

# Claremont School

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## **Introduction and summary**

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## **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

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This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 163 of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

## **Information about the school**

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Claremont is an independent, co-educational preparatory and nursery school situated in a rural area in East Sussex. The school has undergone a period of dramatic change in the last 10 years. It was founded in 1925. In 1993 it was a boarding/day school with approximately 80 pupils aged 2 to 13 years. Today, it is a day school catering for pupils from 1 to 14 years. At the time of the inspection there were 362 pupils on roll. 70 pupils were below compulsory school age.

The school has a nursery department (1 - 4 years), a pre-preparatory (4 - 7 years) and a preparatory department (7 - 14 years). The nursery department is open for 50 weeks a year and the other departments for 36 weeks. The school has mixed ability classes with setting by ability only in Year 8 when pupils study for Common Entrance Examinations or scholarships and places at

independent and maintained secondary schools.

The school sees itself "as providing a stepping stone in a child's education, aiming to give every child a broad education and an inquisitive mind". It "aims to motivate, encourage and guide pupils to succeed and achieve their full potential", be that purely academic or in other fields. The school is non-selective and endeavours to provide an environment where pupils will grow in confidence and self-esteem. The school is proud of the high proportion of pupils who gain entry to selective secondary schools. A significant number of pupils enter independent secondary schools each year with academic, art, music and sport scholarships.

## Summary of main findings

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Claremont is a very good school. It provides very well for its pupils and has many significant strengths. The well-planned curriculum and effective teaching support pupils' high achievement. The aims and values promoted by the school provide a secure foundation for pupils' academic and personal development. It is a happy community where pupils are well cared for and the quality of relationships is high. Very good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their interests, particularly in music and sport.

The success of the school owes much to the clear vision of the principal, the hard work and commitment of the headteacher and the enthusiastic team work of the dedicated teachers and support staff.

## What the school does well

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- pupils of all abilities make good progress and achieve very well;
- pupils' behaviour is excellent. Their excellent attitudes to learning make a valuable contribution to their high achievement;
- the quality of teaching and learning are very good overall;
- the provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is a strength of the school. The positive ethos encourages them to develop into confident, caring and responsible young people;
- the school provides a comprehensive sports programme for all pupils; and
- pupils are very well prepared for their next phase of education.

## What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations

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- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils as set out in section 3 of this report;
- ensure that character references are sought prior to the confirmation of staff appointments; and
- ensure that parents are informed of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year.

## What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002

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In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- develop written plans relating to the admission of pupils with a disability and to improve access throughout the school.

## Next steps

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Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- develop a comprehensive scheme of work for art for the preparatory department;
- provide opportunities for nursery staff to develop a better understanding of the national Foundation Stage guidelines; and
- develop a more consistent approach to the marking of pupils' work across the school.

## Compliance with the regulations for registration

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### 1. The quality of education provided by the school

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#### The quality of the curriculum

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The curriculum makes good provision for pupils' academic, physical and personal development. It is broad and balanced and provides a secure framework that enables pupils to make good progress.

In the nursery and reception classes the curriculum takes account of the national Foundation Stage guidance. Care is taken to ensure that nursery pupils who attend on a part-time basis experience all the areas of learning. However, on occasions, insufficient attention is given to learning through investigation, exploration and experimentation in the classrooms and out-of-doors.

In the reception classes, teachers place an appropriate emphasis on literacy and numeracy but not at the expense of other areas that are also covered in appropriate depth. Pupils learn from an exciting range of activities and teachers make effective use of resources to extend their learning.

Pupils' natural curiosity is fostered successfully so that they become confident and independent learners. There is a good balance between pupil-initiated learning and work that is more directed by adults.

The programme of learning for the one- and two-year-olds provides appropriate stimulation and experiences to enable the very young children to begin to make sense of their ever-widening world.

In the pre-preparatory and preparatory departments all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught except design technology. Aspects of citizenship as well as personal, social and health education are covered. Well-constructed subject policies and schemes of work are in place except for art. The documentation for this subject lacks precision and does not plan for the systematic development of pupils' skills and knowledge. The provision in art for gifted and talented pupils is satisfactory and a number of pupils gain art scholarships each year to selective schools. The rest of the school's curriculum documentation, including that for Common Entrance, provides an effective framework for planning the curriculum.

