

Tower House School

Fisher Street, Paignton, Devon TQ4 5EW

Inspection dates	14–16 June 2016
Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
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 good school

- School leaders and the proprietor have ensured that the quality of education provided by the school has improved since the last inspection in 2013.
- Teaching is typically good. It is characterised by effective planning which engages pupils' interest and promotes good progress. Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in terms of behaviour and achievement, whatever their starting points. These high expectations promote good progress.
- Pupils make good progress across all year groups and most subjects. This is particularly the case in English, literacy and science.
- Staff know the pupils extremely well and this enables them to identify and cater for their individual needs successfully.
- Pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding. Pupils are self-confident, inquisitive and effective learners who display consistently positive attitudes to learning.
- The school is a nurturing environment in which pupils treat each other with respect and consideration. Staff model these values highly effectively in their relationships with pupils.
- In the early years, pupils in Reception make good progress towards achieving their early learning goals.
- The school meets all the independent school standards.

It is not yet an outstanding school because

- School leaders' monitoring of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment does not yet focus closely enough on the progress pupils make as a consequence of the teaching they experience.
- Although the tracking of pupils' attainment and achievement has improved, the school does not analyse the results of this tracking effectively enough in order to promote quicker progress.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching, learning and assessment by ensuring that:
 - the monitoring of the quality of teaching by school leaders pays greater attention to the progress pupils make
 - the information in the school's academic tracking system is analysed more thoroughly to identify aspects of teaching which require further development in order for pupils to make quicker progress.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management is good

- The school's leaders and the proprietor have worked well to improve the quality of education provided by the school since the last inspection in 2013. They are all dedicated and passionate about ensuring that Tower House provides its pupils with a wide range of educational and extra-curricular opportunities that prepare them well for the future. Their belief that everyone can succeed is shared by all staff and it has a clear impact on pupils' self-confidence, aspirations and achievements. Pupils, parents and staff regard Tower House as an 'extended family' in which everyone cares for each other.
- The school has improved its tracking system considerably since the last inspection and it now has a much clearer picture of the progress pupils are making across the school, especially in the senior department. Leaders make effective use of the information they receive about pupils when they join the school, as well as their own baseline assessments, in order to ascertain an accurate understanding of pupils' starting points. This makes their judgements about the progress that pupils make more robust than previously. Nevertheless, the tracking information is not sufficiently well analysed to give a fully clear picture of the progress of particular year groups or groups of pupils.
- The leadership of teaching is good. Staff feel well supported and there is a programme of ongoing professional development. The school closely monitors the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, which is also linked to performance management. There is, however, relatively little focus in this process on assessing the progress that pupils make as a consequence of the teaching they receive over time. As a consequence, leaders' judgements about the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in the school are not as sharp as they could be.
- Staff morale is high. This came out not just in discussions with staff during the inspection but in their formal responses to the staff questionnaire. Many took the opportunity to record how proud they were to be part of the school community.
- The provision for those pupils who have special educational needs or disability is well led. The special educational needs coordinator is very knowledgeable about the current code of practice and liaises well with classroom teachers to ensure that pupils' needs are met. She provides in-house training on, for example, meeting the needs of pupils with autism spectrum disorder.
- The curriculum is broad and balanced across the school. The school's relatively small size allows leaders to adapt the curriculum effectively to meet the needs of individual pupils or groups across all key stages. In key stage 4, for example, the most able can enter for a range of GCSE examinations while other less-able pupils can have their timetable adjusted to their particular aptitudes in order to ensure they succeed in the key core subjects. As a consequence, the curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education.
- The school offers a very wide range of extra-curricular activities. Sport is a particularly popular choice among pupils and there is a variety of different individual or team sports available, including gymnastics, swimming, football, basketball, table tennis and fitness. There are also a number of other extra-curricular options such as choir, performing arts and drama technology. Taken together, these activities allow pupils to develop their artistic, creative and sporting skills. They also make an important contribution to pupils' personal, social and cultural development.
- The school is successful in promoting the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Regular charitable work contributes to pupils' understanding of both the local community and the wider world. For example, all pupils are involved in raising money for a local hospice.
- The school prepares its pupils very well for life in modern Britain. Fundamental British values are promoted successfully across the curriculum. Moreover, they are evident in the way staff and pupils behave towards each other. In all their day-to-day interactions with pupils, staff model the values of respect and tolerance for the beliefs of others. The school also promotes understanding of democracy, the rights of the individual and the rule of law. For example, the pupils in Years 1 to 6 were learning about the upcoming European Union referendum by staging their own debate on whether the south-west of England should remain part of the United Kingdom. Pupils listened carefully and with respect to each other's views and questioned each other politely. In addition to promoting fundamental British values, events like these make an important contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

