

Limespring School

Park House, 16 High Road, East Finchley, London N2 9PJ

Inspection dates 6–7 February 2013

Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Good	2
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- It is led and managed well. The principal is passionate about helping pupils with specific learning needs to achieve their potential. She inspires all staff to work closely together to give pupils enjoyable learning experiences that meet their needs well. She knows exactly what to do to improve the school.
- Teaching is good. Pupils are rigorously assessed before they join the school by a team of experts who, together, design individual programmes that help each pupil to fill gaps in their learning. As a result, pupils make good progress, particularly in their reading, writing and numeracy skills.
- Pupils, who have all experienced failure before joining the school, flourish in a very supportive and orderly environment. They develop high levels of self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline and independence, which prepare them well for their future. Their cultural development is exceptional, owing to a rich curriculum and excellent provision for art.
- Pupils behave well. They feel safe and secure because they trust the staff to care for them well. Arrangements to safeguard their welfare, health and safety are good.
- Parents, carers, pupils and staff are very positive about all aspects of the school's work.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teachers do not always clearly show pupils how they can improve their work.
- The curriculum content covered by each pupil is not centrally recorded so it is not possible to have an overview of the topics pupils have covered.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their teamwork skills and contribute to their local community.
- The work carried out by the school to bring about further improvements is not supported by a management plan.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out with a half-day's notice.
- The inspector observed six lessons taught by three different teachers and held meetings with pupils, parents, carers and staff, including the principal.
- She examined pupils' work and the school's documentation and records, particularly relating to pupils' attainment and progress, safeguarding and pupils' welfare, health and safety. Pupils' behaviour was observed during lessons, around the school and off-site.
- The inspector also took account of the responses in four questionnaires completed by staff and collected the views of parents, carers and pupils during the inspection.

Inspection team

Michèle Messaoudi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Limespring School is a new independent day school that was first registered in January 2012 for up to 32 boys and girls between the ages of seven and 11 who have specific learning difficulties, in particular dyslexia and dyspraxia. There are currently three pupils on roll aged from eight to 11 years attending full time. None has a statement of special educational needs and there are no disabled pupils. In addition, the school provides three- or six-hour weekly sessions led by specialist teachers during school hours for 11 pupils who are registered in other schools.
- The school is owned by a limited company and the principal is one of its two directors. It is housed in a former college building in the London Borough of Barnet.
- There are 11 members of staff, including five specialist teachers and six subject specialists, some of whom work as teaching assistants. The principal is currently the only full-time member of staff.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- This is the school's first inspection.
- The school aims to:
 - 'provide a safe and nurturing environment in which learning is fun and where differences in ability and personal attributes will be acknowledged and children encouraged to understand and support each other's needs. The focus will be on including all children; the provision of specific support for children with learning differences; and in building the child's self-esteem.'

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Help pupils to have a clearer understanding of how they can improve their work by:
 - always giving them precise criteria against which they can measure their success
 - ensuring learning targets are always clear
 - ensuring that marking helps pupils to improve.
- Provide pupils with more opportunities to develop teamwork skills in all subjects and to contribute to the local community.
- Use a management plan to enable staff to make checks on the effectiveness of actions taken.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good. Pupils join the school with reading, writing and numeracy skills that are typically below or well below national expectations for their age. Their specific needs are assessed thoroughly by a team of experts before they join the school and the information from these initial assessments is used to provide tailor-made learning programmes. Teachers check on pupils' progress rigorously and adapt the content of the planned programmes swiftly to respond to pupils' evolving needs. Pupils benefit from good teaching and one-to-one sessions with specialist teachers. Consequently, they are helped to overcome their barriers to learning quickly and make good progress in relation to their individual starting points, whether they have been in school for a whole year or a shorter period of time. Most pupils are on course to attain standards that are in line with national expectations in reading, writing and mathematics. Those who joined with very low starting points in reading are rapidly catching up and consequently are able to access the rest of the curriculum fully. Parents and carers are delighted with the amount of progress made by their children.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Good

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school as a result of the extremely positive ethos created by the staff, in which all pupils flourish in an atmosphere of mutual respect and dignity. A pupil who has recently left the school expressed the views of all when saying, 'I have loved my time at Limespring School. Everyone is so nice and no-one is left out. Everything is really fun and art is the best.' Pupils are eager to learn and particularly enthusiastic about topic work and art. This represents a significant improvement in their attitudes and engagement in education. Pupils' attendance is good and most pupils are consistently punctual. The school teaches pupils the importance of setting a good example to others and pupils develop high levels of self-discipline and a strong sense of personal responsibility as a result of the school's strategies. Their behaviour is good and often excellent, in and out of school. They have a good understanding of different types of bullying and they feel safe and free from any form of harassment.

While pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall, their cultural development is outstanding and their social development is slightly weaker. Pupils' cultural development is promoted extremely well through the thematic approach to the curriculum, a strong commitment to multicultural education and a rich programme of educational visits. The programme of religious education includes the major world religions and pupils can talk confidently and respectfully about aspects of Judaism and Islam. Pupils' awareness of diversity is further enhanced by their daily interactions with staff who come from a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Pupils express a strong sense of right and wrong and respect for the law when explaining how good and bad citizens behave. They contribute their views about ways to improve school life and are listened to. For example, they have initiated the introduction of street dancing and martial arts. Participation in a Christmas concert by playing the guitar, dancing and reciting poetry before an audience fosters pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence very well, as noted by parents and carers. The school has plans in hand to introduce drama to further develop pupils' communication skills and self-confidence.

Pupils are courteous, respectful and considerate. They form very positive relationships with peers and adults and welcome having the company of part-time pupils for some of the daily activities. They have opportunities to interact with strangers on off-site visits. However, owing to the small number of pupils, they have few opportunities for teamwork. Furthermore, while pupils have contributed to the wider community by participating in a sponsored walk to raise funds for 'Children in Need', they have limited opportunities to contribute to their local community.