Music and drama make a strong contribution to the curriculum and are integral to the life of the school. Every pupil is taught to play a musical instrument. Individual pupils may request additional instrumental lessons. The staff who teach music and drama work together to produce a show each year in the well-equipped theatre.

French is taught from the age of three and pupils from Year 4 are offered the opportunity to go to the school's property in St. Omer. Here, they are totally immersed in the French language and culture. This valuable experience consolidates and extends the school's language programme effectively and results in pupils achieving high standards in spoken and written French.

The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good. The comprehensive programme is carefully planned in each year group. It covers health education, including a drug education programme, and seeks to raise pupils' self-esteem and cultural awareness in line with the overall ethos of the school.

The school's planning and provision for special educational needs is good. The school's policy has regard to the national Code of Practice. There are effective systems for identifying pupils' needs and for planning programmes of support which are monitored closely.

There is an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities that enhance the quality of educational provision and standards of achievement. Sport activities are well represented. Sports and games are given prominence and regular competitive matches are organised against local schools. Teams enjoy success. Even though many pupils travel considerable distances to school this does not prevent them from attending after school clubs. Pupils benefit from visits to places of local interest that are linked to the topics being studied. People from the community visit the school to share their expertise.

## **The quality of the teaching and assessment**

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Overall, the quality of teaching and learning is very good. In the preparatory department, teaching is consistently very good or better. Pupils are taught by specialists who have secure subject knowledge and a high level of expertise. The specialist teaching in the core subjects, history, religious education and sport is particularly good. Teachers have challenging but realistic expectations for pupils' achievement. Pupils are clear from the outset about the objectives of lessons and are secure in what is expected of them so that learning opportunities are fully exploited. As a result they make very good progress.

In the pre-preparatory department, teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is characterised by effective planning that gives a good structure to lessons and tasks that engage the pupils' interest, resulting in pupils making good progress. The quality of teaching and learning in the nursery is not as strong as in the rest of the school, but is satisfactory. The teaching is sometimes over-directed so that, on occasions, pupils have insufficient opportunities to think and learn for themselves.

The strong emphasis on the basic skills of speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy makes pupils confident and articulate. They engage willingly in class discussion, respond well to teachers' questions and offer ideas in response to literature. Reading skills are effectively promoted and all pupils read aloud confidently within a range of contexts. A focus on problem solving activities in mathematics provides many opportunities for pupils to apply their skills creatively. Pupils develop valuable skills of observation, comparison and analysis in science which they apply to other subjects.

All teachers know their pupils well, and relationships are open and friendly. As a result, they acquire the confidence to ask for support or clarification, and develop a respect for their teachers. There is an understanding that everyone is expected to work hard, behave responsibly, and give of their best at all times. This results in a purposeful working atmosphere. Pupils enjoy coming to school and concentrate well.

Overall, lessons are well planned and well balanced. Planning takes account of the progress in earlier work. The time available is divided well between instruction, explanation and activities for the pupils. Teachers use a good range of teaching methods and plan a variety of stimulating tasks that support pupils' work in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT). Teachers pay particular attention to the key vocabulary of the subject being taught. In the best lessons teaching is stimulating, enthusiastic and consistently challenging and pupils are inspired to learn.

Attention is given to the different learning needs of individual pupils so that teachers are able to make adjustments to their questioning and to the difficulty of the written task. Targets set by the learning support teacher for specific pupils experiencing difficulties are incorporated into planning and teachers pay good attention to these when teaching. This helps all pupils achieve well. Almost all the parents who responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection feel that the teaching is good.

Resources are used effectively. The outside environment is not only a rich resource for sport but for other subjects such as science and art. The new library is well stocked and pupils are benefiting from the appointment of a librarian to help them in their research. The ICT provision enables pupils to have well-developed knowledge and skills by the time they leave the school.

The school has a clear policy for the assessment and marking of pupils' work. Teachers mark work regularly, but the marking is inconsistent. Some teachers write brief comments such as "good" or "well done" while others simply tick. There are too few constructive comments to help pupils improve their work. The school uses standardised, national, school-based and Common Entrance tests to measure pupils' levels of attainment. Procedures are in place to review the progress made by three- and four-year-olds against national expectations.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. It is a strength of the school. Each of the four strands has an important impact on pupils' work and attitudes.

