TALBOT HOUSE PREPARATORY SCHOOL 8 FIRS GLEN ROAD BOURNEMOUTH DORSET BH9 2LR

Dates of inspection: 3-5 February 1997

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INTRODUCTION

Basic Information about the School

Name of school	Talbot House Preparatory School
Туре	Primary
Status	Registered Independent
Gender	Co-educational
Age range	3-12
Number on roll	158
Number of boarders	None
Fees	Day: £592-670 per term
Name of Proprietor	Mrs E H & Mr P L Stevenson
Name of Headteacher	Mrs E H Stevenson
Address of school	8 Firs Glen Road Bournemouth Dorset BH9 2LR
Telephone No	01202 510348
DFEE Number	912/6124
Dates of inspection	3 - 6 February 1997

Purpose and Scope of the Inspection

1. This inspection was carried out to report on the quality and standards of education provided by the school, the standards achieved, the contribution made by the school to its pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and the quality of governance and management. The findings of the inspection will also be used by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Schools to keep the Secretary of State for Education informed about these issues, and about the school's suitability for registration under the Education Act 1996.

2. English, mathematics and science are reported on in detail. All aspects of the school are reported on at the minimum level of detail.

3. Talbot House Preparatory School caters for pupils aged 3-12. Where year groups are referred to in the text of this report, they relate as far as possible to National Curriculum nomenclature as indicated in Appendix 1. The number of pupils in each year group, destinations of leavers, and the number of teaching and other staff are included in appendices.

School Description

4. Talbot House Preparatory School is an independent day school in Bournemouth. The school's declared aims are to provide a family school where traditional methods of teaching are employed and emphasis is placed on good manners and conduct. The prospectus says that the specific function of the school is to prepare boys and girls aged 3-12 years of age for all examinations normally taken in this preparatory age group. On leaving the school at 11+ and 12+, pupils mainly go on to selective senior schools.

Evidence Base

5. Thirty six lessons were observed by two of Her Majesty's Inspectors. Registration periods, and extra curricular activities were also inspected. Almost all teachers were seen teaching at least once and a number of meetings took place between inspectors and members of the teaching, support and administrative staff. The recent work of a representative sample of pupils from each year group was examined and pupils were heard reading. Pupils were given the opportunity to discuss their work and experience in the school with inspectors. The school provided documentation prior to and during the inspection.

MAIN FINDINGS AND KEY ISSUES FOR ACTION

Main Findings

6. With the exception of the school's accommodation, which does not meet the requirements of the 1996 Education Act, Talbot House School has many strengths. The standards achieved by the pupils in the core subjects are satisfactory or better overall. They are high in mathematics, satisfactory in English and more variable but still generally satisfactory in science. Pupils' achievements are in line with their ability in most respects.

7. The quality of teaching is generally sound or good in the upper part of the school and

satisfactory overall in the earlier years. However, in a quarter of the lessons observed the teaching was unsatisfactory, often because of problems arising from the cramped accommodation. Attitudes to learning are good. Pupils are well motivated and approach their work purposefully, making satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding in most lessons. Staff are dedicated and hardworking and in the upper part of the school effective use is made of the favourable ratio of teachers to pupils to support the learning of children individually. However, in the classes with pupils under five the ratio of adults to pupils is too low. The school places strong emphasis on pupils' social and moral development and there is an appropriate balance of rewards and sanctions; pupils' are well-behaved and well-mannered. Relationships between pupils and teachers and between pupils themselves are amiable and positive.

8. The school has strong, effective leadership but there is a need for more delegation of curriculum co-ordination and management. The day-to-day organisation of the school runs smoothly and efficiently, apart from the wet playtimes observed. The accommodation currently provides an insufficient area of floor space for the number of pupils. The lack of space places great strain on staff and pupils at certain times of certain days in the week.

9. The curriculum is reasonably broad, with a clear emphasis on oracy, literacy and numeracy. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and additional French from about Year 1. There is, however, insufficient time assigned to some subjects, including science.

