

Inspection report

Park Hill School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 314/6059

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 30 January – 2 February 2006

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

Park Hill School is situated in Kingston-upon-Thames, near Richmond Park. It was founded in 1949 and bought by the current proprietors in 1988. It caters for girls from the age of three to eleven and for boys from age three to eight although, in exceptional circumstances, boys may stay at the school beyond this age. There are currently 88 pupils on roll, including 17 who attend nursery or kindergarten part-time. Twenty-eight pupils are in receipt of nursery funding. This provision is registered separately with Ofsted's Early Years Division and was inspected in March 2005. The school is staffed by 15 teachers. Many teach part-time and several offer specialist subject teaching.

The school aims to: *'...develop the whole child, laying the foundation for well-balanced and confident individuals who are healthy in mind, body and spirit.....'* and to: *'..... foster a happy, family atmosphere in the belief that children who enjoy their school days will achieve their best'*.

Summary of main findings

This is a good school with significant strengths in the quality of education it provides. Teaching is good and the curriculum is interesting. Individuals are valued highly and the cultural diversity of its pupils is celebrated. Parents speak warmly of the family atmosphere and sense of community. They acknowledge the school's success in meeting its aims and in providing a fine balance between academic achievement and social development.

What the school does well:

- it promotes very good behaviour and fosters excellent relationships;
- provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding;
- pupils make good progress because they are taught well;
- a varied range of activities captures pupils' enthusiasm and desire to learn;
- pupils' confidence in speaking is promoted very effectively so that they become articulate and creative in their use of language; and

- provision and support for pupils learning English as an additional language is highly effective.

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

- have regard to the health and welfare issues raised in sections 3 and 5 of this report;
- ensure that appropriate checks are carried out on the medical fitness of staff before their appointment is confirmed; and
- provide parents and prospective parents with information on how the school supports the needs of pupils with a statement and the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language.

Next Steps

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

- review the time available for teaching science and information and communication technology (ICT).

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Pupils thoroughly enjoy the varied and interesting curriculum, which is enriched by the school's passionate commitment to value each individual and celebrate the diversity within the school population. It fully reflects the school's aim to develop pupils into well balanced and confident individuals who are healthy in body, mind and spirit. The curriculum places a strong emphasis upon the personal development and growth of each child. All classes have clearly structured lessons concentrating on personal and social development and the oldest pupils enjoy lessons in 'Public Speaking'.

Teachers plan carefully to ensure that topics are not repeated for pupils in classes with more than one year group. They also identify different objectives for the year groups. However, they recognise that the needs of some individuals are met even more effectively by being placed in a year group that differs from their chronological age. These strategies contribute to the good progress that pupils make. A significant strength is the extent to which teachers make links between subjects that help pupils to learn effectively. This begins in the nursery and kindergarten classes where lessons are planned using interesting topics, such as 'Food and Festivals around the World' to link different areas of learning.

A strong emphasis is placed upon developing pupils' speaking, social and creative skills, so that they have plenty of opportunities to express themselves. The youngest children, for example, taste different fruits and voice their preferences, while pupils in Years 3 and 4 create and share their own similes, such as '*majestic as a pyramid*' (sic). Teachers plan successfully to overcome the limitations of the accommodation and in spite of the small rooms, children in the nursery and kindergarten classes have a wide variety of practical activities suitable for their age.

The school is justifiably proud of the provision it makes for both music and sport. Pupils benefit from plenty of opportunities to sing, to learn to play instruments, and to perform and compose with a music specialist. The school ensures that many activities such as tennis, swimming and football are taught by professional coaches. However, the school is aware that science and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons do not have as much time as other subjects. The school is planning to ensure that pupils make more rapid progress in these areas.

A number of pupils join the school with little or no spoken English. They are warmly welcomed and taught extremely well. Consequently they quickly forge positive relationships with staff, are ready to learn and make very good progress. Those pupils who have particular learning or emotional needs are supported very well. When necessary, staff devise specific action plans to ensure that pupils are treated consistently and with a high level of understanding by all staff. This system works well and there are many success stories of pupils having overcome periods of difficulty.

The quality of teaching and assessment

Parents are justified in their belief that teaching is good. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and of the standards they expect them to reach. The quality of presentation of pupils' work is consistently high. During lessons, teachers expect pupils to participate fully in discussions and to carry out their work with a good level of independence. Regular and relevant homework tasks frequently require pupils to be resourceful in 'finding out' or looking up something to reinforce class work. Specialist teaching contributes much to pupils' progress in subjects such as French, science and music.