The pupils' spiritual development is very effectively promoted. All adults in the school work hard to build the self-confidence and self-esteem of the pupils. In drama, pupils are helped to develop an understanding of the possibilities of the expressive use of body and voice. They develop confidence in themselves and acquire an increased sense of ease with one another as they work. Religious education and PSHE lessons help pupils to appreciate the uniqueness of every human being.

The school supports pupils' moral development to very good effect. Pupils are encouraged to understand the consequences of their actions, to be honest and to contribute to the welfare of others in the community. They learn from an early age to distinguish right from wrong. Moral and ethical matters, and citizenship, are raised through the curriculum content. Pupils demonstrate a high level of maturity as they discuss a range of issues pertinent to every day life. In the preparatory department, pupils take on more responsibilities as they grow older and in doing so make an important contribution to the life of the school.

Provision for pupils' social development is excellent. In the day-to-day relationships and activities of the school a high priority is given to respect for other people. Pupils relate positively to each other and to members of staff. Adults provide an excellent example to pupils by treating each other with respect and consideration and by responding to pupils' points of view. A strong sense of community is developed as a result. The house system, school productions, assemblies and residential visits all play major roles in the effective provision for pupils' social development. The school places considerable emphasis on its aim to develop pupils' good manners and behaviour. It meets this aim successfully.

Pupils' cultural development is very good. An appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures is provided through the curriculum. It develops pupils' awareness of different faiths through religious education lessons. Pupils also increase their knowledge and understanding of the multi-cultural nature of society through their English, history and geography lessons. The creative and challenging music curriculum introduces pupils to the characteristics of different musical styles and traditions. It enhances their cultural development significantly.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

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Claremont School gives a high priority to the welfare, health and safety of pupils. The senior management team undertake their responsibilities diligently in this respect. Pupils feel happy, safe and secure.

There are well-written policy documents and guidelines for almost all aspects of care, welfare and safety. The policies take account of national guidance and set out appropriate procedures for staff. They are implemented conscientiously. The policies relating to bullying, health and safety, fire safety, and educational visits are all embedded in the caring culture of the school. Incidents of bullying are extremely rare and are dealt with in line with the school's policy. Pupils can bring their concerns either to the attention of the staff or anonymously by using a special posting box.

Although the school is diligent in identifying any pupils who may be vulnerable or at risk, the school

has no written policy for safeguarding children as required by the regulations. Concerns in this area are dealt with by the headteacher and the school liaises with outside agencies if they need to, but there is no clear system understood by all staff and training in child protection procedures has not taken place.

Fire drills are conducted regularly and are meticulously recorded. Risk assessments are routinely and thoroughly carried out. The school has a high number of staff who are qualified in First Aid and there is easy access to First Aid resources at all times. The school keeps appropriate records and reports accidents to parents as soon as possible. Parents are made aware of the policy for the administration of medicines during the school day.

Supervision by staff is well planned, ensuring that there is proper care of pupils in the school building, around the grounds, and on visits away from the school. There is a well-established reward and sanction system connected to the house system which encourages pupils to put the maximum effort into their work and behaviour. This has a significant impact, along with the ethos, the code of conduct, and school rules, on the promotion of the excellent behaviour seen around the school.

A range of meals is prepared and served on the premises, and the school has endeavoured to improve these by removing or limiting some of the unhealthy options. Some older pupils and some parents still feel the meals are not healthy enough. The admission register is kept up-to-date. Attendance registers are marked but not all teachers note absences as required.

The school has produced a policy concerning the admission of pupils with disabilities. It recognises that the building would present difficulties for pupils with mobility problems. The school has not yet given due regard to their obligation to conduct an audit of the accessibility of the building and the curriculum for pupils with a range of disabilities. They, therefore, do not have an accessibility action plan.

#### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

#### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with the DfES Circular 10/95 (paragraph 3(2)(c)).

#### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?***

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:

- produce written plans relating to the admission of pupils with a disability and to improve access throughout the school.

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

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The school is owned by a limited liability company. Staff have appropriate checks with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with children. The school has good procedures for the recruitment of teaching and non-teaching staff. Professional references are sought and



enquiries made about their previous employment. However, character references are not taken up.

