

# Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

The Old Rectory, Lynn Road, Stow Bardolph, Nr. King's Lynn, Norfolk PE34 3HT

Inspection dates	28-30 November 2017
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Inadequate
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	Outstanding

# Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

#### This is an inadequate school

- The school is in breach of its registration with the Department for Education (DfE). The proprietor has allowed pupils to attend the school who are older than the upper age that it is registered for.
- Leaders do not have sufficient knowledge of the independent school standards and do not give them sufficient priority. As a result, a number of independent school standards are not met.
- Safeguarding is not effective. Statutory guidance, particularly around the safer recruitment of staff, has not been followed closely enough.
- Some staff have not received safeguarding training. The school's designated safeguarding lead has not had training to carry out the role effectively within the last two years.

#### The school has the following strengths

- Pupils feel happy and safe at school. They are free from bullying and know that staff will help them if they are worried about anything.
- Parents and carers express high levels of satisfaction with the school. Parents appreciate the individual care and attention their children receive.

- The school's approach to assessment is underdeveloped. Leaders do not routinely track the progress that pupils make. As a result, some pupils do not make the progress that they should.
- Some teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. Where this is the case, the work pupils are given to do is not sufficiently challenging.
- Pupils are not given enough opportunities to write freely and at length. Too often pupils are given tasks to do that restrict the amount that they can write and the responses they can give.
- Handwriting is taught particularly well. The consistent approach means that pupils develop a neat, joined style by the time they leave.
- Relationships between staff and pupils are notably strong. As a result, classrooms are calm and happy places where pupils learn well.



# Full report

## What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of leadership and management, so that safeguarding is effective and all the independent school standards are met consistently, by ensuring that:
  - the proprietor and senior leaders keep up to date with, and adhere closely to, statutory guidance about safeguarding pupils, including about the recruitment of staff
  - all staff, whatever their role, receive suitable safeguarding training and regular updates about safeguarding pupils
  - recruitment practices are improved so that all necessary checks are carried out before new members of staff are allowed to take up their posts
  - the proprietor and senior leaders have a thorough knowledge of the current independent school standards and check regularly that the requirements of each standard are met in full
  - the conditions of the school's registration are adhered to.
- Develop the school's approach to assessment by:
  - regularly tracking the progress pupils make in reading, writing, mathematics and a wide range of other subjects
  - using assessment to identify pupils whose progress is less than good
  - taking prompt action where pupils are not making the rapid progress they should.
- Raise the quality of teaching by ensuring that teachers:
  - have suitably high expectations of what pupils are capable of achieving
  - use assessment information effectively when planning lessons
  - provide good challenge for all pupils, including the most able
  - give pupils frequent opportunities to write freely and at length.



# **Inspection judgements**

#### **Effectiveness of leadership and management**

#### Inadequate

- The proprietor has not ensured that the school has kept up to date with changes to the legal requirements governing independent schools. As a result, the school no longer meets all of the independent school standards. For example, the school's procedures for dealing with complaints are weak and do not meet requirements.
- The proprietor has allowed the school to breach its registration agreement. The school is registered for pupils who are aged between two and 11 years. The proprietor made the decision to provide education for Year 7 and Year 8 pupils without applying to the DfE for permission to make this material change. Five pupils are currently in Year 7, meaning that they are either 12 years old or will reach this age during the academic year.
- The school's leaders show little understanding of its registration arrangements. The school is registered to take pupils from the age of two years but no two- or three-year-olds currently attend the school. Additional early years provision on the same site, owned by the same provider and with the same name, is registered separately. This overlap in registration leads to confusion. Leaders have too little understanding of the different requirements of the separate registrations.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the school has an appropriate system of assessment in place. Leaders do not measure the progress that pupils make closely enough. They do not have an accurate view of how pupils' attainment compares with other pupils nationally. As a result, some pupils do not make the rapid progress that they should.
- Leaders' views of how good the school is are too generous. Leaders do not use guidance that is available to them well enough to judge accurately how the school compares to others. As a result, although the school has many strengths, it no longer provides an outstanding education for its pupils.
- The proprietor has created a welcoming and friendly school that pupils enjoy coming to. Respect for others is given a high priority and pupils are taught very well how to behave and the importance of good manners. As a result, the school is a calm and harmonious place where pupils are polite, friendly and confident.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society. Pupils are helped to develop a good understanding of the differences and similarities between people. As a result, pupils show excellent attitudes towards those who share characteristics protected by law. For example, when discussing racism with the lead inspector, one pupil linked this to recent news reports and described a politician's actions as 'disgusting, horrible behaviour'. He said that, in contrast, this school is 'open to the world'.
- The school provides pupils with an appropriately wide curriculum, covering all the subjects in the national curriculum. Each subject is taught separately and usually by subject specialists. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of clubs, use of the school's extensive grounds, care of the school's animals and residential visits. These opportunities are valued greatly by pupils. One pupil described the school's residential visit to an outdoor centre as 'the most fun thing that will ever happen in your life'.
- The school provides almost all of the required information on request to parents and



