

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

1 Hall Flat Lane, Balby, Doncaster, South Yorkshire DN4 8PT

Inspection dates	10–12 May 2016
Overall effectiveness	Requires improvement
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Requires improvement
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- The issues identified at the previous inspection have not adequately been addressed and therefore leadership and management require improvement.
- Pupils still do not get enough first-hand opportunities to learn about contrasting cultures and communities. Neither do they use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across a range of subjects frequently enough.
- The headteacher and the staff do not use information on pupils' achievements effectively enough so that they gain a more accurate picture of the progress pupils are making.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunity to write at length so that they can practise the skills they have been taught.

The school has the following strengths

- Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They conduct themselves well at all times of the school day.
- Relationships are extremely good and pupils welcome and accept the diversity they have in this very inclusive and caring school.
- Teachers know their pupils extremely well and use this knowledge to help them become successful learners.
- The headteacher works closely with other staff to ensure that the quality of teaching continuously improves as she takes great care to make sure teaching is adapted to meet pupils' individual needs and make learning fun.
- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects from a range of starting points because of the good teaching.
- Pupils learn and gain skills in a range of subjects which gives them confidence and skills so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education.
- Children in the early years make good progress and are well prepared as they move into the next class.
- The headteacher ensures that the independent school standards and the statutory requirements for early years children are met.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve leadership and management by:
 - making better use of the information on pupils' achievement so that a more accurate picture of their progress is available
 - addressing fully the areas for improvement identified at the last inspection so that pupils have more first-hand opportunities to learn about different cultures and beliefs and use their information and communication technology skills more regularly across a range of subjects.

- Improve teaching and learning by giving pupils more opportunities to write at length so they can practise the skills they have been taught.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management **requires improvement**

- The headteacher has not fully addressed issues that were raised at the last inspection. The headteacher knows her school extremely well. She is aware that the strengths of the school are in the quality of teaching and the social, moral and spiritual development of pupils. She acknowledges that a strong focus on these areas and a full-time teaching commitment have meant that other areas of development have not been addressed, such as the issues raised at the last inspection.
- The school is non-selective and has no religious affiliation so that pupils of all abilities, needs and cultures are accepted and welcomed into the school. The headteacher has established a strong ethos combining inclusiveness and respect for everyone. This strong school ethos supports pupils' good social, moral and spiritual development.
- Through the rich diversity of ethnicities found in the school, pupils learn to welcome and accept difference. However, the active promotion of the learning of different faiths and beliefs is more limited. Pupils learn about some cultural religious celebrations but have few visits or visitors in school. This limits the cultural development of pupils.
- Pupils have sufficient learning on ICT but, as identified at the last inspection, they have too few opportunities to use their ICT skills in other subjects. Pupils do, however, gain technological knowledge through other means such as design technology.
- The achievement of pupils is evident in books and in records of standardised tests. However, this information is not analysed and used to track progress. Therefore, teachers do not always have an accurate view of how well pupils are doing.
- All teachers work extremely well together to ensure that the quality of teaching is good or better. Their enthusiasm for teaching and their skill in imparting knowledge is infectious and pupils respond very positively. Training from the local authority, such as early years training, is undertaken when available.
- Parents are highly supportive of the work the school does to support their children both emotionally and academically and appreciate the way the school helps pupils to become successful and confident learners. Parents value the family atmosphere found in the school and the nurturing care their children receive.
- Modern British values are well promoted. Pupils regularly take part in debates which helps them learn tolerance and understanding for the beliefs of others and about democracy.
- Pupils learn through a wide range of subjects so that they are stimulated and interested in learning. They have the opportunity to learn subjects such as Greek, Italian and French languages and study Shakespeare and British history. These subjects, coupled with an exciting outdoor environment and valuable educational visits, help pupils gain knowledge in a broad range of subjects.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. All adults, including those living on the premises, have received all the required checks. The headteacher has ensured that all staff are appropriately trained in first aid, fire safety and child protection. Pupils say that they feel safe and parents consider their child is very safe in the school. All staff know the pupils extremely well and are vigilant for any signs of distress or changes in behaviour which may indicate a cause for concern. Pupils learn about aspects such as road safety as they walk to the local sports field. Visitors have been in school to help pupils learn about keeping themselves safe in a range of situations. Plans are now in place for visits, such as from the local community police, to take place on a regular basis again.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment **is good**

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and are skilled at communicating this knowledge to pupils.
- Teachers make learning fun and help pupils understand through first-hand experiences. In a history lesson pupils explored a range of Victorian household objects to try and guess their uses. This helped them understand what life was like in this era.
- There is a range of abilities in each class. Teachers know their pupils well and use this knowledge to adapt activities and questioning to meet the needs of pupils to support good learning.
- Teachers use different strategies to challenge pupils and help them learn. They move around the classroom questioning and checking understanding. Fun activities, such as 'walking the plank' (walking

along a balancing beam), help pupils to concentrate, consolidate their learning and allow teachers to check their understanding.

