily opportunities to reflect on a wide range of issues and to express their views through assemblies, and in class. Participation in regular presentations, drama productions and art competitions develops their self-esteem and self-confidence extremely well. Pupils' excellent spiritual and moral development is reflected in their outstanding behaviour, thoughtful outlook and courage to challenge inequalities, as they did in a letter to their local Member of Parliament. From the Nursery onwards, pupils are encouraged to develop independence and self-motivation, as well as to work constructively with their peers. Pupils relate very positively to others, whatever their cultural or ethnic background and feel free from

harassment. Through religious education and other subjects, they learn to understand and respect others' views and to challenge prejudice and racism.

As they move through each phase, pupils shoulder responsibilities commensurate with their age and demonstrate a keen sense of social responsibility, whether as class monitors, captains, school officers, head girls, eco teams or young citizens. The older girls take pleasure in caring for the younger ones at break and lunchtimes. Beyond the school community, pupils learn about British institutions through the citizenship programme and educational visits. For example, in Reception, they were learning about the various roles played by hospital staff. Pupils help to raise funds to support a school in Sri Lanka, a project through which they can measure the positive impact of their action on the lives of others. They develop enterprise skills by managing a budget to make products, which they sell for charity. Pupils' cultural development is promoted exceptionally well by the curriculum and the enrichment programme which ensure that all find something that they can excel at. For example, pupils are entered in the Young Artist competition at the Royal College of Art every year and they have been awarded commendations.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The arrangements to support pupils' welfare, health and safety are outstanding. All of the policies and procedures for child protection, anti-bullying, behaviour, health and safety, fire safety and first aid are written clearly, pay due regard to the national guidance and are implemented consistently. References and medical checks are rigorously obtained on staff. All staff are trained as required, in safeguarding and first aid. The staff are very attentive to meeting each pupil's specific needs and foster a caring and inclusive ethos. Risk assessment is undertaken rigorously. Pupils feel very safe and they trust adults to deal with any issues or concerns that arise effectively. Pupils' safety education begins in the early years where they learn about crossing the road safely before going on school outings. Pupils are very strongly encouraged to embrace healthy lifestyles and the school was awarded Healthy School status in 2010. They have opportunities to exercise vigorously four days a week and they enjoy well-balanced nutritious school meals. Many choose to walk or scoot to school.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

Robust recruitment procedures ensure that the required vetting checks are carried out on all adults working at the school prior to confirmation of their employment. These checks are duly recorded in a single central register that contains all of the required information, and is a model of good practice.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The three-storey Regency property provides very pleasant teaching accommodation that enables safe and effective learning in a warm family atmosphere. High quality outdoor provision includes an exciting adventure playground and a full-sized netball court.

Provision of information

Parents, carers and others receive a wealth of information that is accurate and up to date. All of the required information is provided or is made available to them. Parents and carers appreciate the school's open-door policy and feel well informed of their daughters' progress. They are exceptionally positive about all aspects of the school's work.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The complaints procedures meet 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.

- Ensure that the curriculum in Reception always challenges the more able.
- Ensure all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can extend their fine motor skills sufficiently to develop good handwriting skills.
- Improve the consistency of marking in English to ensure that it is always helpful to pupils.

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	Day preparatory school for girls
Date school opened	1985
Age range of pupils	3–11 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	88
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	9
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	0
Number of pupils who are looked after	0
Annual fees	£13,230
Address of school	2, Park Hill Road Belsize Park London NW3 2YN
Telephone number	0207 485 4673
Email address	admin@thevillageschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Carol Gay
Proprietor	Carol Gay

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.

5 October 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Village School, London, NW3 2YN



Thank you for welcoming the inspection team so warmly when we visited your school recently. We greatly enjoyed meeting you, seeing you learn and talking to you about school life. You told us that you enjoy learning and feel at home at school. You take pleasure in helping others, especially the youngest pupils. We were impressed by your outstanding behaviour, enthusiasm for learning, self-confidence and sense of responsibility. You are proud of your school and understandably so. We found that your school provides you with an outstanding education and it meets all government requirements. It is a place where adults work very hard to help you develop all the skills you need to move on to your preferred secondary school and achieve your full potential.

You learn a wide range of subjects and can join many different clubs and take part in lots of educational visits. You make outstanding academic progress and in your personal development. Your teachers and teaching assistants care for you very well and teach you extremely well. You feel safe and understand the importance of eating and drinking healthily and taking exercise.

In order to make your school even better, we have asked your school to:

- provide more opportunities for all children aged from three to five years to develop their fine motor skills and so help them with their handwriting
- ensure that the curriculum always challenges the more able reception children
- improve the consistency of marking in English to ensure that it is always helpful to pupils.

You will help your teachers if you continue to work as hard as we saw during the inspection and if you maintain your excellent behaviour.

Yours sincerely

Michèle Messaoudi
Lead inspector