Key Issues for Action

- In order to meet the requirement of the 1996 Education Act in terms of accommodation, the school must either reduce the number of pupils or provide extra premises;
- Staffing for pupils under five should be brought into line with the Children Act (1989) guidance;
- To improve the standard of work and provision further, effective delegation of curriculum management and co-ordination of subjects is needed so that schemes of work are written and implemented effectively;
- The time allocations to subjects need to be reviewed, and some changes made to the emphasis given to aspects within them, in order to improve the balance between and within subjects.

STANDARDS AND QUALITY

Standards of Achievement

10. The standards of achievement of pupils in the core subjects are mostly at or above national expectations. Last year pupils took the National Curriculum tests at 7 and 11. While the results were not moderated at Key Stage 1, and were not externally marked at Key Stage 2, the levels of achievement indicated by them were confirmed by the observation of lessons, the scrutiny of work and the discussions with pupils that took place during the inspection. At the age of 7, pupils' achievements are in line with national expectations. At 11, they achieve well in mathematics and satisfactorily in English. Their achievements are relatively weak in science. In many respects, pupils achievements are in line with their ability. Standards in science, however, do not reflect the pupils' abilities.

11. Most pupils can speak well and listen carefully. There is, however, some inconsistency in progress and development in oral skills in the school. Most pupils learn to read effectively in the

kindergarten and transition classes. Older pupils continue to read well but would benefit from being introduced to a wider range of literature. Pupils' standards of writing are sound or better and handwriting is fluent and legible. Spelling and punctuation are good.

12. Standards of numeracy are good. Pupils generally apply their mathematical skills effectively in other areas of the curriculum, such as geography and science, where they make competent use of graphs. Although there is relatively little direct teaching of information technology (IT) skills, pupils use computers for computer-assisted learning. Many pupils learn a great deal about IT from the use they make of computers at home. For example, images captured from the Internet, at home, were used in preparation for an assembly.

Quality of Learning

13. Pupils generally learn well; they are well motivated, with good attitudes to their work. They make satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding in most lessons, except where lack of space limits the ability of pupils to undertake practical work effectively or prevents teachers from overseeing the pupils' work sufficiently and influencing their learning. Almost all pupils are purposeful, co-operative and actively engaged in their lessons. There are insufficient opportunities in some classes for pupils to develop and use their library skills.

14. Pupils gain knowledge and understanding from investigations and problem solving exercises, for example in mathematics and in design and technology (D&T). In one Key Stage 2 class, pupils developed their skills of measurement which were used in designing shoes for themselves. There was good investigation and simple testing of hypotheses in a class of nursery and reception pupils. Older pupils at Key Stage 2 in science learnt well through practical investigation but restrictions of space provided unnecessary problems for them to solve and inhibited their learning in what would otherwise have been an excellent lesson.

PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, BEHAVIOUR AND WELFARE

Pupils' Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development

15. The good ethos of the school and the high standard of the pupils' behaviour make a distinct contribution to the pupils' moral and social development. The teachers set a positive tone which is reflected by the pupils in the courtesy and consideration they extend to adults and to their peers. All pupils from time to time are given responsibilities within their classes and they are able to work together collaboratively. Money is raised for a range of local and national charities. At the time of the inspection, one class received a visit from a representative of Guide Dogs for the Blind, in connection with the topic they were following; this helped them to gain a greater understanding of what it is like to be blind.

16. Lunchtimes are pleasant social occasions. Grace is said before and after the meal. There are also prayers and hymns at the weekly assemblies.

17. The pupils are introduced to aspects of culture, for example, through the study of Shakespeare by the oldest pupils. However, the school should consider giving greater emphasis to literature, art and music of good quality in order to enhance the pupils' cultural development more effectively. It would also be beneficial to raise pupils' awareness of a range of cultures in order to develop tolerance and an understanding of cultural diversity.

Behaviour and Discipline

18. Behaviour is good in all areas of school life. Pupils are courteous, helpful and considerate, confident in speaking with adults and generally friendly towards each other. This good behaviour and self discipline make major contributions to the quality of learning. The balance of rewards and sanctions is appropriate and pupils respond positively to the school's rules and conventions. Although there is no written policy on bullying, any problems are dealt with effectively and promptly.

