

Blossom House School

Independent school standard inspection report

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| DfE registration number | 315/6076 |
| Unique Reference Number (URN) | 102694 |
| Inspection number | 386902 |
| Inspection dates | 6–7 March 2012 |
| Reporting inspector | Mark Lindfield 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

Blossom House School is a specialist day school which provides education for pupils aged three to nineteen years with speech, language and communication difficulties. It opened in 1993 and occupies an extended former residential care home located in the London Borough of Merton. The school has recently leased an additional property a short distance from the main site to provide education for pupils aged 16 and older.

Currently there are 163 pupils on roll; 157 attend full time and 6 children attend the nursery part time for morning sessions only. Almost all pupils have a statement of special educational needs and the large majority are boys. Pupils attend from London boroughs and almost all have their places funded by their local authority. Seven children are in receipt of government nursery funding. The school was previously inspected in October 2008.

The school aims to 'provide a communication centred environment where children with a range of speech, language and communication difficulties are supported in all areas of their learning'.

Evaluation of the school

Blossom House provides an outstanding quality of education supported by an outstanding curriculum. Teaching and assessment have improved since the last inspection and are consistently good across the school and outstanding in significant areas. A significant strength is the high quality provision provided by a large team of specialist therapists that contributes strongly to the outstanding progress made by pupils. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Safeguarding arrangements are also good. Since the last inspection the school has improved procedures to provide an annual account of expenditure for pupils with statements of special educational needs and now meets all of the regulations.

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

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

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It pays due regard to the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements where children are provided with stimulating experiences across all areas of learning. It covers all National Curriculum subjects and for older pupils provides a broad range of accredited courses. Since the last inspection it has extended provision across Key Stage 4 with new specialist classroom facilities. The curriculum throughout the school provides a strong focus on developing pupils' basic skills, especially their communication skills.

Planning across all subjects is based around a theme of study over a six-week period. Regular monitoring of planning by senior staff has helped to develop a consistent whole-school curriculum approach. As a result, lesson planning for all subjects is detailed, setting out clear objectives, activities and key vocabulary. Schemes of work and medium-term planning provide clear routes of progression across the school. All lessons refer to pupils' individual education plans to ensure provision is closely matched to pupils' specific needs. Pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to excel. For example, Year 11 pupils produced very high quality animations from their own drawings; excellent progress is made in the development of pupils' physical skills and body control during occupational therapy sessions and physical education lessons.

An important strength is the provision made by a range of specialist therapists in an integrated and cohesive approach to developing pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. Speech and language therapists work alongside teachers in class to provide specific support and ensure a systematic approach to developing individuals' communication skills. The school currently provides individual programmes for the small number of students over 16 years of age and these are effectively tailored to their needs and capabilities. The school plans to further develop this provision to accommodate a greater number of students in the next academic year. Personal, social, health and citizenship education is effectively threaded through many aspects of the curriculum. Life skills sessions provide good opportunities for pupils to develop their social and emotional skills. Music, drama, art and psychotherapy sessions provide pupils with timely and appropriate support to develop their emotional well-being and boost their self-esteem. This integrated approach helps pupils to make good or better progress in developing their social and emotional skills and in increasing their awareness of the needs of others. On entry into the nursery many children arrive with limited social skills and with difficulties in communicating, particularly regarding speaking and listening. Staff provide strong support to develop these skills and involve therapists and professionals from an early age. However, opportunities for the youngest children to select tools, equipment and materials or initiate activities to further develop their independent learning and research skills are not as well developed as in other areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding. Teaching across the school is generally good or better. Outstanding teaching is evident in each key stage and in

several subject areas. Teachers' lesson planning is a strength and is based on regular assessments and includes specific targets drawn from individual education plans. Relationships are strong and pupils have positive attitudes to learning. Teaching assistants are used effectively to support pupils' learning, emotional or physical needs. For example, in an outstanding science lesson, pupils provided a series of accurate and knowledgeable responses to the teacher's rapid questioning, whilst the teaching assistant frequently praised and rewarded pupils to moderate any over exuberance. Teachers have good subject knowledge and explain tasks well so that pupils know what they need to do to complete work. A consistent approach to using visual timetables helps provide a clear structure to every lesson and therapy session. Pupils are provided with short sequenced activities that help to make learning more accessible. Pupils move into smaller groups for literacy and numeracy lessons to provide them with different learning activities so that work is well matched to their capabilities.

A good emphasis on teaching phonics (letters and sounds) skills supports pupils' reading and writing skills well from an early age. Literacy skills are enhanced effectively by close partnership working with specialist professionals who work, both in sessions with individual pupils and alongside teachers, to further develop pupils' expressive language and confidence in speaking. Pupils continue to make good progress in developing their ability to express themselves as they move through the school. For example, Year 9 pupils participated in lively debating sessions with several convincing statements and persuasive responses made. Where teaching is outstanding, teachers use their profound knowledge of individual pupils' abilities and ongoing assessments within a lesson to set very high levels of challenge and maintain exceptional pace, but this is not always the case in good lessons.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

Pupils' spiritual moral social and cultural development is good. Pupils enjoy school and show positive attitudes in the majority of lessons. Attendance varies according to individual circumstances, but overall is good. The school works closely to monitor and react to any lapses in attendance. Behaviour management systems are effective and ensure behaviour is good. Procedures are consistently applied and this means that pupils make good progress in developing their social skills and managing their behaviour. Pupils suitably develop their cooperation and social skills in lessons and frequently provide support and encouragement to each other. They make a positive contribution to school life by completing many small tasks willingly.