Teachers' planning is satisfactory with examples of good practice where teachers provide more detail about how tasks will be adapted for pupils' ages and abilities. In many cases, what unfolds during a lesson exceeds the quality of the written plans. This is because teachers know their pupils well, and are adept at modifying tasks to meet their needs as the lesson continues. The small size of each class enables teachers and other adults supporting in the class to be alert to pupils' immediate difficulties and to intervene as and when necessary. Teamwork between adults is good; support staff are clear about their role but also work flexibly as the occasion requires.

Teachers are especially skilled at engaging pupils in an exchange of ideas through asking open-ended questions that encourage them to think more deeply. Because relationships are strong and founded on mutual trust and respect, pupils know that their ideas will be valued and so are encouraged to 'have a go'. Teachers take a positive approach to managing behaviour, although intervention is required rarely. They are skilled at using techniques that capture pupils' imagination and they use praise effectively to boost pupils' self esteem and to value their efforts. Within this environment teachers are able to judge the right time to introduce an element of new and more challenging learning. For example, pupils in the Transition Class (Year 1) were measuring the length of objects using small plastic cubes. They were encouraged to increase the level of accuracy when the teacher introduced the notion of half a cube.

Teachers invariably tell pupils what they will be doing in the lessons and some, though not all, explain clearly what pupils will learn and what they will be looking for in pupils' work. The pupils are very clear that this strategy helps them to know what is expected of them and is effective in enabling them to judge for themselves whether or not they have been successful.

Systems for assessing pupils' work and progress are good. The results of annual tests in reading and mathematics enable the headteacher to monitor pupils' general progress. Teachers keep information about how well individual pupils are doing. They mark work regularly and give pupils good verbal feedback on what they have achieved and what they could do better. Staff meet together to discuss the needs of individuals who may be causing them concern so that they can provide a consistent approach to the support they provide. Teachers set termly targets for pupils in English and mathematics which are discussed with parents.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Parents are highly appreciative of the extent to which staff genuinely 'treasure' individual pupils and celebrate the international nature of the school. The school is highly successful in fostering respect for cultural differences and the curriculum provides a rich diet of activities relating to cultures from around the world. While the curriculum affords many opportunities for pupils to develop their awareness of themselves and others and to grow in self-confidence and self-esteem, at Park Hill the provision is more than this. Excellent relationships between adults and pupils mean that pupils learn within an ethos of mutual respect and trust. Consequently, pupils behave very well in lessons, around school, with adults and with each other. As one pupil stated: '*...because this school is so little and good, no-one is really nasty*'. They appreciate their teachers and are entirely confident that they will be listened to and their ideas taken seriously. The school forum meets regularly with the headteacher and has discussed several initiatives to improve the school. This experience is very good preparation for adult life.

Pupils of all ages are encouraged to consider and discuss moral and social issues. The youngest begin by thinking about behaviour in their own class. As pupils mature they gradually broaden their ideas to reflect on the school community and then wider environmental issues such as recycling. The oldest pupils debate topics such as why people go to war and discuss current affairs arising from newspaper articles. They also consider personal choices, how to deal with difficult situations and health issues. This means that pupils flourish and the older ones show great maturity in exercising their responsibility towards others. For example, one house captain sees her role as: '*...encouraging the children to be kind and helpful, not just to compete against each other*'. Pupils take increasing responsibility for their own learning in lessons. This was exemplified when pupils in Year 2 conducted independent research on a country in Europe, with impressive maturity. They combine accuracy with sensitivity and courtesy when evaluating each other's musical compositions, and evaluate their own progress with disarming honesty.

Whole-school assemblies contribute much to the family atmosphere and celebrations of pupils' achievements. The weekly assembly in the local church offers an opportunity for parents to join with their children and to become part of the wider family of the school. During the inspection this was a moving occasion in which the message of valuing individuals and the diversity within the school permeated every song, prayer and story.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Staff provide a good level of day-to-day care. Parents are justified in their view that their children are looked after well and helped to settle into school life. Clear written policies for promoting the good behaviour of pupils and to prevent bullying help to create an environment in which pupils feel secure and valued as individuals. Staff reward good behaviour and use suitable sanctions for inappropriate behaviour, though these are required rarely. When necessary, the school records the use of any significant sanctions.