Attendance

19. Attendance is good. There are clear procedures for following up absences and ascertaining that they are all authorised. However, the attendance registers themselves do not distinguish between authorised and unauthorised absence, so some modifications of the procedures will be necessary in order to meet the requirements of the 1995 regulations.

Welfare and Guidance

20. The school is a caring environment and its family nature effectively promotes the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. Pupils are well known to staff and cared for according to their needs. Medical care and procedures in the case of accidents are good. The school has a carefully kept incident book. Staff are aware of the school's safety procedures and adhere to them rigorously. Although there are no written guidelines for staff on child protection issues, the school possesses the local authority's child protection procedures pack and all staff are aware of the head teacher's role with regard to child protection.

21. Sound guidance is given to parents and pupils on the selection and transfer to suitable schools. Most pupils obtain entry to the selective schools of their choice. Pupils appreciate the care the school provides and respond well to it.

THE SCHOOL'S GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

22. The school has strong leadership. However, the lack of delegation in relation to the coordination and management of the curriculum has caused weaknesses in the detailed planning of subjects. The headteacher and her husband are the joint proprietors of the school. The school's aims are simple, clear and appropriate. They are understood by staff, pupils and parents. Policies are generally understood, though there are few policy documents or guidelines, and there is no staff handbook.

23. The proprietors have begun consultations to prepare a school development plan. A start has been made on the delegation of responsibility with the designation of co-ordinators for science, history and geography. These

co-ordinators have prepared schemes of work, which have yet to be implemented.

24. Daily routines run smoothly, apart from wet playtimes, where the lack of space places great strain on staff and pupils. Although the school has no secretary, administration is effective. Staff meet regularly and there is good communication within the school. Financial management rests with the proprietors. Resources for the curriculum are provided through consultation but there are no individual budgets for subjects and areas of the school.

QUALITY OF TEACHING

25. The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in three quarters of the lessons observed and was good in just over a third. The most successful teaching is carefully planned, makes good use of discussion and of practical work where appropriate, and motivates the pupils by presenting the work in relevant and interesting ways. Most lessons have clear objectives and are well organised.

26. Teachers show adequate subject knowledge and have good relationships with the pupils. However, in a quarter of the lessons observed teaching was unsatisfactory. There were two reasons for this relatively high proportion. The first and main reason is that many lessons were adversely effected by the cramped conditions within classrooms and by the high noise levels coming from adjacent classes. The sound of tape recorded programmes or classes moving up and down stairs caused serious distraction. In these circumstances, teachers were unable to carry out their intentions effectively. The second reason was that in some lessons the tasks given to pupils were too narrowly prescribed, and teachers did not have a high enough expectation of the pupils' ability to think for themselves and to make contributions.

ASSESSMENT, RECORDING AND REPORTING

27. The pupils' work is regularly and conscientiously marked and their progress is frequently tested. Teachers keep careful records of the ground covered by individual pupils, particularly in reading, writing and mathematics. Parents receive detailed written reports twice a year, and are given opportunities at least once a year, and more frequently if they wish, to discuss their children's progress with the teachers.

28. While assessment procedures are thorough and helpful, there are ways in which they could be further improved. Samples of pupils' work are kept in portfolios. These would be of more practical value if the samples were more carefully selected, dated and annotated briefly to explain the context of the work and the degree to which the pupil had been helped. Tick-lists are kept to record the milestones of pupils' progress, but these are against the statements of attainment in the National Curriculum prior to its 1994 revision. The school should use the revised attainment targets, making assessments at the end of the year or the key stage, by considering which level descriptions give the best fit. Many of the records kept, including the reading record books and the progress sheets, concentrate largely on noting the pages and exercises covered. Teachers and parents should be encouraged to write evaluative comments on the pupil's strengths and weaknesses so that the assessments can more clearly inform the planning of future work.

THE CURRICULUM

Quality and Range (see Appendix 2 for details)

29. The curriculum is reasonably broad, with a clear emphasis on oracy, literacy and numeracy. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and, in addition, pupils learn French from around Year 1 and can opt for extra lessons in German, ballet and elocution at an appropriate stage.

