

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

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

Inspection dates

1–2 May 2018

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	Requires improvement

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a school that requires improvement

- Leaders have not addressed sufficiently well the areas for improvement identified at the previous two inspections.
- Leaders do not evaluate the work of the school well enough. They do not sustain the improvements they set out to make.
- Pupils do not learn enough about the faiths and cultures most represented in modern Britain.
- Pupils have little opportunity to attempt to solve challenging mathematical problems across the curriculum.
- Teachers do not provide enough opportunities for pupils to practise their information communication technology (ICT) skills as part of their learning in a range of subjects. Inspectors identified this as an area for improvement at the last two inspections.
- Pupils do not have enough opportunities to learn to plan, draft, improve, edit and present pieces of writing for different purposes and audiences. Inspectors identified writing at length and for purpose and audience as areas for improvement at the last two inspections.

The school has the following strengths

- Leaders have high expectations of pupils' academic achievement, behaviour and personal and social development.
- The headteacher ensures that the school meets the independent school standards.
- Teachers aim high. They give each pupil a great deal of personal attention. Consequently, pupils of all ages achieve well in a range of subjects.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. Pupils of diverse cultural heritage develop warm, respectful relationships with each other. Pupils thrive and feel safe.
- Pupils develop positive attitudes to learning.
- Leaders provide a broad, balanced and rich curriculum that helps pupils to acquire steadily a vast web of knowledge.

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 the effectiveness of leadership and management, by:
 - developing the arrangements for evaluating the educational provision, making plans for improvement, and checking regularly the progress made towards improvement priorities
 - fully addressing the recommendations arising from previous inspections.
- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, by:
 - ensuring that pupils have regular opportunities to practise their ICT skills across the curriculum
 - teaching pupils to plan, draft, improve, edit and present longer pieces of writing in a range of subjects
 - providing opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their developing mathematical knowledge in subjects such as geography and science.
- Further improve pupils' cultural development, by:
 - more systematically teaching pupils about cultures, traditions and faiths represented in modern Britain.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Requires improvement

- Leaders have not acted effectively to address the areas for improvement identified at the previous two inspections. Leaders have taken insufficient action to provide opportunities for pupils to develop and use their ICT skills. Pupils still do not get to write at length, nearly enough. Though leaders have made progress in developing pupils' knowledge of other cultures, pupils do not know enough about faiths and cultures most represented in modern Britain.
- Because leaders are so heavily involved in the all-consuming day-to-day running of all aspects of the school, they do not make time to reflect and evaluate enough. They do not identify those aspects of the school's work that could improve further. When they do identify improvement priorities, actions lose impetus. Leaders do not check the progress towards accomplishing their aims.
- The headteacher is ambitious for the pupils. The headteacher and other adults in the school uphold high expectations of pupils' learning and behaviour. They are passionate about their work. They labour tirelessly to give the pupils the best they can. As a result, pupils achieve well in their academic studies and develop well personally and socially.
- The independent school standards and the statutory requirements for the early years are met. However, leaders struggle to make the time to review the requirements regularly. They had to take action, during the inspection, to adjust and update a few of the school's policies and practices to meet requirements.
- The curriculum is broad, balanced and appealing to pupils. The school lives up to its motto, 'Floreat arbor scientiae', or 'May the tree of knowledge flourish.' Teachers are a mine of information, which they constantly impart to the pupils in engaging ways. Consequently, pupils progressively acquire a breadth and depth of knowledge that helps them to develop well academically.
- The curriculum makes a strong contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. For example, pupils have learned about and interpreted the sayings of Confucius. Teachers share with pupils countless classic novels and traditional tales, giving pupils insight into human nature and relationships.
- Pupils learn about traditions and customs of a range of countries across the globe. For example, in their geography lessons, pupils have learned about life in the United States, Australia and Germany. Pupils have recently undertaken a project about Chinese traditions. However, they do not learn enough about the faiths and cultures most represented in modern Britain.
- Parents and carers are exceptionally supportive of the school. They commented on the caring and nurturing environment. One parent summed up the views of others, referring to the school community as being 'like a family'.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- A suitable safeguarding policy, displayed on the school's website, reflects the statutory

guidance. The range of health and safety policies required to fulfil the independent school standards are in place to guide adults' practice. The designated safeguarding lead has undertaken the required training. She has taken on additional training, for example in paediatric first aid and in fire safety.