Assemblies make a good contribution to developing pupils' spiritual development. Visiting speakers provide excellent opportunities for pupils to reflect and consider spiritual aspects. Pupils develop their speaking and presentation skills well by delivering class assemblies. Year 10 pupils led an assembly on the theme of a major sporting event which was greeted with spontaneous applause. The school is an inclusive and welcoming environment where staff and resources help to promote pupils' good understanding of other cultures and faiths in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

Arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. Staff take good care of pupils and pay good attention to their well-being. Pupils' behaviour is good and challenging behaviour is well managed because staff are consistent in the implementation of whole-school procedures. Staff respond to instances of bullying effectively, although this remains an area of concern for some pupils. Staff child protection training is up to date and the school's child protection policy contains clear procedures for recording and monitoring any child protection concerns. Senior staff who act as designated persons have attended training at the appropriate level to ensure any child protection concerns are shared with the appropriate agency. The school has completed comprehensive fire safety checks and any recommendations from external fire consultants have all been suitably acted upon. All portable appliances have been recently tested to ensure that they are in good working order.

The school has clear procedures in place to ensure pupils' health and safety. Robust risk assessments are in place for all subjects. Pupils working with design and technology equipment have produced health and safety posters and have acted out the appropriate response in the event of an accident. Risk assessments for educational visits are completed effectively, including the trip to Paris and Disneyland during the inspection. The school has made reasonable adjustments to the premises and curriculum to ensure that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has completed appropriate checks on staff and others to ensure their suitability to work with children. The school's central register contains all of the required information.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school has specific rooms for pupils who are ill or in need of medical attention on each site. Classrooms at all sites are well equipped and encourage pupils to effectively develop their skills in a wide range of areas. Several classrooms are versatile, containing interior walls which are easily adjusted to provide small areas free from distractions or larger open spaces.

The school interior contains a range of attractive displays of pupils' work and informative posters. All sites are well maintained, clean and are well decorated. Specialist rooms are provided for therapists with well-resourced occupational therapy areas. Well-equipped classrooms provide suitable areas for specialist subjects and practical work. Outdoor areas are provided across a sloping school site; play areas are even with soft playing surfaces. The school has plans to develop access and landscape the garden area to provide grass and woodland areas.

Provision of information

Parents and carers are suitably informed about the progress their children make through annual reports and by attending termly review meetings. Parents and carers of Nursery and Reception children have termly meetings and they are provided with termly written reports. The school provides helpful opportunities for parents and carers to meet with specialist therapists to deepen their understanding of the support they can provide for their child. Individual education plans identify learning targets which are well monitored to assess progress and they are shared with parents and carers. A few parents and carers report that they would appreciate more frequent information on their children's progress.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has an appropriate complaints procedure that 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').³

What the school could do to improve further

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

- provide more frequent opportunities for Nursery and Reception children to select tools, equipment and materials to initiate learning activities to further develop their independence
- ensure teachers always apply knowledge gained from ongoing assessments within a lesson to set very high levels of challenge and maintain exceptional pace in all lessons.

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

Inspection judgements

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|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | good | satisfactory | inadequate |
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The quality of education

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|--|---|--|--|--|
| 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

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

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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|--|--|---|--|--|
| The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils | | √ | | |
|--|--|---|--|--|

School details

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| School status | Independent | | |
| Type of school | Special day school for pupils with speech, language and communication difficulties | | |
| Date school opened | 1993 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 3–19 years | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 119 | Girls: 38 | Total: 157 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 4 | Girls: 2 | Total: 6 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs | Boys: 106 | Girls: 37 | Total: 143 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £25,227 – £34,500 | | |
| Address of school | 8A The Drive Wimbledon London SW20 8TG | | |
| Telephone number | 020 8946 7348 | | |
| Email address | admin@blossomhouseschool.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Joanna Burgess | | |
| Proprietor | Joanna Burgess | | |

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.



8 March 2012

Dear Pupils

Inspection of Blossom House School, London SW20 8TG

Thank you for the warm way you welcomed us to your school. We enjoyed meeting you and noticed your polite manners and the way that you worked hard in lessons. Your school provides you with an outstanding education and this means that you do very well and many of you make excellent progress. From your first days in school until the time you leave you are given a wide range of opportunities to learn and develop your learning skills. You are helped by caring staff who work hard to ensure that you are looked after effectively and are kept safe.

Teachers provide you with interesting lessons that are very well planned. This helps you to produce outstanding work. We noticed how Year 6 pupils were able to explain the organs of the body and used an interactive computer whiteboard in an excellent lesson. Year 11 pupils have produced some excellent short films of their art work; I hope you get the chance to see them. Year 9 pupils made some very good points in their debates and spoke confidently to each other about their views. We enjoyed listening to the Year 10 assembly and hearing the applause from the audience.

Throughout your time at the school you are given excellent support by a range of staff. Adults provide you with help to develop your talking and listening skills on many occasions through the week. You make great strides in developing your body control during lessons in the movement room. You are also helped to discuss your concerns in special music, art, drama and psychotherapy sessions. I hope that the Year 8 pupils enjoyed their visit to Paris and came back with many memories.

I have asked the school to improve two things. Firstly, to ensure the youngest children use equipment and materials to initiate learning activities to further promote their independence. Secondly, teachers must use assessment information to always set really challenging tasks and maintain exceptional pace in all lessons.

Yours sincerely

Mark Lindfield
Her Majesty's Inspector