30. While the curriculum is sufficiently broad, the balance within and between subjects needs improvement. Older pupils in particular do not have sufficient time for science and for some other subjects, to attain the standards of which they are capable. The school has identified the need to give more emphasis, within subjects, to using and applying mathematics and to experimental and investigative science. There is also a need to emphasise literature more strongly in English.

31. Schemes of work are being developed. Schemes for history, geography and science have recently been written and it is intended to implement them next September. They give a helpful allocation of topics to year groups, drawing closely on the National Curriculum Programme of Study, and indicate some of the resources available. These practical guidelines for teachers could serve us a useful model for the development of further schemes of work.

32. The programme of work for the under-fives is clearly planned, with some collaboration between teachers. The planning is in terms of the subjects of the curriculum. The school should consider using the areas of learning set out in the "Nursery Education Desirable Outcomes", to give structure to the planning so that a more flexible and appropriate programme of work can be developed.

Equality of Opportunity

33. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum provided by the school.

Provision for Pupils with Special Educational Needs

34. There are a few pupils with mild learning difficulties and also a few pupils with sensory impairment or some other physical handicap.

35. The pupils with mild learning difficulties receive extra attention from their class teachers, and some also are withdrawn for individual or small group work with a part-time teacher. Generally, pupils make satisfactory progress. Occasionally there is a need for a more careful diagnosis of a child's particular difficulties so that an appropriate individual education plan can be formulated.

36. The pupils with physical handicaps are well integrated and are given good access to the curriculum. The school has received some useful advice on their particular conditions, but better liaison needs to be established with other agencies, so that the school is informed when reviews are undertaken, and is given up-to-date information concerning any changes in their condition.

37. The school has not, up to now, been aware of the Department for Education and Employment's Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs. It will be useful to look at it carefully so that those parts which are relevant can be implemented, and so that parents can be given informed advice.

TEACHING AND NON-TEACHING STAFF

38. The school has sufficient and suitably qualified staff to cover the curriculum it offers in the 5-12 age range. However, the staffing for the under fives is inadequate, since none of the three staff are qualified teachers, and the child to adult ratio exceeds the 8:1 recommendation of the Children Act (1989) guidance. The school has nine full-time teachers and 11 part-time teachers; six of the full-time staff and many part-timers are qualified teachers. In addition, one full-time teacher is a qualified nursery nurse. They are appropriately deployed. Teachers are now being identified as subject co-ordinators. A number of teachers have undertaken in-service training and are considering further aspects of staff development which will directly enhance their work. An in-service day has been booked in the local authority's training centre. New teachers receive support from other colleagues. The required checks on teachers before appointment are carefully carried out.

RESOURCES FOR LEARNING

39. Resources for learning are sufficient for the curriculum taught by the school. Provision for mathematics is good. There is no shortage of books although the school's library provision is divided between classes and not all pupils have equal access to it. There is insufficient space for displaying books attractively in most classrooms.

40. The number of computers is adequate for present use and the computer assisted learning programme effectively supports the curriculum in most of the classes. Provision of gymnastic and other equipment stored at the Stockwood Road Sports Centre is good and the equipment is in good condition. Pupils were seen to be well supervised in carrying out and putting away this equipment, which is a part of good practice in physical education.

41. The storage of scientific chemicals is not fully safe. Some bottles are not labelled and dangerous chemicals are kept on open shelves.

PREMISES AND ACCOMMODATION

42. The school is situated on a very constricted site on two floors of a converted private house. The buildings are generally: well maintained, decorated and lit; clean and warm. However, most of the classrooms are much too small for the numbers of pupils they accommodate. Inevitably, in such constricted conditions, noise from nearby classrooms or from pupils moving around the school inhibits pupils' learning. The most constricted classrooms are those for the Year 4 and Year 5 pupils and that occupied by the 13 pupils in Year 6/7. In these classrooms there is only just over one square metre of learning space for each pupil. In the reception class and in the nursery class pupils are also very congested and the space per pupil falls well below the 2.3 square metres recommended in the Children Act (1989) guidance. The playground is small, but the problems this causes have been reduced by staggering class recreation times. Similarly the rotation of pupils going to swimming and physical education lessons at the local pools and recreation centre have helped to reduce the overcrowding in the classrooms. However, on Friday mornings all pupils are present on the school premises. The wet playtime observed placed great strains on pupils and staff, who were waiting in very cramped conditions at times, in cloakrooms and corridors.

