

Inspection of Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

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

Inspection dates: 14 to 16 November 2023

Overall effectiveness	Good
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The quality of education	Good
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Behaviour and attitudes	Good
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Personal development	Good
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Leadership and management	Good
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Early years provision	Good
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Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Good
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Does the school meet the independent school standards?	Yes
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What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils thrive in the school's happy environment. Pupils and parents cherish how the school values the unique qualities of each pupil. Those who arrive with negative prior experiences re-engage with learning.

Pupils and staff develop strong relationships. In Reception, children quickly learn the school's values. They share toys and play well together. As pupils grow at the school, they support each other in their learning and celebrate each other's successes. The school equips pupils well to resolve disagreements between friends. Pupils have confidence that staff are willing and able to help them should they need assistance.

The school has high expectations of what children in Reception and older pupils can learn. In lessons, pupils study the curriculum with interest and diligence. They benefit from the school's enriching programme of visiting speakers and trips to sites of local, national and international significance. Pupils fluently discuss and write about the sophisticated topics within the school's broad curriculum.

Pupils willingly take up positions of responsibility at the school. They take turns feeding the farm animals kept on school site and look after equipment on the playground, such as the 'calm canopy'.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The curriculum is well designed and delivered. Leaders organise most of the curriculum logically so that pupils learn topics in sensible steps. When designing learning activities, teachers account for the different needs of each pupil. This ensures that pupils learn the curriculum effectively. Teachers regularly check what pupils know and understand. They quickly spot and help pupils who are at risk of falling behind. In a few subjects, however, leaders have not clearly outlined for staff exactly what pupils must know and understand. As a result, teachers do not place enough emphasis on the key knowledge pupils need, so pupils do not remember what they should.

From the earliest moments in Reception, pupils are encouraged to enjoy reading. They make good use of the well-stocked library and talk about their reading with enthusiasm. The school ensures that children in Reception learn the basics of reading. During key stage 1, pupils learn to read fluently. When pupils find learning to read tough, staff provide pupils with effective support to help them catch up.

The school quickly spots pupils who may have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders work effectively with parents and external specialists to identify pupils' needs and provide precise guidance for staff. Staff deliver effective support for these pupils. As a result, pupils with SEND learn the curriculum well. They also learn effective strategies to manage the challenges resulting from their varying needs. Parents feel that the school gives pupils with SEND the support they need to succeed.

The school's routines ensure pupils stay focused on their learning. Pupils learn in calm and purposeful environments. In Reception, children quickly learn to concentrate and listen carefully to others. Staff deal with the rare instances of unacceptable behaviour effectively.

Valuing others' differences is at the heart of the school's work. Pupils are knowledgeable about the different lifestyles and beliefs in contemporary society. Pupils also understand how democratic decisions are made in the United Kingdom. The school prepares pupils well for adult life in modern Britain.

The school provides the information pupils need to start considering career opportunities. The school prepares pupils well for their next steps into secondary school.

Leaders and the proprietor body have built positive relations with parents, pupils, staff and the local community. Leaders ensure that pupils take part in community events, such as taking part in a local act of remembrance. Staff are well supported by leaders. All staff enjoy working at the school. Although positive about the school, some parents commented that they would like the school to improve communication with parents. This is something that the school is working on with the help of a group of parents.

Leaders and the proprietor body have ensured that the school meets all the independent school standards, for instance with regards to maintaining premises and having suitable risk assessments in place. Additionally, the school is compliant with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the statutory requirements of the early years foundation stage.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve?

(Information for the school and proprietor)

- In some subjects, the school's documents do not provide teachers with sufficient guidance about what pupils must know and understand. This leads to teachers not always placing enough emphasis on important knowledge. As a result, pupils forget key knowledge. The school must ensure that curriculum plans clarify precisely what pupils must know and understand in every subject.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	121251
DfE registration number	926/6143
Local authority	Norfolk
Inspection number	10254640
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	4 to 13
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	56
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	DPSMN Limited
Chair	Elizabeth Laffeaty-Sharpe
Headteacher	Bernadette Lillie and Terri Tighe
Annual fees (day pupils)	£7,800 to £11,820
Telephone number	01366 388066
Website	www.downhamprep.co.uk
Email address	office@downhamprep.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	18 to 20 September 2018

Information about this school

- At the previous inspection, the chair of the proprietor body was also the headteacher. In November 2020, the chair stood down as headteacher and two headteachers, who work collaboratively, took up their posts.
- In March 2019, the school had an additional inspection regarding the proprietor body's request for a material change to extend the school's age range.
- The school uses no alternative provision.
- The school has one site which is located at: The Old Rectory, Stow Bardolph, Nr Kings Lynn, Norfolk PE34 3HT.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.

- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors spoke with the chair of the proprietor body, the headteachers, teachers, members of support staff, parents and pupils.
- Inspectors carried out deep dives in these subjects: history, mathematics, reading and science. For each deep dive, inspectors held discussions about the curriculum, looked at curriculum plans, visited a sample of lessons, spoke to teachers, spoke to some pupils about their learning and looked at samples of pupils' work.
- Inspectors also looked at curriculum plans and spoke to leaders about other subjects.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, the inspectors: reviewed the single central record; took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors looked at school policies and procedures, held discussions with leaders and considered the school's premises to check compliance with the independent school standards.

- Inspectors considered the responses of the 14 staff, 43 pupils and 26 parents that took part in Ofsted's online surveys.

Inspection team

Al Mistrano, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Hannah Stoten

His Majesty's Inspector

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