■ The governance of the school

- The proprietor works successfully with school leaders to establish a positive culture which combines nurturing the individual with high ambitions for what they can achieve. The proprietor visits the school very regularly and has formal and informal meetings with staff to ensure that he has accurate and current information about the operation of the school. Nonetheless, he is clear about the distinction between strategic and operational matters and has delegated effectively to school leaders. These arrangements allow the school's leaders to run the school efficiently in the secure knowledge that they will receive the right balance of challenge and support from the proprietor.
- The proprietor has worked well with school leaders to ensure that the school meets all the independent school standards.
- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective. The school complies with all the legislative requirements and guidance issued by the Secretary of State for Education. The relevant background checks are made on all staff and they are recorded accurately in the single central record. Staff are well trained in safeguarding and child protection and all read part one of 'Keeping children safe in education' as part of this training. Building on these foundations, the school goes on to create a genuine culture of safeguarding in which the welfare and safety of pupils is at the heart of everything it does. The school works successfully to establish secure relationships between staff and pupils based on mutual trust and respect. Staff listen to pupils well and take any concerns they have seriously; they also know the pupils extremely well and this places them in a strong position to look after their welfare and safety. Pupils are unanimous in stating that they feel very safe. School leaders have undertaken appropriate training in relation to the 'Prevent' duty, but work with children to protect them from the dangers of radicalisation and extremism is only at an early stage of development.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good