43. In order for the school to meet the requirements of the 1996 Education Act in terms of accommodation, the school must either reduce the number of pupils or provide extra premises.

LINKS WITH PARENTS, AGENCIES AND OTHER INSTITUTIONS

44. There are satisfactory links with parents who strongly support the school. Parents expressed satisfaction with the work their children are expected to do at home, consider that the school's values and attitudes have a positive effect on their children and that the school enables their children to achieve a good standard as they made clear in the parents' meeting connected with the inspection and in their response to the questionnaire. They are kept well informed of the activities through regular newsletters. Parents report that they can contact staff easily when they have questions or problems. Parents provide a great deal of effective support for pupils' homework. The school has good links with the local community, and with charities and industry.

SUBJECTS OF THE CURRICULUM AND OTHER CURRICULAR PROVISION

English

45. Pupils throughout the school achieve standards in English that are in line with or above national expectations. In many respects these standards are a satisfactory reflection of pupils' capabilities, but there are some further improvements that need to be made in order to help pupils to reach the standards of which they are capable in all aspects of the subject.

46. When given the opportunity to do so, pupils are able to speak clearly and articulately and communicate effectively in small groups and in presentations given to the class. In those classes where a clear emphasis is given to the development of oral skills the attainments are good but there is insufficent consistency in this respect.

47. Pupils learn to read efficiently and most make good progress in the kindergarten and transition, so that by the time they are in Key Stage 2 they are reading well, with accuracy, understanding and fluency. However, for the small minority who experience some difficulties, the range of teaching strategies is too narrow along with the choice of reading materials. Older pupils continue to read well and some choose to read a range of interesting and worthwhile books. Others, however, stick to a more limited diet and need greater guidance so that they encounter a wider range of good literature.

48. Comprehension exercises are regularly undertaken. These are of greater value when they require pupils to reason and to look for meanings beyond the literal, rather than just testing surface understanding and recall. Teachers should be more selective in their choice of comprehension exercises and should also consider other ways of developing pupils' ability to understand and to analyse texts, for example through the study of literature.

49. Pupils achieve sound or good standards in their writing. By the time they are in the oldest classes, their handwriting is fluent and legible, and their spelling and punctuation is good. They have a sound knowledge of parts of speech and enliven their writing by using a wide vocabulary. From Year 2, all pupils have dictionaries and use them effectively. In English lessons, pupils write regularly at length in their own words. In the school as a whole, the writing covers a good range of styles and purposes, including stories, descriptions, book reviews, poems, letters, persuasive writing and instructions. However, in some classes the range is restricted and too much of the written work in other subjects is copied.

50. There is now a need to develop a scheme of work which will give teachers guidance and support and lead to greater consistency between classes. This scheme should give greater emphasis to literature.

Mathematics

51. Standards of achievement in both key stages are good in relation both to national norms and pupils' abilities. National curriculum tests, although not externally moderated, reflect the standards seen in lessons.

52. At both key stages there is a balance of work, involving both the practice of skills and practical work using commercial schemes. At Key Stage 2, pupils used measurement when designing shoes. There is some computer assisted learning, and practical work including constructing networks for mathematical solids. There is some investigational work in mathematics and number work in design and technology, science and geography.

53. The pupils show good standards of learning. They are keen to learn, and stay on task. They complete homework on time and their corrections the next day. There is some effective collaborative

work with difficulties caused by lack of space. Teaching is generally satisfactory. The work is well planned and teachers have good relationships with their pupils. The pace of lessons is appropriate and there are good examples of individual guidance, whole class teaching and questioning of pupils. The small size of rooms means that it is impossible for some teachers to reach pupils' desks to check their work and too much time is spent by some pupils queuing to have their work marked. There is scope for more mathematical investigations.