others. The required information about pupils' academic performance during the preceding year is not made available. The proprietor does not provide the local authority with the required annual accounts of income received and expenditure incurred by the school for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

- Parents are very positive about the school. All of the parents who responded to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, said that their children feel happy and safe at school. Almost all said that they would recommend the school to others.
- Many parents chose to provide additional free-text comments in support of the school. Several described their appreciation of the individual care and attention their children receive. Comments such as, 'Our child thoroughly enjoys school' and 'This school is a really happy and relaxed place' were typical.

#### Governance

The school does not have a governing body or any other group that performs a similar function. The school is owned by a sole proprietor who is also the school's principal. All decisions are made by the proprietor and there is no mechanism for moderating those decisions or for holding the principal to account.

#### Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are not effective.
- The proprietor has not ensured that the school has remained up to date with changes in safeguarding practice. As a result, the criteria in the statutory guidance, 'Keeping children safe in education' (September 2016), have not been followed well enough.
- The school was unable to provide evidence that any member of the school's leadership team has completed training in the safer recruitment of staff. As a result, processes to ensure that only suitable people are employed to work with children are not good enough.
- At the beginning of the inspection, all of the required checks had not been completed for all members of staff, including those who had been employed most recently. The school's single central record of these checks does not meet statutory requirements. The checks were completed before the end of the inspection, confirming that no pupils had been put at risk by the laxity of the school's recruitment processes.
- The proprietor has not ensured that staff and leaders are sufficiently well trained to spot the signs of both abuse and neglect. The school's processes for reporting such concerns and ensuring that appropriate action is taken are not sufficiently well developed.
- The school's training records show that some members of staff have not had safeguarding training recently or, in some cases, at all. The designated safeguarding lead has not received updated training within the last two years, the minimum requirement described in the statutory guidance.
- The proprietor has not ensured that suitable accommodation is provided for the shortterm care of sick and injured pupils. Although the school has a medical room, this does not meet requirements as it does not include a washing facility and is not near a toilet.
- The hot water tap in the kitchen in the Old Rectory building presents a scalding risk. This



room is sometimes used for staff to provide first aid to pupils.

- The school has published its safeguarding policy on its website. The policy is appropriate and meets current requirements.
- The school's admissions register does not show the required information about pupils' destinations when they are taken off roll.

#### Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Teachers speak to pupils politely and with respect. Pupils respond in kind, both when speaking with adults and when speaking with other pupils in their class. This ensures that classrooms are happy and productive places where pupils listen carefully and concentrate well.
- Handwriting is taught particularly well. The school's chosen method is used consistently throughout the school. Teachers model the school's cursive handwriting style when writing on the board or in pupils' exercise books. Expectations of how pupils should present their work are high and many pupils' exercise books are notably neat and well presented.
- The proprietor has chosen to employ specialist staff to teach individual subjects throughout the school. Leaders find that this approach works well. Teachers' subject knowledge is particularly strong in some areas of the school's curriculum including history, drama, science, Spanish and music. Pupils' good knowledge of these subjects reflects the strong teaching that they receive.
- Pupils are now being provided with greater opportunities to develop their independence as learners. For example, in science they are being given more frequent opportunities to carry out scientific investigations. This is having a positive effect on their knowledge and understanding in the subject.
- Teachers have high expectations of pupils in terms of their behaviour and how pupils should present their work. Pupils respond well to these high expectations and this is reflected both in their work and how they conduct themselves around the school.
- Assessment is underdeveloped. Pupils' reading, spelling and mathematics 'age' is checked twice per year using commercially produced tests. The results of these tests are not compared with previous results to check that pupils are doing as well as they should. Teachers do not assess the work that pupils do in their classrooms in a way that enables them to plan teaching that fully meets the needs of learners.
- Some of the work that pupils are given to do is not well chosen. Sometimes work is too easy because teachers' expectations of what pupils can achieve are not high enough. Where this is the case, pupils do not make as much progress or attain as well as they should. For example, much of pupils' work involves filling in worksheets that restrict the range and type of answers they are able to provide. Pupils are given too few opportunities to write freely and at length.



#### Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

#### Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils feel safe at school. They say that bullying is something that hardly ever happens. Pupils know that they should tell an adult if bullying does occur. They have great faith that staff will sort things out quickly should an issue arise.
- Pupils are taught to keep themselves safe in a range of different ways. For example, they take part in termly fire drills and understand the importance of evacuating the buildings quickly and sensibly. Pupils learn about issues such as road safety at a level appropriate for their age.
- Politeness and good manners are given a high priority at the school. Pupils are expected to show respect for adults and each other at all times. For example, pupils stand and say 'good morning' when the principal enters the room, as a sign of respect. These high expectations mean that pupils are extremely well mannered and able to talk to visitors sensibly and with maturity.
- Pupils have excellent attitudes to other people. They know that it is wrong to judge people on the colour of their skin or any other characteristics protected by law. Pupils spoke very eloquently to the lead inspector about equality issues. When discussing racism, one pupil spoke for the group by saying, 'It's just the pigment in your skin – we don't really notice it.'
- Pupils show good attitudes to learning. They work hard and do their best. Pupils take great care with the presentation of their work. For example, pupils' handwriting is frequently of a high standard.

#### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave very well in lessons and it is rare for learning to be disrupted by poor behaviour. The consistently good behaviour helps pupils to make good progress. They respond quickly to instructions and are keen to please their teachers. As a result, classrooms are calm and orderly places where pupils learn well.
- Pupils also behave sensibly during less-structured parts of the school day. They play well together and enjoy each other's company. Pupils are kind and caring, and ensure that no-one is left out. When speaking with the lead inspector, several pupils said that they particularly like the friendliness of this small school.
- The school's overall rate of attendance is just below the national average. There is little variation in the attendance of different groups of pupils. For example, the attendance of boys and girls is very similar. No groups of pupils are disadvantaged by low attendance.

#### **Outcomes for pupils**

Good

■ The work in pupils' exercise books and conversations with pupils show that they are



working broadly within the expected range for their age. Some pupils are working at a higher standard. The work in pupils' exercise books shows that current pupils are making good progress overall.

- The school's chosen method of assessing pupils is to test their reading, spelling and mathematics 'age' in January and May each year. Leaders do not routinely compare results of these tests as a means of checking the progress that pupils make. Inspectors compared the latest available assessment results, from January and May 2017. This showed that many pupils make better than expected progress in reading, spelling and mathematics. That is, their scores rose by more months than the four that had elapsed between tests.
- Some pupils' progress is weaker than others. The school's assessment records show that some pupils' reading, spelling and mathematics ages increased by less than the number of months that have passed between assessments. For example, in one class 60% of pupils made at least the expected amount of progress in spelling but 40% did not.
- The school does not assess pupils' progress and attainment in writing. The work in pupils' exercise books shows that most pupils are making good progress overall. However, the amount of writing that pupils do 'freely', without adult intervention or the considerable structure that is provided for example by worksheets, is limited.
- Pupils' handwriting is very well developed. Pupils are taught to use the school's chosen handwriting style throughout the school. As a result, pupils form letters correctly and uniformly, ensuring that they are all the right size. Pupils are taught explicitly how to join letters. By the time pupils leave the school, most have noticeably neat, joined handwriting.
- Pupils make good progress in a range of subjects other than English and mathematics. Pupils learn a range of facts about the subjects that they are taught and are encouraged to discuss and debate what they have learned. For example, pupils in Year 3 were able to use their good knowledge of William the Conqueror to discuss the Domesday Book and why the survey was carried out.