- Teaching is typically good at Tower House School. It is built on the strong foundations provided by teachers' excellent rapport with pupils. Teachers have high expectations of behaviour and achievement and pupils keenly strive to meet these expectations. As a result, classrooms are very positive learning environments in which staff and pupils work hard together to succeed. When pupils were asked what they thought was the best thing about their school they often spoke first of the quality of teaching they received. They felt that teachers were kind, caring and helpful and that they made learning enjoyable.
- Staff encourage pupils to succeed, whatever their starting points, and provide activities and exercises that are mostly well matched to pupils' abilities. On occasion, however, the level of challenge for the most able is not sufficiently high.
- Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they use it well to plan lessons. Teaching is supported effectively by curriculum plans and schemes of work, although these are stronger in Reception and key stages 1 and 2 than in key stages 3 and 4.
- Improved tracking of academic progress gives teachers a better understanding of the progress that pupils make from their starting points than was evident at the last inspection. This enables them to tailor their planning to the abilities and needs of pupils effectively.
- Teachers' ongoing informal assessment of pupils' progress in lessons is good and they adapt their lesson plans accordingly and efficiently, tackling misconceptions as they go. Most teachers use questioning effectively to assess, probe and develop pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Classrooms are safe places to learn in the sense that pupils are encouraged to learn from their mistakes and are always free to ask questions. As a consequence pupils' progress improves.
- Teaching is effective in developing pupils' reading abilities. Children in Reception year, whatever their level of reading ability, are well taught in how to use phonics to help them read unfamiliar or difficult words.
- The annual reports on pupils that the school sends to parents are very thorough and give parents plenty of good information about their child's attainment and progress. The reports are particularly strong in Reception where not only do parents receive a comprehensive assessment against all the early learning goals at the end of the year but also half-termly updates as the year progresses.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare is outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils are inquisitive and eager to learn in all situations. They display a genuine thirst for knowledge across all subjects and disciplines; one Year 3 pupil said her favourite subject is science, 'because science is everything'.
- Pupils clearly think deeply about issues and discuss them reflectively, as was shown in the junior school referendum debate. While clearly passionate about their own opinions, they show a deep respect for others' beliefs and values. A clear sense of the importance of fairness characterised pupils' interactions with each other.
- The school has successfully fostered a culture which regards itself as an 'extended family' in which everyone looks after each other. On numerous occasions older pupils were seen to reassure younger ones with a kind gesture or friendly word. Pupils ensure that everyone is included in games or other activities in social times such as break or lunch.
- The school encourages pupils to take pride in their achievements both inside and outside school. Regular assemblies allow pupils to share their achievements with others, and all successes, however big or small, are celebrated equally.
- Pupils are very physically active and understand how this helps them to stay healthy. They are also emotionally intelligent and understand how to be considerate of the feelings of others. They know that they will receive very good support from the school if they are upset for any reason.
- Pupils have a very clear and developed sense of how to keep safe. This is particularly the case with regard to e-safety, on which the school puts a great deal of emphasis.
- Careers advice enables pupils to make informed decisions about their next steps. All pupils who left the school at the end of Year 11 in 2015 went on to sustained education, either at schools with a sixth form or at further education establishments.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- Pupils' conduct is exemplary; they are kind, courteous and friendly at all times. Their politeness to each other, to staff, and to visiting adults was a particularly noticeable feature of the inspection. Pupils who have recently joined the school report how welcome they have been made to feel.
- Pupils demonstrate excellent self-discipline and behave appropriately on all occasions, in and out of classrooms. They listen to each other and to adults patiently and wait their turn to speak.
- No disruption by pupils, low-level or otherwise, was seen during the inspection. This means that no time in lessons is lost and learning time is maximised. Pupils clearly understand the connection between good behaviour and positive attitudes and success in education, now and in the future.
- All staff model the highest standards of conduct when interacting with others. This has promoted a culture of high expectations of conduct with no exceptions.
- Pupils, staff and parents report very little bullying and this is confirmed by the school's own behaviour records. All are confident that if it did occur that it would be dealt with quickly and successfully.
- Pupils wear their uniform smartly and with pride.

Outcomes for pupils are good

- Across all year groups pupils make good progress. Progress is strongest in subjects such as English, literacy, science and art. In mathematics, while progress is still good, it is not as swift as in the other core subjects.
- In the juniors (Years 1 to 6) pupils make very good progress across all the subject areas of reading, writing, mathematics, spelling, punctuation and grammar. The majority of pupils in last year's Year 6 cohort attained Level 5 in their national tests, which was in line with the school's projections. This shows that the school has a good understanding of the progress pupils have made from their starting points across both key stage 1 and 2.

- A significant number of the most able pupils leave the school at the end of Year 6 to attend local grammar schools, which means that the prior attainment of pupils in the seniors (Years 7 to 11) is lower than in the juniors. Nonetheless, in 2015 the proportion of pupils attaining five GCSE grades from A* to C, including English and mathematics, was higher than the national average. Similarly, the proportion of all GCSE exam entries which resulted in a grade C or above was also higher than the national average.
- Outcomes in the early years are very good. The majority of children in Reception in 2015 achieved all their early learning goals and the overall proportion of children who achieved a good level of development was in line with the national average. The current cohort of children in Reception are making good progress and all are on track to achieve a good level of development by the end of the year.
- As a result of good leadership and effective teaching, pupils who have special educational needs or disability across all key stages make progress at least as good as other pupils and often better.
- Pupils read well. They read fluently and can understand the words and passages they are reading. As they pass through the school they become increasingly confident readers and many have reading ages well in advance of their chronological ages.
- Pupils are very well prepared for the next level of their education, employment or training, whether they leave at the end of Year 6 or Year 11. Of those who left the school after taking their GCSEs in 2015, all went on to either further education providers or schools with sixth forms.