All teaching staff are suitably qualified with a wide range of experience in education. Very effective use is made of specialist subject teachers.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that character references are sought prior to the confirmation of staff appointments (paragraph 4(c)).

## **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

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The school's premises and accommodation are suitable for their purpose. The school is housed in a Grade II listed manor house on a site that covers over a hundred acres. The grounds are very well maintained. Excellent outdoor facilities include football, rugby, hockey, netball and cricket pitches, an outdoor swimming pool, woods and a lake.

Pupils from four to seven years of age in the pre-preparatory department are taught in classrooms on the ground floor. Older pupils, aged seven to thirteen, are taught in the preparatory classrooms on the first floor. There are specialist rooms for music, art, French, history, science and information and communication technology. A new library has been created on the ground floor and the chapel has been refurbished into a comfortable additional teaching space used for a variety of purposes including singing, drama and dance. Other facilities include a newly refurbished sports hall and newly built all-purpose theatre that is used for assemblies and lunch.

The nursery is separate from the main building and is housed in the original stable block. It consists of a series of small rooms with access to three distinct outdoor play areas. They have appropriate equipment for young pupils and attractive murals that add colour.

The premises and accommodation are immaculately clean and very well maintained. Attractive displays of pupils' work add interest to classrooms and corridors and contribute to the positive ethos of the school. There is a well-equipped computer suite and very good resources for music.

Although corridors within the school are narrow and older pupils use the main staircase throughout the day, the excellent behaviour of pupils and the well-established procedures ensure that movement around the school is safe for all pupils and adults. While classrooms are suitable for the number of pupils on roll, movement in some classes is limited when numbers reach the maximum. The furniture in the classrooms is suitable for each age group. There is a sufficient number of toilets and washbasins for staff and pupils.

Fire evacuation procedures are displayed clearly in each classroom and fire exits are clearly signed. The school does not have a separate medical room for pupils when they are sick. However, pupils who are unwell are looked after in the senior teachers' office where they can lie down if necessary while they wait for a parent or carer to collect them.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

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Claremont places great emphasis on maintaining strong links with parents. The attractive prospectus provides parents with a good introduction to the school. The parents' handbook is detailed and gives them much helpful information.

The school also communicates regularly with parents in various other ways. It publishes a calendar of events each term and the headteacher writes a newsletter at regular intervals giving details about developments at the school. Weekly bulletins are posted on the school's website and notice boards are placed at strategic points in the grounds to inform parents of particular events.

There are effective induction procedures in place to ensure that pupils and parents are fully informed of the curriculum, the expectations and the practices in each department of the school. These help to reassure pupils and build their confidence. Parents have ready access to staff. Information is often sought and given on an informal basis. Two formal parents' evenings are held each year where parents discuss their children's achievement and progress.

Pupils in the preparatory department receive a mid-term assessment card which has details of academic attainment in addition to comments about attitudes and the contributions made to school life. Three written reports on pupils' progress are sent out each year.

The school does not inform parents of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during a school year.

### ***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

The school meets all but one of the regulations.

### ***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that parents are informed of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(g)).

## **7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**

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The school has a clear policy for handling complaints which meets the regulations. The policy allows for a complaint to be dealt with informally, but includes further formal procedures so that, when necessary, complaints can be considered more fully. Just over half of the parents who responded to the questionnaire reported that they do not understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints. The school is considering suitable strategies to ensure that parents are

fully informed.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

**School details**

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Name of school:	Claremont School		
DfES ref number:	845/6010		
Type of school:	Preparatory and Nursery		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	1 - 14 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys 146,	Girls 128,	Total 274
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys 39,	Girls 31,	Total 70
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys 1,	Girls 0,	Total 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,825 - £6,525		
Address of school:	Baldslow		
	St. Leonards-on-Sea		
	East Sussex		
	TN37 7PW		
E-mail address:	enquiries@claremontschool.co.uk		
Telephone number:	01425 751555		
Fax number:	01425 754310		
Headteacher:	Mr I J Culley		
Proprietor:	Claremont School (St Leonards)		
Lead Inspector:	Mrs P Hoey		
Dates of inspection:	11 - 14 October 2004		

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