

# **Inspection report**

## **Airthrie School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 916/6037**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection:**

**26 - 29 September 2005**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

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

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A 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**

Airthrie School is an independent non-selective school for boys and girls aged three to eleven years of age. It was founded in 1940 and the present proprietor has been at the school since 1983. Hillfield Dyslexia Trust was set up in 1986 to provide additional specialist support within the school. The school is held in linked Victorian houses on a tree-lined road on the edge of the town of Cheltenham. There are currently 166 pupils, 25 of whom are attending on a part-time basis until they are ready for full-time education.

The school aims to provide a school where *'pupils and staff should be happy.... keen to work hard and achieve their full potential.'*

### **Summary of main findings**

Airthrie School is a very good school. The staff know all the pupils very well and care for them in a kind manner. Everyone at the school works together to create a warm family atmosphere. Pupils feel safe and secure and enjoy their learning. The teaching is effective and pupils make very good progress. The curriculum is rich and varied and relevant to pupils' age and ability. Behaviour is very good; the pupils know what is expected of them and apply themselves very well to their work. The school's success owes much to the clear vision and inspiring leadership of the headteacher and the commitment of the teachers and the support staff. Parents are very well informed and support the school enthusiastically.

### **What the school does well:**

- it provides effective teaching which enables the pupils to make very good progress;
- it promotes the personal development of pupils very well;
- it provides a very supportive learning environment both inside and outside the classroom where each pupil's contribution is valued;
- it has developed a successful partnership with parents who support the school actively and are kept very well informed about their children's progress; and

- it encourages very good behaviour, politeness and courtesy.

**What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:**

The school meets all the regulations for registration.

**Next Steps**

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

- consider allocating more time during the mornings for creative subjects; and
- explore additional imaginative ways to enhance the use of information and communication technology (ICT) throughout the curriculum.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

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

### **The quality of the curriculum**

The curriculum is broad, balanced and highly relevant to the needs of the pupils. Pupils study the full National Curriculum with the addition of French from the nursery onwards. There is a strong and appropriate emphasis on English, mathematics and science, but creative and aesthetic subjects such as art, drama and music are also an important part of the overall curriculum. Many pupils benefit from individual instrumental tuition.

The curriculum for the Foundation Stage is very well planned, being based on national guidance for nursery and reception children. The development of social and personal skills is appropriately central to the activities planned, with play as another key element of the provision. Children experience a wide range of activities which include both those that are adult-led and others which are initiated by the children themselves. Pupils are divided into small ability groups for English and mathematics from Year 3 and for science from Year 4. The importance given to the basics of literacy and numeracy prepares the children very well for the rest of their education. Whilst ICT is well taught at the school more imaginative ways of teaching it across the curriculum could be considered.

Throughout the rest of the school, the documentation of the curriculum provides very good support to teachers' planning and pupils' learning. There is very effective long, medium and short-term planning which focuses on what pupils will learn. The plans secure progression and continuity in learning at all stages. Personal, social and health education is both woven into the broader curriculum and taught as a distinct subject, as well as through high quality assemblies. The curriculum is modified suitably for those pupils who have additional needs. The support provided for pupils with specific learning difficulties is carefully and effectively managed, balancing the need for extra support with the desire not to miss parts of the curriculum planned and provided for the whole class.

The school provides a wide range of educational visits, for example to Avoncroft and Dean Heritage museums, the Bacon and Roses theatres, and a wide range of sporting activities: these serve both to enrich the curriculum and to enhance the educational experiences for the pupils. There is a variety of extra-curricular activities which pupils enjoy, including art, music, chess, cross-country running, football and netball.

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

The quality of teaching is good and in many cases very good. The detailed planning of the educational programme is effective in meeting the needs of all pupils. Staff use the planning to good advantage in their teaching, focusing clearly on what pupils need to learn. Much of this planning is the outcome of joint efforts by the staff

ensuring that staff expertise is best used. No class time is wasted at the school; pupils are purposefully occupied throughout the day.

Staff are well qualified and experienced for the roles they undertake. A wide variety of teaching methods is used to good effect, such as paired and group work and individual activities. This teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and increase their understanding and skills. Pupils respond enthusiastically and enjoy their learning. Year 6 pupils expressed the view that '*learning is fun at school*'. Pupils behave very well in lessons and around the school. Practical and investigative work is encouraged; for example, pupils had the opportunity to investigate the different effects of submerging objects in water. Staff know the pupils very well and use this information sensitively in the planning of their lessons and in the management of classes. Support staff are well qualified and capable and make a valuable contribution to the quality of teaching. Pupils in need of additional help are identified at an early stage and are supported very well by the specialist staff.

One strength of the school is the widespread use of specialist teachers across all age ranges. Pupils benefit from a wealth of creative and aesthetic input from staff. This is evident from the very attractive, well presented displays around the school and the success the school has in local and national competitions. However, opportunities for teaching creative subjects at the beginning of the day, when pupils are at their most receptive, could be extended.

The school is well resourced and these resources are purposefully used to support learning. For example, Year 1 pupils are adept at programming a moving robot. Also staff are proficient in adapting and using their own resources.

As a result of high quality teaching, effective planning and careful nurturing, pupils make very good progress. The headteacher and senior staff carefully guide Year 6 pupils and their parents in their choice of the next school and consequently pupils invariably gain a place at the school of their choice.

Within the school there are effective procedures for monitoring pupils' learning. This comprehensive process begins in nursery and culminates with Year 6 taking national tests in which they achieve very good results. Parents are kept very well informed as to the progress their children are making.