#### Early years provision

Good

- The Reception Year classrooms provide a bright and attractive environment. Children have a good amount of space to use, particularly given the small class size. Children are provided with a good range of suitable activities to select from independently, alongside more structured learning activities led by adults.
- Children have access to an exceptionally large amount of outdoor space. The very large garden, accessed directly from the Reception classroom, provides a wide range of learning opportunities for the children. In addition, staff make good use of the school's extensive grounds to broaden children's knowledge and experiences. For example, the children enjoy visiting the school's friendly goats and the ducks that swim on the school's large pond.
- Children make good progress during their time in the Reception Year. Most children start school with skills and abilities that are at least typical of their age. In the last academic year, all children reached a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year,



ensuring that they were ready for the increasing academic demands of Year 1.

- Relationships between the early years staff and children are strong. Staff model kindness and respect to children, and the children respond appropriately. Adults plan learning well to meet children's needs, presenting new learning in a variety of ways to suit different children's individual preferences.
- Children learn the school's rules quickly. They listen well to what the adults tell them and follow instructions carefully. The school's youngest children are given the same clear messages about being polite and kind to others as the rest of the school.
- The early years provision does not meet the needs of the two-year-olds for which it is registered. For example, there is no provision for changing nappies or for children to be able to take a nap during the day. However, although the school is registered for two-year-olds, there are currently no pupils of this age on the school's register and there are no plans to admit two-year-olds in the near future.



# **School details**

Unique reference number	121251
DfE registration number	926/6143
Inspection number	10038903

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	Other Independent School
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	114
Proprietor	Mrs E Laffeaty-Sharpe
Headteacher	Paul Cochrane
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,426–£9,900
Telephone number	01366 388066
Website	www.downhamprep.co.uk
Email address	office@downhamprep.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	22–24 October 2014

#### Information about this school

- Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery is a small, privately owned independent school.
- The school is currently in breach of its registration agreement. It is registered for pupils between two and 11 years. Five pupils have either turned 12 or will become 12 during this academic year.
- Although registered to take children from the age of two years, there are currently no children below Reception age on the school's admissions register. The school does not plan to admit two-year-olds.
- Separately registered early years provision shares the site and is owned by the same proprietor. The early years provision, also named Downham Preparatory School and



Montessori Nursery, unique reference number EY305661, was not included in this inspection. The proprietor also owns a second early years setting nearby, Downham Nursery School, unique reference number EY398091. Separate inspection reports for these providers are available on the Ofsted website.



# Information about this inspection

- Inspectors gathered a range of evidence to judge the quality of teaching and learning over time. Inspectors observed parts of 18 lessons, some jointly with school leaders.
- Inspectors looked closely at the work in pupils' exercise books. They listened to pupils read and talked to them about their work.
- Inspectors looked at a range of the school's documents including assessment information. They checked the school's single central record of pre-employment checks and other documentation concerned with the safer recruitment of staff and volunteers.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor, the headteacher, other leaders and the school council.
- Inspectors spoke with parents as they brought their children to school. Inspectors considered 41 responses to Parent View, Ofsted's online questionnaire, and 51 free-text responses.
- Inspectors took account of 14 responses to the staff survey.