54. Resources for the subject are adequate with a good range of texts but there is little use of information technology apart from computer assisted learning. There is scope for the greater coordination of the subject and a scheme of work. Assessment of pupils' work is prompt, frequent and thorough and pupils are well known to teachers.

Science

55. While standards of achievement in science are generally satisfactory in relation to pupils' age, there is too much variation between classes. The National Curriculum test results show that the standards achieved are relatively weak in comparison with the other core subjects, and this was confirmed by the observation of lessons. The standards currently being achieved do not, therefore, fully reflect the pupils' abilities.

56. Good work in observation and recording and the early stages of hypothesis testing was seen in kindergarten investigations of woodlice and 'minibeasts'. A series of lessons for different age groups in Key Stage 2 showed pupils progressing well in their investigation and their understanding of forces. The practical work observed was limited in scope and expectations by the small size of rooms. Most pupils' books show good notes, the most effective learning taking place when pupils record findings in their own words. Pupils co-operate well in practical work under difficult conditions. Teaching is generally satisfactory, some good homework is set and books are marked conscientiously; lessons were well planned with clear aims. The pace of work is generally appropriate. The subject could benefit from effective co-ordination and a shared scheme of work which would ensure that there was no unnecessary repetition and that there was adequate coverage of broad and balanced science curriculum. There as yet is little use of IT in science lessons.

7. NUMBERS OF PUPILS AND SCHOOL'S NOMENCLATURE

Age	Year	School's Nonenclature (if diff)	Number of Boys	Number of Girls	Total
Nursery	Ν	Kindergarten}			
4-5 yrs	R	KGP }	10	18	28
5-6 yrs	Y1	KG 2	6	10	16
6-7 yrs	Y2	Transition	10	9	19
7-8 yrs	Y3	Form 1	13	6	19
8-9 yrs	Y4	Form 2	7	12	19
9-10 yrs	Y5	Form 3	10	11	21
10-11 yrs	Y6	Form 4L	15	8	23
11-12 yrs	Y7	Form 4S	6	7	13
TOTAL			77	81	158

DESTINATIONS OF LEAVERS

TYPE OF INSTITUTION	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
independent		2				2							
СТС													
SCEA													
LEA maintained	1			1		5							
grant maintained						13	6						
sixth form college													
Further Education													
Higher Education													
Specialist Academies													
Training													
Employment													
Other													
TOTAL	1	2		1		20	6						

Teaching Staff

Full-Time	9
Part-Time	11
Full Time Equivalent	10.84
Ratio of Pupils to Teachers (PTR)	14.58

Other Staff

Care Staff/Medical

Support Staff

Clerical/Adminstrative

Caretaking/Maintenance/Cleaning

TOTAL

i	
FULL TIME	PART TIME
	1
	5
	1
	3
	10

THE CURRICULUM

KEY STAGE 1

SUBJECTS AND COURSES	Yr	R	Yr	1	Yr	2
	а	b	а	b	а	b
art	90		70	150	90	
D&T	100			45	170	
drama						
English	230		345	230	250	
geography	10		15		30	
Greek						
history	10		15		30	
п						
Latin						
mathematics	150		90	100	205	
modern lang 1				45	45	
music	30		30	30	60	
physical ed	120		120	120	120	
religious ed	20		15		15	
science	20		30	45	60	

KEY STAGE 2

Yr	3	Yr	4	Yr	5	Yr	6
а	b	а	b	а	b	а	b
110		75		60		60	
100		40		30		60	
375		425		360		340	
50		75		60		60	
50		75		60		60	
390		350		345		320	
45		45		60		60	
45		45		90		105	
120		120		120		120	
15		15		30		20	
70		95		60		120	

Subjects are listed in minutes per week

- Column a:
- minutes per week taught to all pupils minutes per week taught to some pupils. Column b:

KEY STAGE 3

SUBJECTS AND COURSES	Yr	7
	а	b
art	105	
D&T	60	
drama		
English	380	
Greek		
geography	60	
history	60	
Π		
Latin		
mathematics	340	
modern lang 1	60	
music	120	
physical ed	100	
religious ed	15	
science	120	
modern lang 2		