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

Yes.

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

The school makes very good provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils. There is a warm, family feeling in the school where both staff and pupils feel valued as members of the school community. Much of this is due to the influence of the headteacher who is always on hand to guide and advise. Pupils behave very well. They move around the school buildings quietly and are considerate towards others. They obey the simple school and classroom rules,

some of which they helped to devise. Older pupils are encouraged to take the initiative and set an example to the younger pupils. They take special care of the school pets and the ducks, hens and rabbits are very contented. Pupils throughout the school are encouraged to be self-reliant, with the youngest ones, for example, learning to get ready themselves for physical education. The school is a happy place where pupils thrive in the nurturing environment. Pupils report that they love coming to school and that the teachers help them to learn.

Airthrie School has a high profile locally. Older pupils visit local senior citizens and entertain them at Christmas. The pupils successfully participate in many creative, musical and sports events and derive much pleasure from these experiences. They are aware that others are less fortunate than themselves and take part in charity fund-raising. Visitors are welcomed to the school. For example a visiting musician demonstrated how effective music could be in setting the mood during an assembly. A staff member, dressed in full underwater gear, effectively demonstrated how music such as that from films, could exert influence and scare swimmers. This was in connection with the Thought for the Week: *'Music makes me feel...'*, to which pupils had been asked to add comments. They had added phrases such as *'...like dancing!'*.

Religious education is taught throughout the school and due emphasis is given to teaching pupils about different religions and cultures in an informed and straightforward manner, as shown in a Year 6 lesson where prayer artefacts were studied. Pupils' cultural awareness is further fostered through a carefully chosen programme of visits to places of worship such as synagogues and churches and the study of history, art and literature.

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

Yes.

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

Provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is very good. Underpinning this is an excellent set of policies including those on anti-bullying, child protection and safety on educational visits. All the documents take account of the required guidance and regulations. They are also embedded in the life of the school. The policy on behaviour and discipline, for example, describes and guides new teachers on appropriate expectations, sanctions and rewards. Pupils are kept safe and feel secure, both at school and when they are away from the buildings. For example, when pupils are playing sport on a nearby field, the staff escorting them follow the school's rules, wearing high visibility jackets, crossing the road at a pelican crossing and carrying a first aid box. The comprehensive child protection policy is co-ordinated by the headteacher, and staff have received, or are about to receive, the required training.

Supervision of pupils when they are on school premises and when away from the building is very good. Safety procedures are followed and the risks involved in all activities away from school are properly assessed. Admission and attendance

registers are kept correctly and in accordance with the regulations. Fire drills are held at least twice a term and a detailed risk assessment has been undertaken. The school pays due regard to the requirements to ensure staff are suitably trained in first aid, and to provide appropriate first aid resources. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act, having a good plan to ensure accessibility of the curriculum, information and premises.

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

Yes.

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

The school has comprehensive procedures for the appointment of all staff, which include the checking of references, qualifications and medical fitness. All staff have been checked for their suitability to work with children.

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

Yes.

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

The school is housed in suitable buildings. These comprise two substantial Victorian houses, linked together at ground floor and basement levels. Alterations and additions to the original fabric of the buildings have provided a series of additional classrooms, an assembly hall and a specialist room for the teaching of ICT and science. All teaching rooms are decorated to a very high standard and retain much of their original character. Furniture is of an appropriate style and size and of good quality.

The outside of the school is very well appointed. The gardens have been transformed, over time, into real outdoor classrooms. This is particularly the case for the younger pupils. Pupils become 'pirates' on the adventure playground equipment, develop social and nurturing skills looking after the ducks, hens and rabbits housed in one corner of the area and marvel as they watch the laying of the frog spawn in the pond. The fruit trees provide shade, and sheds for storage are well used. There is an adequate hard play area and the school uses playing fields and swimming pools nearby for sports and games.

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

Yes.

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

The school provides a wide range of information for parents and other partners. A new attractive and informative prospectus is being introduced which gives parents sufficient information about the main aspects of the school. Parents are provided with a detailed and comprehensive 'welcome pack' which provides a wide range of information including the school policies on anti-bullying, child protection, welfare, health and safety and complaints procedure. The school sends out informative termly newsletters. Regular newsletters produced by parents also help to keep everyone well informed. The notice boards are effectively used to provide information. Many parents responded to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection and expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school. They feel very well informed about whole school issues and about their own children's attainments and progress. Parents have the opportunity to attend two consultation evenings with staff in the autumn and spring term. In addition there are special information evenings throughout the year. Parents are given a detailed written report at the end of the summer term.

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

Yes.

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

The school has recently updated the complaints procedure. It is clear and concise and sets out a range of appropriate steps for both formal and informal complaints. Complaints are very rare, but parents understand the procedure should they have a concern. Parents indicated in the questionnaire that they understand these procedures.

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

Yes.



## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Airthrie School
DfES Number:	916/6037
Type of school:	Primary/Preparatory
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 54    Girls: 85    Total: 139
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 12    Girls: 14    Total: 26
Annual fees (day pupils):	£4,140 - £5,655
Address of school:	27 - 29 Christchurch Road Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL50 2 NY
Telephone number:	01242 512837
Fax number:	01242 579583
Email address:	<a href="mailto:Mail@airthrie-school.co.uk">Mail@airthrie-school.co.uk</a>
Headteacher:	Mrs A E Sullivan
Proprietor:	Mrs A E Sullivan
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Jill Bainton
Date of inspection:	26 - 29 September 2005

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