Quality of teaching**Good**

Teaching is good. Teachers are highly qualified and very experienced and most have additional qualifications in dyslexia, dyspraxia and dyscalculia. They have a thorough understanding of pupils' specific learning needs and expert knowledge of the best methods to use to support pupils' learning. Teachers and support staff have high expectations of what pupils can achieve. Teaching assistants are generally sufficiently well briefed to support individual pupils well. Staff ask probing questions that help pupils to consolidate the knowledge gained in previous lessons and make them think more deeply about the subject matter. They listen carefully to pupils' responses and rectify misconceptions at once. They plan a variety of tasks that break new learning into small steps and build on pupils' knowledge and understanding methodically.

Staff use a wide range of resources that match pupils' individual learning needs and promote their ability to work by themselves. They use time very effectively. They check on pupils' learning continuously and give them constructive verbal feedback to help them improve on their work. Marking comments are mostly helpful and always encouraging. Occasionally, however, marking is not sufficiently detailed to show pupils exactly how to improve. Pupils are given learning targets. Mostly these work well but occasionally, they are not clear enough. The targets they are given are not always specific enough to help them acquire new knowledge and skills faster. These are the main reasons why teaching is not yet outstanding.

Teachers regularly assess pupils' learning against national norms, which enables them to track pupils' progress rigorously. They use the information from assessments well to plan work that matches pupils' needs closely.

Quality of curriculum**Good**

The curriculum is good. It serves all pupils well in that it places a strong emphasis on developing their basic and physical skills, and it is designed to meet their individual needs closely and re-engage them in education swiftly. Its breadth encompasses all the National Curriculum subjects. In addition, pupils have guitar and street dance lessons. They learn to touch-type in information and communication technology lessons. Reading and spelling are taught systematically by specialist teachers. The current focus on developing pupils' hand muscles supports the development of their handwriting extremely well. Pupils have daily opportunities for writing outside their literacy lessons and there are plans in hand to encourage them to write at even greater length. The provision for physical education focuses on developing pupils' balance and eye-to-hand coordination, and includes gymnastics, dance, games and martial arts.

Pupils' learning experiences and cultural development are greatly enriched and deepened by the thematic approach to the curriculum, frequent educational visits that are part and parcel of the curriculum and the excellent provision for art. For example, pupils have recently studied Ancient Egypt through a wide range of well-planned, practical and creative cross-curricular activities, including writing the diary of a pharaoh, producing leaflets to advertise holidays in Ancient Egypt and making high quality masks of Tutankhamun and Nefertiti, and clay models of amulets and mummies. Pupils also enjoy lots of practical work in mathematics and science and they write up their investigations. Personal, social, health and citizenship education contributes greatly to pupils' self-knowledge, self-confidence and moral and social development.

Long- and medium-term plans are based on the National Curriculum and indicate how pupils will progress in their learning. Pupils are supported well by individual learning plans that are reviewed regularly as a result of assessments. Individual teachers keep useful records of what each pupil learns but the curriculum content covered by each pupil is not centrally recorded so it is not possible to have an overview of what has been covered.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety**Good**

The school makes good provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety and meets all the requirements for independent schools. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. All the required checks are carried out on the proprietors, staff and volunteers to ascertain their suitability to work with children. These checks are appropriately recorded in a central register. The essential policies and procedures aimed at minimising risks are implemented consciously and reviewed regularly. All staff receive the appropriate level of training in child protection and a sufficient number are trained in first aid. The staff supervise pupils closely without being oppressive. They promote high standards of behaviour consistently, which results in a calm and orderly environment. Pupils report the absence of bullying and, to date, there has been no need for the school to apply serious sanctions. Pupils feel safe because staff care for them well and teach them how they can keep safe when playing in the park, crossing the road or using computers. Pupils develop a good understanding of what constitutes healthy lifestyles. They have daily opportunities to exercise vigorously indoors and outdoors.

Leadership and management**Good**

Leadership and management are good. Under the inspirational leadership of the principal, the staff form a passionate team of professionals dedicated to securing the best possible outcomes for each pupil. The principal leads by example and ensures that staff share a common understanding of what constitutes good teaching. Together, they create a positive ethos that fosters pupils' good attitudes to learning, behaviour and personal development. Staff report that they are supported very effectively by the principal and the programme of professional development. At regular staff meetings, staff discuss pupils' progress, the effectiveness of the provision to help pupils achieve their potential, and possible improvements. The school also takes pupils' views into account to provide a curriculum that interests them and helps them to achieve well. Through this concerted effort, the principal, one of the two directors of the company, evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of the school accurately and correctly identifies the priorities for further development. She reports her findings to the other director and an advisory board. However, this collective work is not formalised into a management plan to enable school leaders to make checks on the effectiveness of actions taken. The school forges very close partnerships with parents and carers, who feel very well informed of their children's progress and welfare. Parents and carers say that staff are very active in communicating with them outside the formal consultation meetings scheduled every term. They find the detailed annual report they receive very informative and helpful.

The premises provide clean and very pleasant teaching accommodation that enables effective and safe learning. Parents, carers and others have access to the full range of information to which they are entitled, through the school website and prospectus. The complaints policy meets requirements. The proprietors have ensured that all independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	137890
Inspection number	408677
DfE registration number	302/6003

This inspection was carried out 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.

Type of school	Day independent special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	7–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	3
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Limespring School Ltd
Principal	Mrs Denise Drinkwater
Date of previous school inspection	NA
Annual fees (day pupils)	£12,000–£21,000
Telephone number	0208 4441387
Email address	info@limespringschool.co.uk

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