There is a comprehensive policy for health and safety and a range of risk assessments for activities that take place in school. The accident log is completed accurately and, following a recent change to procedures, signed by parents. There is a good level of First Aid cover. The First Aid policy gives clear guidance to staff including that on administering medication. All staff are informed of pupils' medical conditions, including allergies. Regular fire drills and checks of equipment are carried out and logged carefully. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations.

The school has considered the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act and has devised a plan to improve the access to the building and to provide a disabled toilet.

The designated person responsible for child protection matters has undertaken further training for this role very recently. However, the school's written policy does not comply fully with the latest guidance on safeguarding children in education and should be updated. The school's policy on school outings was amended during the inspection to comply fully with regulations and now needs to be implemented on all future visits.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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

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

- *ensure that the school's written policy for child protection complies fully with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)); and*
- *implement the updated written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school having regard to DfES guidance (paragraph 3(2)(c)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has thorough procedures for checking the identity, employment history and qualifications of staff before confirming their appointment. References are taken up from previous employers. However, staff have not been required to declare their

medical fitness before their appointments are confirmed. The school now has a form for this purpose to use in future appointments. New staff are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with children. Class helpers and volunteers are not routinely checked but are not left in sole charge of pupils.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that the medical fitness of staff is checked prior to the confirmation of their appointment (paragraph 4(c)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is based in a large Victorian house with several additional buildings in the garden area. The classrooms are adequate in size for the small number of pupils in each group. Staff organise the rooms effectively to make best use of available space. This includes nursery and kindergarten staff exchanging rooms during the afternoons to suit different activities. Classrooms are well decorated, clean and tidy. Furniture is of good quality and appropriate for pupils' ages.

Although there is a sufficient number of washrooms, provision for the older boys and girls are not separate. Pupils who are sick are accommodated at present in the school office or the ICT suite but there is no washbasin in either room.

The large garden contains a range of surfaces and equipment for play. Nursery pupils have easy access to a small but attractive outside space, and there is a good-sized covered area for nursery and kindergarten classes to use. The school compensates for shortcomings in the amount of outdoor space for physical activities by using local specialist sports facilities and by making good use of provision in the local environment such as Richmond Park.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with most but not all of the requirements.

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

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

- *ensure that there are separate washrooms for older boys and girls (paragraph 5(k)); and*
- *provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The quality of information for parents and carers is good. The prospectus is easy to read and contains plenty of information about the school's ethos and aims. Together with the school's terms and conditions, which contain information on the arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions, parents receive most of the information required by the regulations. However, the school does not provide details of the provision it makes for pupils with a statement of special educational needs or for those who speak English as an additional language.

Regular newsletters give parents a good flavour of life at the school and help to keep them up-to-date with events. The parents' notice board, placed where they enter each day, is a good means of communicating day-to-day information and also tells parents about the policies that are available on request. The website is easy to use and contains a wealth of information about the curriculum, about how the school is organised and about members of staff.

Parents have regular opportunities, both formal and informal, to meet with teachers and other staff to discuss their children's progress. Written reports at the end of each year give a detailed picture of pupils' academic achievement. Termly written reports, together with a termly meeting with teachers at which targets are set, give parents a good overview of their children's progress. Parents indicate that they are pleased with the information they receive.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure parents are given particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)).*

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

The school has comprehensive and well-structured procedures for handling complaints that are readily available for parents on request. Despite this, one in five of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that they did not understand them. In response, the school has reminded parents of the procedures in a newsletter. Parents are encouraged to raise matters informally and this means that, to date, the formal stages of the procedures have not been required.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Park Hill School
DfES Number:	314/6059
Type of school:	Preparatory
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11 girls, 3 - 8 boys
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 15 Girls: 56 Total: 71
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 12 Girls: 5 Total: 17
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,480 - £6,780
Address of school:	8 Queen's Road Kingston-upon-Thames Surrey KT2 7SH
Telephone number:	020 8546 5496
Fax number:	020 8546 4558
Email address:	secretary@parkhillschool.com
Principal:	Mrs Marie Christie
Headteacher:	Mrs Gill Smith
Proprietor:	Park Hill School Limited
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Jane Wotherspoon HMI
Date of inspection:	30 January – 2 February 2006

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