#### Inspection team

Wendy Varney, lead inspector

Paul Copping

Her Majesty's Inspector Ofsted Inspector



# **Annex. Compliance with regulatory requirements**

#### The school must meet the following independent school standards

#### Part 3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 7 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that
  - 7(b) such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- I5 The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admission and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006.
- 18(2) The standard in this paragraph is met if
  - 18(2)(a) no such person is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act where that person is or will be engaging in activity which is regulated activity within the meaning of Part 1 of Schedule 4 to that Act
  - 18(2)(b) no such person carries out work, or intends to carry out work, at the school in contravention of a prohibition order, an interim prohibition order, or any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act of section 142 of the 2002 Act, or any disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in either such direction
  - 18(2)(c) the proprietor carries out appropriate checks to confirm in respect of each such person
  - 18(2)(c)(iii) the person's right to work in the United Kingdom; and
  - 18(2)(e) in the case of any person for whom, by reason of that person living or having lived outside the United Kingdom, obtaining such a certificate is not sufficient to establish the person's suitability to work in a school, such further checks are made as the proprietor considers appropriate, having regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
- 18(3) The checks referred to in sub-paragraphs (2)(c) and (except where sub-paragraph (4) applies) (2)(e) must be completed before a person's appointment.
- 21(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor keeps a register which shows such of the information referred to in sub-paragraphs (3) to (7) as is applicable to the school in question.
- 21(3) The information referred to in this sub-paragraph is
  - 21(3)(a) in relation to each member of staff ('S') appointed on or after 1st May 2007, whether
  - 21(3)(a)(ii) a check was made to establish whether S is barred from regulated activity relating to children in accordance with section 3(2) of the 2006 Act
  - 21(3)(a)(iii) a check was made to establish whether S is subject to any direction made under section 128 of the 2008 Act or section 142 of the 2002 Act or any



disqualification, prohibition or restriction which takes effect as if contained in such a direction

- 21(3)(a)(vii) a check of S's right to work in the United Kingdom was made; and
- 21(3)(a)(viii) checks were made pursuant to paragraph 18(2)(e)
- 21(3)(b) in relation to each member of staff ('S'), whether a check was made to establish whether S is subject to a prohibition order or an interim prohibition order, including the date on which such check was completed.

## Part 5. Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 24(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that suitable accommodation is provided in order to cater for the medical and therapy needs of pupils, including-
  - 24(1)(b) accommodation for the short term care of sick and injured pupils, which includes a washing facility and is near to a toilet facility.
- 28(1) The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
  - 28(1)(d) the temperature of hot water at the point of use does not pose a scalding risk to users.

## Part 6. Provision of information

- 32(1) The standard about the provision of information by the school is met if the proprietor ensures that
  - 32(1)(b) the information specified in sub-paragraph (3) is made available to parents of prospective pupils and, on request, to the Chief Inspector, the Secretary of State or an independent inspectorate
  - 32(1)(h) where a pupil wholly or partly funded by a local authority (except where funding is solely for free of charge early years provision in accordance with the duty contained in section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006[16]) is registered at the school, an annual account of income received and expenditure incurred by the school in respect of that pupil is provided to the local authority and, on request, to the Secretary of State.
- 32(3) The information specified in this sub-paragraph is
  - 32(3)(e) particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations.

## Part 7. Manner in which complaints are handled

- 33 The standard about the manner in which complaints are handled is met if the proprietor ensures that a complaints procedure is drawn up and effectively implemented which deals with the handling of complaints from parents of pupils and which
  - 33(f) where the parent is not satisfied with the response to the complaint made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e), makes provision for a hearing before a panel



appointed by or on behalf of the proprietor and consisting of at least three people who were not directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint

- 33(g) ensures that, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, one panel member is independent of the management and running of the school
- 33(h) allows for a parent to attend and be accompanied at a panel hearing if they wish
- 33(i) provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that a copy of those findings and recommendations is
- 33(i)(i) provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about; and
- 33(i)(ii) available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor and the head teacher
- 33(j) provides for a written record to be kept of all complaints that are made in accordance with sub-paragraph (e) and
- 33(j)(i) whether they are resolved following a formal procedure, or proceed to a panel hearing; and
- 33(j)(ii) action taken by the school as a result of those complaints (regardless of whether they are upheld)
- 33(k) provides that correspondence, statements and records relating to individual complaints are to be kept confidential except where the Secretary of State or a body conducting an inspection under section 109 of the 2008 Act requests access to them.

#### Part 8. Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 34(1) The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school
  - 34(1)(a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
  - 34(1)(b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
  - 34(1)(c) actively promote the well-being of pupils.



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