- Pupils are encouraged to 'have a go' and good relationships mean they are not afraid to get things wrong and learn from their mistakes.
- Teachers give pupils constant feedback on their work throughout lessons. This enables pupils to know where they have gone wrong and how they can improve.
- Teachers' explanations are clear and therefore pupils know exactly what they should be learning. This also helps them to work well independently.
- Teachers make sure pupils write for different purposes and audiences. They enjoyed working in groups on newspaper articles about the Cottingley fairies. They do not have enough opportunities to write at length which can limit their ability to demonstrate and practise the skills they have learned.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare are good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are confident and articulate and happy to talk to visitors about their work and their school.
- Pupils recognise the importance of being a successful learner and want to do well at school.
- Pupils are happy that any of the adults are there to talk to them should they have any concerns or worries.
- Pupils know how to keep themselves safe on the internet. They have an understanding of how to keep themselves safe in a range of situations, such as speaking to strangers and crossing the road.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils' conduct around the school is exemplary.
- They are happy pupils who mix well with pupils of all ages. Relationships are relaxed and friendly.
- Pupils work and play extremely well together with very little adult supervision required.
- Expectations of behaviour are high from adults and pupils alike.
- Pupils love coming to school and high rates of attendance testify to this.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- From their starting points, pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress across a range of subjects. This means that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils' progress in languages is particularly outstanding. A daily diet of French conversation means that pupils quickly become confident speakers.
- Pupils make good progress in reading. They read to adults on a daily basis in school. The headteacher's enthusiasm for reading, particularly classical literature, is passed on to pupils. Pupils speak enthusiastically about 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' which they have recently studied. They have a wide range of classical and some modern literature to read in school. Parents support this good progress as they listen to their child read at night and make available a wider range of more modern literature.
- Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in English and mathematics. In English, high expectations of grammar, punctuation and spelling are consistently reinforced in all subjects. This, and regular spelling checks, means that pupils' ability to spell is very good.
- Pupils learn through teaching which gives them first-hand experiences to help understand concepts. When the senior class were learning about levers in science, experiments with everyday items such as staplers and nutcrackers helped cement their understanding.
- The most-able pupils make good progress as they are given tasks that match their abilities. The constant assessment by teachers of how well pupils are doing during lessons means that these pupils are always being tested to work harder and learn in more depth.
- The progress made by older pupils is good. They are given individualised support, at times on a one-to-one basis, which takes care of their learning and emotional needs well.

Early years provision

is good

- Children enter the Reception with standards that are generally typical for children of that age. Occasionally, children enter with standards in social and communication development which are higher than those typically expected for children of their age.
- They quickly become confident learners and make good and better progress, particularly in number and reading and writing skills. This enables them to be well prepared as they move to their next class.
- Behaviour is excellent as are relationships. Children mix well together at breaktimes and in physical education lessons with the senior class. This helps them form close bonds with older children.
- Children are enthusiastic and happy and this is well channelled by teachers so that children are happy to learn. Much teaching is relatively formal and adult-directed; opportunities to reinforce their learning through first-hand experiences happen on a daily basis. Children enjoyed buying real cakes in their class patisserie with real money to practise addition of different coin values.
- The outside area is an interesting and exciting environment for young children and promotes imagination and physical development well.
- The head and her staff have ensured that all the early years statutory requirements and relevant independent school standards have been met. Teachers have good communication with the local authority through visits and training to make sure they have a good understanding of the needs of these younger children.
- Parents come in to school at the beginning and end of each day, enabling good communication between home and school. Parents speak very positively about the work the school does.
- Although registered to accept children as young as two years old, the headteacher recognises that they do not have the appropriate provision for children of this young age. Therefore no applications for children as young as two years are accepted.
- Although teachers know their children extremely well, they do not use this information well enough to gain an accurate picture of how well children are achieving in each area of learning and therefore where areas of development may be.

School details

Unique reference number	106816
Inspection number	10012838
DfE registration number	371/6010

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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	Independent preparatory day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	27
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Jane Spencer
Headteacher	Jane Spencer
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,890
Telephone number	01302 856800
Website	www.sycamorehallschool.co.uk
Email address	sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	12–13 June 2013

Information about this school

- Sycamore Hall Preparatory School is a non-selective independent school for boys and girls between the ages of two and 11 years.
- The school is registered for up to 45 pupils. Currently, there are 27 pupils on roll between the ages of four and 12. One of the pupils has a statement of special educational needs.
- Three pupils are currently attending the school who are over the school's official registration requirements. The school are in the process of contacting the Department for Education (DfE) to clarify that this short-term anomaly is acceptable. They are also clarifying that they wish to be registered for pupils between the ages of three and 11 years as per their website and prospectus.
- Children in the Reception Year are taught as part of the infant class.
- A large number of pupils are of minority ethnic heritage.
- The proprietor is also the headteacher and the teacher of the senior class. She also acts in the capacity of governance for the school. Her sister is the only other full-time teacher and teaches pupils in the infant class. There is one other part-time teacher.
- The school was last inspected in June 2013 when it was judged to be a good school.
- The school offers before- and after-school care for pupils which is managed by the school's proprietor.
- The school motto is Floreat Arbor Scientiae, May the Tree of Knowledge Flourish.

Information about this inspection

- The inspection was carried out over two and a half days, with no notice, by one of Her Majesty's Inspectors. The inspector was unable to give the school notice of the inspection as the school's telephone lines were not operational at the time of the inspection.
- The inspector held meetings with the headteacher, who is the proprietor, and the teacher in the infant class. The inspector also spoke to and observed the work of the other member of staff.
- She also met with pupils informally during the school day. When meeting with pupils, inspectors listened to them read and spoke to them about their work and the school.
- The inspector visited all the classrooms and observed learning in a range of subjects. She also studied most pupils' work in a range of year-groups and subjects.
- The inspector toured the building both inside and outside to ensure relevant independent school standards were met and that pupils' welfare is taken into account.
- No parental responses were made to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View. However, the inspector spoke to four parents and received letters from two other parents. These responses were taken into account.
- The inspector considered the behaviour of pupils during different times of the school day and took account of pupils', parents' and staff's opinions about behaviour.
- The inspector examined school documentation, including information relating to pupils' achievement and the admission and attendance registers. She also studied a range of policies required as part of the independent school standards and early years requirements, including those relating to behaviour, safeguarding and welfare, as well as health and safety documents.

Inspection team

Jo Sharpe, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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