

Inspection report

Longwood School and Nursery

Independent school

DfES ref no: 919/6236

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 22 - 25 May 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

Longwood School and Nursery is a non-selective independent school situated in Hertfordshire. The nursery opened in 1990 and in response to demand Longwood School opened in 1992.

Pupils come from a wide variety of backgrounds and cultures. The school serves not only the local community but many families from further afield. It provides early morning, late afternoon and holiday care.

At the time of the inspection, there were 215 full-time and 12 part-time pupils on roll. There were 71 pupils funded under the Nursery Scheme.

The school's aim is to provide a happy and caring environment for all the children. It seeks to *'help pupils gain confidence and acquire competence in new skills'*.

Summary of main findings

Longwood School has a caring and friendly ethos. Pupils feel happy at the school. They make good friendships and feel safe and secure. Staff relationships with pupils are extremely caring and supportive and this is valued by parents. Pupils develop into enthusiastic and confident learners. Their overall achievement is satisfactory. They reach high standards in English and mathematics.

The quality of the curriculum and the teaching are satisfactory overall. However, there are some features of the provision that require improvement. These include curriculum planning, teaching and assessment.

Whilst the new building for Key Stage 2 pupils is appropriate some of the classrooms for the younger pupils have limited space for effective teaching and learning.

What the school does well:

- it places a strong emphasis on the teaching of reading, writing, speaking, listening and mathematics; consequently, pupils achieve high standards in these subjects;
- its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and encourages pupils to grow into happy and thoughtful young people. Their behaviour is very good;

- it cares for its pupils well and all staff strive hard to ensure their welfare and personal development;
- its family atmosphere ensures that pupils flourish and enjoy learning; and
- it attracts parents' active support and they are seen as the school's extended family. They are always made welcome.

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

- improve the quality of education provided, in particular, the issues regarding the curriculum, teaching and assessment identified in section 1 of this report;
- improve the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, as detailed in section 3;
- ensure that all staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) prior to the confirmation of their appointment, as identified in section 4;
- improve the premises and accommodation, as noted in section 5.

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

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the curriculum and the premises.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. A high proportion of time is devoted to English and mathematics, especially reading, writing and arithmetic, resulting in pupils achieving well in these subjects.

The school seeks to meet the developmental needs of pupils below the age of three years by following the principles of the national guidance of '*Birth to Three Matters*'. The staff are not yet fully aware of the implications of the guidance and are still learning to implement it fully. As a result, some of the planned learning programmes are not appropriate for very young pupils. However, in the more successful provision, staff encourage pupils to gain confidence, try new things, explore and respond by gestures and sounds.

Account is taken of the national guidance for pupils in the Foundation Stage to plan a programme of activities. The development of pupils' personal, social and emotional development underpins all the work. An appropriate emphasis is given to communication, language and literacy and mathematical development. This results in pupils becoming confident communicators and competent problem solvers. Pupils learn from a range of activities of variable quality. The most successful activities are those which encourage pupils to investigate, reflect and reach their own conclusions. Frequently, there are too many teacher-directed activities at the expense of those initiated by pupils.

The present organisation of the Foundation Stage, however, does not allow for consistency between the four classes because one class plans a learning programme based on the use of Montessori equipment. This leads to a fragmented approach to curriculum planning. The school recognises the need to review the structure of the Foundation Stage with regard to the mixed age classes and the status of the Montessori class.

In Key Stages 1 and 2 all subjects of the National Curriculum are taught, except religious education (RE) and design and technology. The curriculum provides appropriate opportunities for the pupils to be given experience in all the areas of learning required by the regulations, although the technological aspects of the curriculum are under-developed. There is not a systematically planned curriculum to develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in pupils' learning. Continuity in English, mathematics and science is helped through the use of commercial schemes which are implemented consistently. In other subjects there is very little detail of how pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding will be taught progressively through the school. French is taught to pupils from the age of two years and makes a valuable contribution to their cultural awareness. Good use is made of the nearby sports centre and golf course for some games sessions. Pupils' work is supported by regular homework which extends the work started in class.

