

Tower House School

Fisher Street, Paignton, TQ4 5EW

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| Inspection dates | 14–16 May 2013 | |
| Overall effectiveness | Good | 2 |
| Pupils' achievement | Good | 2 |
| Pupils' behaviour and personal development | Outstanding | 1 |
| 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

- Pupils make good progress across the school, especially in reading, and they attain above average results in national tests and GCSE examinations.
- Pupils' consistently thoughtful behaviour is an outstanding factor in their successful learning.
- Teaching is usually good in the junior and senior departments. It is consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage.
- The good curriculum meets the needs of all pupils, including disabled pupils and those with special educational needs, and prepares them well for the next stage in their education.
- Good leadership and management by the three department headteachers are bringing about further improvements in teaching and learning.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teaching is not yet consistently good across all departments and the marking of pupils' work is variable in quality.
- Pupils' progress varies across departments and subjects. While progress is checked in each department, there is no system in place to enable the headteachers to easily gain an overview of progress throughout the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day’s notice.
- The inspectors observed 15 lessons taught by 15 different teachers, listened to pupils reading, looked at pupils’ work, and met with groups of pupils, staff, the headteachers of the three departments and the proprietor. They also spoke informally with a few parents and carers.
- Inspectors examined school documentation, including records of pupils’ progress, anonymous teacher appraisals, teachers’ planning and schemes of work, safeguarding policies and procedures, and department improvement plans.
- Inspectors took account of the views of pupils, staff and parents and carers in discussion and in examining the 17 questionnaires completed by staff and 37 responses by parents and carers to the on-line survey, Parent View.

Inspection team

Sue Frater, Lead inspector

Her Majesty’s Inspector

Helen Griffiths

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Tower House School is a non-selective independent day school for boys and girls between the ages of two and 16 years. It aims to provide an environment in which the full academic, social, cultural and physical potential of individual pupils can be achieved.
- There are currently 219 pupils on roll. This includes 57 children aged from two to four years who attend part time. The school is registered for 58 children in the nursery. The number of children aged three and four years receiving government funding is 46. Provision for the pre-school aged children in the nursery was not included in this inspection. Provision for the children who had reached compulsory school age in the Early Years Foundation Stage was inspected. Two pupils in the school have a statement of special educational needs.
- The school opened in 1982 and is housed in a former convent school building in Paignton, Devon. It operates as three departments: the nursery (Early Years Foundation Stage), the junior department and the senior department, each with its own headteacher, but with the same proprietor. The headteacher of the senior school was appointed to the post in September 2012. The school was last inspected in September 2009.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Make sure all pupils make good progress across departments and subjects by:
 - measuring pupils' progress systematically throughout the school to identify and tackle any underachievement
 - providing more opportunities for pupils to discuss, investigate and apply their new knowledge and skills across subjects independently and in groups
 - improving the consistency and effectiveness of teachers' marking by making sure it provides written comments that help pupils to know how to improve their work
 - improving the consistency of schemes of work and making sure they promote good progress across the school.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good due to the quality of teaching which is mostly good. When they start school, children have levels of skills that are wide ranging, but on average they are broadly typical for children of their age. They make good progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage in all areas of learning, and particularly in reading, and attain above age-related expectations in the early learning goals. Pupils continue to make good progress overall, and outstanding progress in reading, in the junior department. Their attainment in the national tests at the end of Year 6 has been above average for the past three years. Many pupils pass the 11+ entrance examinations for local grammar schools. Pupils make good progress overall in the senior school, although it is not consistently good across all subjects. Taking the past three years as a whole, attainment in GCSE examinations, including English and mathematics, is above average. Pupils are prepared well for the next stage of their education and most go on to take A-level examinations at grammar schools or in sixth form colleges. Specialist support for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs helps them to make outstanding progress. In addition to developing skills in reading, writing and mathematics, pupils acquire a good range of skills, for example in physical education, art, drama and music. Thus, the school meets its aims.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Pupils demonstrate very positive attitudes to learning and thoroughly enjoy school. They especially enjoy working together in role-play and practical activities. They are polite and extremely considerate of others. This contributes to a calm environment in lessons and around the school. On rare occasions, pupils engage in off-task chatter, but this is because the lesson does not challenge or interest them. The exceptionally positive relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils feel valued as individuals and safe. Instances of bullying are rare and pupils actively try to prevent it, for example by being 'active listeners' to the concerns of younger pupils. Pupils are aware of all forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and are confident that staff would address any incidents effectively. The school can demonstrate exceptional progress for any pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Attendance is very good and pupils are punctual in arriving at school and to lessons.