- Leaders have made sure that the site and grounds are secure and safe. They have assessed potential risks and put in place appropriate measures to reduce risks. They keep a watchful eye on pupils throughout the day, inside and outside.
- During the inspection, leaders carried out an impromptu fire evacuation drill. Pupils evacuated the building promptly and gathered in the designated space for a roll call.
- Pupils' excellent behaviour makes a strong contribution to their safety, as do the trusting relationships they have with the adults in the school. Pupils say they feel safe and secure at school and adults unanimously agree.
- Adults care for the pupils well. For example, they make sure pupils receive a hearty, balanced, healthy meal each day. They encourage them to try different foods.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Teachers have high expectations of pupils. They pitch work to the ability of the most able. They support other pupils by adapting tasks and helping them to keep up. Consequently, the vast majority of pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects, regardless of their starting points.
- Lively teaching sustains pupils' enthusiasm, engagement and involvement. Not a minute is wasted in lessons as teachers expect pupils to concentrate and finish their tasks in good time.
- The content of lessons, and the way teachers present it, maintains pupils' interest. Pupils show enthusiasm for the many classic stories teachers share with them, looking forward to the next instalment.
- Teachers routinely check pupils' learning throughout lessons. They give pupils immediate feedback on their learning, helping pupils to make quick progress. Teachers give each pupil a lot of individual attention and help with their work.
- The youngest children get off to a good start. The teacher's expectations are equally as high for these children as they are for older pupils, so they make rapid progress. The teaching assistant supports their development particularly effectively, providing encouragement and guidance.
- Teachers expect the very best handwriting, spelling and punctuation in all lessons. As a result, the work of the vast majority of pupils is neat and tidy and most handwriting is completed in meticulous, cursive script from an early age. Teachers help pupils to develop a wide vocabulary and to write accurately.
- Teachers occasionally give pupils opportunities to complete a lengthy piece of writing. However, pupils have too few opportunities to plan, draft, improve, edit and present pieces of writing for a range of audiences and purposes, limiting their composition abilities.
- Teachers are adept at helping pupils to become fluent in number and to calculate using

quick and efficient methods. Pupils have opportunities to solve mathematical problems. However, teachers do not give pupils opportunities to practise and apply their mathematics knowledge, understanding and skills in subjects such as geography and science. This prevents pupils making even stronger progress in their conceptual understanding.

- Teachers give pupils little opportunity to learn using ICT. Pupils do not receive sufficient insight into the capability of ICT to enhance their learning. Nor do they develop the technology skills they often begin to learn at home.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils develop very positive attitudes to learning. They develop resilience. They learn to sustain concentration. They take pride in their work, as demonstrated by the good quality of presentation in their workbooks, which they look after.
- Pupils say bullying is virtually non-existent. They are happy that adults help them to deal with rare disagreements they cannot resolve themselves. Parents who made their views known have no concerns about bullying and say their children feel safe.
- Pupils move around the building safely. They play safely together in the playground. For example, teachers teach the pupils how to stay safe as they walk to the local park together and cross the road.
- Very limited use of technology at the school limits opportunities for pupils to learn how to use technology safely. Pupils, when questioned, showed variable knowledge about how to stay safe online. Most of what they know, they say they learned at home. Pupils in the past had a better knowledge of e-safety than pupils currently in the school do.
- The youngest children are nurtured and well cared for. They settle quickly into the school's routines and enjoy school.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Adults have the highest expectations of pupils' behaviour. Pupils regulate their own behaviour well. They follow well-established routines and rules without having to be reminded.
- Adults help pupils to exhibit good manners, for example when they are dining. Pupils learn to listen to each other and take turns speaking.
- Relationships between adults and pupils and between pupils and their peers are strong. All the pupils get on exceptionally well with each other. They treat each other with respect regardless of their ethnic heritage, age or gender. Nobody is left out in playground games.
- Pupils enjoy attending school. They miss very little school, so rates of attendance are high.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress, year on year, from a range of starting points in a wide range of subjects. By the time they leave, those that stay on until age 11 are well prepared for secondary school. In standardised tests, most pupils achieve above-average scores consistently.
- The youngest children learn to read words quickly. Most read fluently and accurately. Pupils' well-developed vocabulary and extensive general knowledge help them to make good progress in their reading comprehension.
- Pupils learn to write sentences accurately. Most pupils' spelling is correct. However, pupils' ability to plan and compose a lengthy, cohesive piece of writing is limited. This is because they have few opportunities to practise writing stories and letter writing, for example.
- Most of the pupils in the senior class can recall their multiplication tables quickly. They become fluent in numeracy and calculate using efficient methods. They are less adept at attempting the most challenging problems in a range of contexts.
- Pupils' development in speaking and writing French is a particular strength. The youngest children learn to write simple sentences in French.
- Pupils acquire a vast quantity of knowledge in a wide range of subjects over time. They make connections between what they learn in different subjects, aiding their overall progress.

School details

Unique reference number	106816
DfE registration number	371/6010
Inspection number	10046951

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 category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	23
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	10–12 May 2016

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 23 pupils on roll between the ages of four and 11.
- The school has never admitted children as young as two years old. At the time of the last inspection, the proprietor was intending to clarify with the Department for Education (DfE) that the school wished to be registered for pupils between the ages of three and 11 years as per the website and prospectus. This action is still pending.
- 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.

- The proprietor manages before- and after-school care for pupils attending the school.
- Children in the Reception Year are taught as part of the infant class.
- Most of the pupils are of minority ethnic heritage.

Information about this inspection

- This independent school standard inspection was commissioned by the DfE. It took place with one day's notice.
- The inspector visited both classes several times to observe teaching and learning. He asked pupils about their learning and scrutinised their workbooks. He listened to several pupils reading.
- The inspector asked pupils about what it is like to be a pupil at the school. He observed pupils as they played and ate their lunch.
- Discussions were held with the headteacher, who is also the proprietor, and the other full time leader/teacher in the school. Discussions were held with five parents. The written responses of 13 of the parents to Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, were considered.
- The inspector examined a range of documents, including those relating to safeguarding and child protection. He looked carefully around the buildings and site. All the required independent school standards compliance checks were made.

Inspection team

Philip Riozzi, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

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