A high priority is given to the development of pupils' personal and social skills. However, there is no structured programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils are introduced to a variety of topics to help them develop their self-knowledge in such subjects as science and geography. Visitors to the school and visits to places of interest give pupils a view of the wider world in which they live. The curriculum coverage of citizenship is not clearly defined, although it is touched upon in the written schemes of work for the humanities. The after-school clubs provide a suitable enrichment to the curriculum.

The school has made a sound start in developing its provision for pupils with learning difficulties. A co-ordinator has been appointed. A well-defined policy is in place and pupils with learning difficulties are identified early. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Individual education plans (IEPs) are detailed, appropriate strategies are identified and useful guidelines about planning for pupils with learning difficulties are given to staff. However, pupils' needs are not always fully met in all classes.

The school has produced a range of policies for all subjects except RE. Schemes of work based on the National Curriculum are written for Key Stages 1 and 2. However, at present the documentation lacks cohesion. It does not indicate sufficiently how well pupils' differing needs and abilities will be catered for. Not enough is said about the methods to be used. There is a no clearly defined structure to ensure the continuity and progression of pupils' learning across the key stages. The school indicates on its development plan that all the curriculum documents will be reviewed this year.

Whole school procedures are not in place for staff to analyse and evaluate the impact of their provision on pupils' learning. The absence of an evaluation means that assessments of pupils' progress are insufficiently clear.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is satisfactory overall but ranges from outstanding to unsatisfactory. Staff form positive relationships with their pupils and know them very well. This provides an environment in which pupils work in harmony and support each other in learning.

There is no consistent whole school approach to planning and the quality of individual teachers' planning is variable. In many plans the activities or topics to be covered are clearly outlined. Very few plans indicate the skills or knowledge the pupils should acquire. There is a heavy reliance in some classes on work sheets and published schemes.

In some lessons and activities teachers are not fully confident in their subject knowledge and this restricts the breadth of study in some subjects, such as ICT in Key Stages 1 and 2.

Where the teaching is effective, teachers make good use of time to inject pace, challenge and variety into their lessons, planning appropriate activities for the ages and aptitudes of the pupils. A good example was observed in a physical education

session, where the different age groups were well challenged at their own levels. In the outstanding lessons the teachers' enthusiasm inspired pupils to learn. For example, in French and history learning was made fun through songs, games and stimulating resources.

Where teaching is less effective, teachers do not use a sufficient variety of techniques and depend too much on pupils working on their own or progressing through workbooks produced by commercial schemes. Teachers' questioning is not skilful enough to check progress or to extend the pupils' learning, and the work is insufficiently matched to the age, ability level and prior knowledge of the pupils. The quality of the teaching is also weakened where learning outcomes have not been planned. In some lessons too much time is wasted, for example by the older pupils in waiting for younger ones to catch up, or in waiting for adult support when stuck with a problem.

Valuable support is provided by the care assistants who work particularly well with the youngest pupils. The staff work very effectively as a team, manage pupils particularly well and use a range of strategies to hold their attention. The level of care shown to pupils is very good in all classes.

The school has a wide range of exciting and stimulating resources, particularly for the youngest pupils, and in the most successful lessons teachers make good use of these to support learning. However, computers are under-used across the school. This restricts opportunities to extend pupils' skills in independent research and in the use of ICT, especially for those in Key Stage 2.

Assessment procedures are unsatisfactory. The school has no clearly defined assessment policy. Whilst teachers make some use of informal assessment through question and answer in lessons, the school has no structured approach to the use of ongoing assessment to inform future planning. Staff assess pupils' reading, spelling and phonics progress daily and keep appropriate records. However, much of the content of the pupils' daily progress records provides a summary of tasks completed rather than an evaluation of their learning. In class pupils are given useful oral feedback. Pupils' work is marked regularly with ticks and encouraging comments. However, marking is not sufficiently diagnostic to pinpoint gaps in pupils' understanding and help them make progress. Pupils are rarely involved in their own assessment and so do not take responsibility for improving their work.

There is no framework for the assessment of pupils below the age of three years. The Foundation Stage profiles act as guidance for summative assessment of the reception age pupils and the National Curriculum level descriptors as benchmarks for the older ones.