Early years provision

is good

- The school has a small number of pupils in its Reception year. It securely meets all the independent school standards in relation to the early years foundation stage.
- The early years is led strongly by the headteacher of the nursery. She has a comprehensive knowledge of the statutory framework and its overarching principles. In her role as a member of the senior leadership team she has also been instrumental in spreading some of the good practice evident in the early years to the rest of the school.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment is good in Reception. In particular, the assessment and tracking of children's progress is a strength. The school has a very clear understanding of where children are in their journey towards meeting the early learning goals and achieving a good level of development.
- Children are successfully taught how to use phonics effectively. When they read, children in Reception readily use their skills in phonics to help them with difficult or unfamiliar words. In addition, because of their strong grounding in phonics, they have sufficient resilience to keep trying if at first they are unsuccessful in reading a particular word.
- Children's personal development, behaviour and welfare are outstanding in Reception. They are inquisitive and open to new experiences and participate eagerly in the wide range of activities they undertake. They also behave exceptionally well and look after each other.
- Pupils typically make very good progress in their time in Reception. The children currently in Reception are all on track to meet all their early learning goals and to achieve a good level of development by the end of the year. They are, thus, very well prepared to enter Year 1. This picture of good progress can also be seen in the results for the Reception cohort of 2015, when most children achieved all of their early learning goals and the proportion who achieved a good level of development was in line with the national average.
- Parents with children in Reception receive regular half-termly updates on their child's progress throughout the year. At the end of the year they receive a comprehensive written assessment of their child's progress, together with details of their child's early years foundation stage profile. In addition, the school works effectively with parents through regular and frequent informal contact at the beginning and end of the school day to ensure that all concerned have up-to-the-minute information about how their children are progressing in school and at home.

School details

Unique reference number	113612
Inspection number	10012941
DfE registration number	880/6004

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	Day school
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4–16
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	82
Number of part time pupils	0
Proprietor	Stephen Fuzzard
Chair	n/a
Headteacher	Amanda Jordan
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,552–£9,567
Telephone number	01803 557077
Website	www.towerhouseschool.com
Email address	enquiries@towerhouseschool.com
Date of previous inspection	14–16 May 2013

Information about this school

- Tower House School is a small non-selective independent day school. It has been open since 1982 and consists of three departments: the seniors (Years 7 to 11); the juniors (Years 1 to 6); and a Reception class.
- The school also has a nursery, The Beehive Nursery, but that is separately registered and did not form part of this inspection.
- The school has a small number of pupils with education, health and care plans or statements of special educational needs. Approximately a quarter of pupils have been identified as having special educational needs, most commonly specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.
- A very small number of pupils are placed at the school by the local authority.
- The school does not use alternative provision.
- The school had its last standard inspection on 14 to 16 May 2013.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning during lessons. In addition, an extensive selection of pupils' work was examined.
- Inspectors talked to pupils in formal discussions and informally at various times during the inspection.
- The inspectors also observed pupils arriving at and leaving school and during break and lunchtime.
- Inspectors had a number of meetings with school leaders and the lead inspector spoke to the proprietor on the telephone.
- A wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including the full range of the school's policies. Documents relating to safeguarding and child protection were also checked, as were the school's records of the checks it makes on teachers.
- In making their judgements the inspectors took into account 25 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online parental questionnaire. There were also 20 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- The lead inspector undertook a thorough inspection of the premises in order to ensure it met the requirements of the independent school standards.

Inspection team

Stephen Lee, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Flora Bean

Ofsted Inspector

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