Aspects of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are exemplary. Pupils develop caring attitudes towards others, including those of different cultures, and a strong sense of right and wrong. Pupils are also developing excellent social skills. They are courteous and proud of their contribution to the school and community, for example as members of the school council, in supporting local charities and food banks or singing to local elderly residents. Pupils learn about public services, such as the police, fire brigade and National Health Service, and institutions including local and national government. Every care is taken to provide each pupil with something to excel in, including sport or the arts, and, as a result, their confidence and self-esteem are improving strongly.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good and enables pupils to make good progress. Due to regular appraisal of teachers' work and staff development, teaching is consistently good in the Early Years Foundation Stage. In this department, teachers constantly assess the children's learning and adapt lessons accordingly. Teaching is mostly good in the junior and senior departments, although it ranges from adequate to outstanding across different subjects. The teaching of reading is outstanding as a result of staff training in the Early Years Foundation Stage and in the junior department. In all lessons, teachers create a positive climate for learning and manage pupils' behaviour well. In the most effective lessons, teachers have high expectations and use their good

subject knowledge to question, challenge and inspire pupils to think for themselves. They also encourage pupils to consider spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues. For example, in a Year 11 GCSE English lesson on Steinbeck's novel *Of Mice and Men*, pupils discussed whether or not characters had acted morally. In less effective lessons, pupils spend most of the time listening to the teacher, with limited opportunities to discuss, investigate and apply their new learning independently and in groups.

Pupils' progress towards reaching the expected National Curriculum levels in reading, writing and mathematics is tracked carefully across the junior department each term. This helps teachers to adapt lessons in these subjects to enable all pupils to make good progress from their different starting points. There is no similar system in the senior department to check that pupils are making sufficient progress across all subjects each term. In the absence of this information, teachers are not all adjusting lessons as they proceed in order to meet the pupils' different learning needs. The marking of pupils' work is variable. Pupils make most progress in subjects where written comments help them to know how to improve their work to reach the next National Curriculum level or GCSE grade. Progress is slower when written comments do not help pupils to know how to improve their work. Specialist support for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is highly effective because the pupils' progress is constantly assessed and provision is tailored to the needs of each individual.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good because it is broad and balanced, enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and enables pupils to achieve well over time. Very well-thought-out individual education plans, together with specialist support, enable pupils with a statement of special educational needs to make exceptional progress. The Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum is particularly well organised and supported by detailed planning. It covers all the areas of learning and makes imaginative use of the outside area to develop the children's independence in learning. Children's transition from this stage into the junior department is supported very effectively.

The curriculum in the junior department is based on the National Curriculum and underpinned by good quality planning. Visits, for example to the local library, and teaching by subject specialists, for instance in music, develop pupils' skills and understanding in a wide range of subjects. The curriculum in the senior department also covers all areas of the National Curriculum and is supported by schemes of work, although they vary in quality from adequate to outstanding. While planning for pupils' progress within each department is clear, none of the headteachers has an overview of planning across the school to make sure progress is consistently good. Pupils are not entered early for GCSE examinations because they are all encouraged to reach the higher grades. Effective careers guidance results in most pupils selecting appropriate A-level courses in their next stage of education. Across the school, good provision is made for personal, social, health and citizenship education which helps pupils to become well-rounded individuals. Extra-curricular activities include an extensive choice of sporting and arts-related activities, such as swimming, bowls, basketball, shooting, skiing, theatre visits and working with the National Theatre. As a result, pupils are able to develop and pursue new interests to a high level.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