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 the curriculum gives pupils of compulsory school age experience in the technological area of learning (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii));*
- *provide personal, social and health education that reflects the school's aims and ethos (paragraph 1(2)(f));*
- *carefully plan lessons, with effective teaching methods and suitable activities for the different ages and abilities, particularly for the youngest pupils, in order to provide the opportunity for these pupils to learn and make progress (paragraphs 1(3)(c), 1(2)(b), 1(2)(h)(ii), and 1(2)(i));*
- *devise thorough and detailed lesson plans which take account of pupils' prior attainments so as to meet the needs of individuals or groups of pupils (paragraph 1(3)(d));*
- *enable teachers to demonstrate appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught, particularly for pupils under three, in religious education and in information and communication technology (paragraph 1(3)(e));*
- *assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use this information to plan teaching so that pupils will make even better progress (paragraph 1(3)(g));and*
- *put in place a framework to evaluate the provision for the pupils below three years of age (paragraph 1(4)).*

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

The school makes good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils' spiritual development is nurtured effectively. All staff are committed to developing pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence from a very early age. The school celebrates all pupils' achievements from their first steps to writing a piece of prose, thus contributing strongly to their growing self-confidence. The achievement tree in the foyer is a celebration of pupils' success. The caring attitude shown by the staff towards pupils encourages mutually supportive relationships between pupils, who show sensitivity towards each others' feelings. As a result, the school is a happy place where pupils are keen to learn.

The school promotes a good understanding of moral principals which allows pupils to tell right from wrong. They gain an understanding of appropriate behaviour from babyhood because staff create a climate in which their moral development is fostered naturally and consistently. Pupils and parents are familiar with the school's behaviour policy. Sanctions and rewards are made explicit and pupils of all ages know the system well. Pupils are given responsibilities appropriate for their age. For example, the newly formed school council highlights their responsibilities in the school community.

The school ethos strongly supports pupils' social development. In the classes of pupils below five years of age careful attention is given to providing good role models

and to teaching pupils such social skills as sharing toys and helping others. In the classes of older pupils this good beginning is built on effectively. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to co-operate and share responsibility. Pupils develop into polite, well-mannered young people who show care and consideration for others.

The cultural development of pupils is good. The multi-cultural nature of the school, and the good relationships between minority ethnic groups, provide many opportunities for awareness and appreciation of pupils' own, and respect for others', faiths and beliefs. The school makes very good use of visits, to museums, art galleries, and places of interest to extend pupils' cultural knowledge and their awareness of their place in wider society. Important festivals from world faiths are recognised. Parental involvement in providing wider cultural experiences is welcomed.

Pupils are taught to regard reading as a pleasure and books as a valuable source of creativity, ideas and information. Music and dance feature strongly in the life of the school and enrich pupils' cultural experiences.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school takes considerable care to ensure the welfare of its pupils. It creates a secure environment where the staff have a good knowledge of individual pupils and pay careful attention to their welfare. Pupils readily feel at home in the school's family atmosphere. Parents report that they appreciate the friendly environment provided by the school. They feel that the school helps their children to settle quickly when they join. However, there are a number of requirements that are not met.

Clear policies and procedures are in place for promoting and maintaining good behaviour and eliminating bullying. Pupils are aware of what they should do if they feel they are being treated unfairly by another pupil. Movement around the school is orderly and safe. Pupils are supervised effectively for the majority of their time in school. However, there are occasions when the staffing ratio is inadequate and pupils on work experience are given inappropriate supervisory duties.

Good procedures for child protection are followed closely. The designated child protection officers have participated in multi-agency training but not all staff have been trained in this important area of responsibility. The school is planning this as a matter of urgency.

There is a suitable number of staff qualified in First Aid. All incidents and treatments are carefully recorded. Parents receive a copy of the record so they are fully informed. The medical boxes contain appropriate basic equipment. There is a clear policy about the administration of medicines and parents are informed of the procedures. Pupils' allergies are carefully noted and all staff are aware of the action to take.

The school has made good provision for fire safety. There are regular fire drills, appliances are checked and fire assessments carried out. Fire exits are clearly labelled and kept free from obstructions. The Fire Officer visited the school in 2004 and the school has addressed the recommendations made in the report. A commercial company carries out risk assessments.

Detailed risk assessments are carried out for all visits outside the school and on the premises to identify potential hazards. All staff have a responsibility to note any risks to pupils' safety and to inform the proprietor.

The admission register is maintained in the required format. The attendance registers, however, are not maintained in accordance with the regulations. Attendance is good and pupils arrive promptly.

The school has not considered the DDA in the context of admitting pupils with disabilities and the adaptations required to the curriculum and the building. There is no three-year plan to show how the building might be adapted to accommodate pupils who need special facilities.

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 staff are deployed in such a way to ensure the proper supervision of pupils (paragraph 3(7)); and*
- *ensure that the attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) Regulations 1995 (paragraph 3(9)).*

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:

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the curriculum and the premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is privately owned. There are procedures for the recruitment of suitable staff, currently these do not meet the requirements of the regulations. Almost all the staff who come in contact with pupils have been checked by the CR B, but these are not yet completed. Prior to their appointment, checks are made to confirm candidates' work experience, medical fitness, identity and qualifications. Professional and character references are also requested.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

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

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

- *ensure that, prior to the confirmation of their employment , staff at the school have been subject to a check with the CRB to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable for a school although some of the accommodation is limited.

The school's accommodation is divided into two buildings. The new building for Key Stage 2 pupils provides a bright and airy environment for their learning. However, in the main building used by all the younger pupils, some classrooms are small and others are only just adequate in size. For example, the space in the music room is very limited for the music and movement lessons. Young pupils' movements are restricted as they respond to the music. In other small rooms the amount of classroom furniture also restricts pupils' movements.

There is good access to the attractive grounds which include a grassy area, an all weather playground and a very well equipped play park with high quality equipment. Older pupils make very good use of the adjoining leisure centre and golf club facilities. However, Foundation Stage pupils do not have free continuous access to the outside area. There is no planning for outdoor activities which reflects the indoor provision.

Food is prepared in a small, hygienic kitchen at lunchtime, and pupils eat in either their own rooms or the hall which is also used for dance, music activities and the weekly assembly.

The building is well maintained and in good decorative order. The medical room does not have direct access to running water or a toilet facility so it does not meet requirements.

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 the size of the classrooms and teaching areas are appropriate in size to allow for effective teaching and learning, particularly for the younger pupils (paragraph 5(j)); and*

- *ensure that there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides suitable information for parents and others. Descriptive reports and IEP review reports on pupils' progress are prepared for parents each term. These show clearly what pupils have learned but do not always indicate how their learning is to be extended. An attractive printed prospectus with a useful folder for single sheets of paper is given to parents and prospective parents. Information is provided about the school's aims, curricular provision, relevant policy documents, staff lists and term dates. An informative newsletter is published each term. Class news and curriculum developments are described and pupils' achievements are celebrated. The reading record book is an effective daily means of home/school communication.

The staff offer a warm welcome to parents, pupils and other visitors. The proprietor, headteacher and office staff have a high profile at the beginning and end of each day. Informal discussion often takes place between parents and staff at this time.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a written complaints procedure which matches the requirements of the regulations. It is available to parents and prospective parents, and sets out clear time scales and procedures the school will follow in the management of a complaint. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, 30 % of parents who responded said they did not fully understand the procedures for making a complaint. The school may wish to consider how they can ensure that all parents are well informed.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Longwood School and Nursery
DfES Number:	919/6236
Type of school:	Primary and nursery
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	0 - 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 113 Girls: 102 Total: 215
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 4 Girls: 8 Total: 12
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,735 - £4,350
Address of school:	Bushey Hall Drive Bushey Watford Herts WD23 2QG
Telephone number:	01923 253715
Fax number:	01923 222760
Email address:	info@longwoodschool.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Muriel Garman
Proprietor:	Mr Malcolm Livesey
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Pauline Hoey
Date of inspection:	22 - 25 May 2006

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