Good provision is made for pupils' welfare, health and safety. This area has been improved since the previous inspection and all the independent school standards are now met. Staff take good care of pupils and promote their health and safety during lessons, around the school and on school trips. As a result, pupils feel safe in school and most parents and carers who responded to the Parent View survey agree. Arrangements for the safeguarding of pupils, including child protection and staff recruitment checks, and staff training in these areas, are robust and reviewed regularly. All required checks are recorded in a single central register. Risk assessments, including for fire

safety and school trips, are carried out carefully. Any pupils at risk are identified early and effective arrangements are made to keep them engaged in school. Pupils are supervised well in school and on trips. Pupils say that there are few incidents of bullying and, when they occur, teachers deal with them effectively. Arrangements to promote good behaviour and attendance are very effective and result in a calm environment for learning. Pupils are keen to keep healthy and safe. They understand the importance of healthy eating and participating in sport. They are also aware of all forms of bullying, including cyber bullying, and are confident to turn to staff with any concerns. The school now works well with parents, carers and other agencies to make sure that pupils are kept safe. Comprehensive policies and procedures are in place to protect and support pupils, including those to eliminate bullying. In the Early Years Foundation Stage all adults are well deployed to support children's learning and welfare.

Leadership and management

Good

Leadership and management are good. The proprietor supports and challenges the three headteachers to improve the quality of provision. They, in turn, hold teachers to account for the progress pupils make, through annual appraisals. In the Early Years Foundation Stage, appraisals are supplemented by half-termly checks on teaching and children's progress. This regular self-evaluation has resulted in early intervention for children at risk of underachieving and in staff development, and promotes consistently good teaching and learning. In the junior department, pupils' progress is analysed each term and areas for improvement are accurately identified. Improvement plans provide clear direction for staff development, for example in reading, and lead to a more consistently good quality of teaching and learning in English and mathematics. In the senior department, limited monitoring of pupils' progress during the year, and variable teaching, resulted in a dip in GCSE results in 2012, although they were in line with the national average. The headteacher is taking appropriate action to improve the areas of weaker teaching. Inspection evidence indicates that the attainment of current Year 11 pupils is likely to be above average, as in the years prior to 2012. Since the appointment of the new headteacher in the senior department, all three headteachers are rightly working more closely together. They are promoting greater consistency across the school in pupils' progress, behaviour and attendance, and in the quality of teaching and the curriculum. They have made a good start, but, there is no system in place to help them gain an overview of pupils' progress across the whole school.

Most parents and carers are satisfied with the work of the school and would recommend it to others. The school provides parents, carers and others with all the required information, much of which is on the school website. Parents and carers receive a summary of their child's achievements each term and a detailed end of year report. The school's procedures for handling complaints are clear and meet requirements. The premises and accommodation are suitable with specialist facilities to provide for the full range of the curriculum. Regulations not met at the time of the previous inspection are now met and so all the independent school standards are met.

What inspection judgements mean

| School | | |
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| 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/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses. |

School details

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| Unique reference number | 113612 |
| Inspection number | 421049 |
| DfE registration number | 880/6004 |

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.

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| Type of school | Independent day school |
| School status | Independent School |
| Age range of pupils | 2–16 years |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed |
| Number of pupils on the school roll | 219 |
| Number of part time pupils | 57 |
| Proprietor | Stephen Fuszard |
| Headteacher | Amanda Jordan |
| Date of previous school inspection | 23 September 2009 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £5,928 - £8,688 |
| Telephone number | 01803 557077 |
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| Email address | enquiries@towerhouseschool.com |

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