

Inspection report
The Mulberry House School
Independent school
DfES ref no: 202/6392

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 4 - 5 October 2006

Introduction

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 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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

The Mulberry House School, in West Hampstead, opened originally for pupils aged two to five years and expanded in 1994 to take children up to the age of eight. The school occupies two buildings a short distance apart in the same road. It serves an area of wide ethnic and cultural diversity which is reflected in both the pupils and staff at the school. Of the 175 pupils, 75 attend part-time and 68 three and four-year-olds receive nursery funding. The school operates from 8am to 6pm for 47 weeks a year. During the inspection, this extended provision was registered separately with Ofsted's Early Years Division and will be inspected in due course.

The school aims to *'develop within each child a love of learning; to offer a challenging education that is designed to enhance their emotional, intellectual and physical development'* and *'to work in partnership with parents to ensure that each child's first important experience of school will be a secure and happy one'*.

Overall evaluation of the school

Mulberry House provides its pupils with a good quality education. It is successful in achieving its aims. Pupils make good progress and achieve high standards in literacy and numeracy. They are well prepared for the next stage of their education. The school meets almost all the independent schools' regulations.

The curriculum is good. It is broad and covers all aspects of learning but with a strong emphasis on English and mathematics. Each subject policy and detailed scheme of work sets out exactly what pupils should learn and achieve at each stage of their education. Provision for speaking and listening, literacy and numeracy is particularly strong and contributes significantly to the good, and sometimes outstanding, progress pupils make in these basic skills. Pupils are articulate and use their extensive vocabulary to produce some excellent pieces of written work for their age. For example, Prep III (Year 2) pupils learnt the demanding poem 'Weathers' by Thomas Hardy to recite in assembly. The challenge to write their own poem in a similar style was met effectively by most pupils. A good programme of enrichment activities through visits and visitors to the school makes a valuable contribution to pupils' very good cultural development and to their enjoyment of learning. Provision for pupils' personal, social and health education is integral to the well-established daily routines and the strong family ethos of the school. Aspects of health education are taught through projects so that pupils learn about healthy eating and to take responsibility for looking after their bodies. The curriculum for the younger pupils is

based in principle on the 'curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage' with its six areas of learning. In Transition, planning for literacy and numeracy is very good but there is less detail for the other areas of learning. The curriculum is planned as a series of lessons led by the adults rather than as a range of integrated opportunities and experiences. Play is a discrete period in the day rather than a method of experiencing opportunities for exploration. This compartmentalised approach reduces opportunities for children to choose from a range of activities and to initiate their own learning. In Prep I, planning reflects the subjects of the National Curriculum and, while the emphasis on literacy and numeracy is appropriate for the ability of many children, this constrains the balance between the areas of learning.

Good teaching is founded on the warm relationships that are evident through the school. Well established daily routines help even the youngest pupils to settle confidently to school life. Adults work hard to create an inviting and stimulating environment for learning which is supported by a very good range of high quality resources. Good organisation and management set clear expectations of behaviour and reinforce the school's values to which the pupils respond positively. The good team teaching between staff offers pupils a positive role model for their own strong relationships and good behaviour. Because teachers know their pupils well, they are able to plan and modify activities accordingly to meet their needs. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' work, especially in English and mathematics and, generally, pupils don't disappoint them. Standards are high. However, there is scope for teachers to challenge pupils further, especially more able pupils, to work independently through opportunities for individual research, problem solving and creative thinking. At times, teachers do too much for the pupils and over-direct the activities so that opportunities for pupils to use their imagination are reduced. Lessons are tightly structured; they begin with a clear explanation of what pupils are expected to learn and end with a review of what has been learnt. This means pupils are always clear about what they are learning and why. Occasionally, the introduction to the lessons is overlong and this restricts the time available for pupils to work on the activities. Regular feedback to pupils during lessons tells them how to improve their work, and targets in literacy and numeracy give them something to aim for. Although there are no pupils with a statement of special education need, some pupils have been identified as needing some additional support. This is provided effectively through the high adult:pupil ratio which enables teachers to give pupils plenty of individual support to help them make good progress.

Good systems are being developed further to assess pupils' progress over time through observations of younger pupils and with a raft of regular tests for older ones. Staff gather a wealth of evidence but this is not always presented in a coherent way to make the links between curriculum planning and assessment as strong as they could be. Records of achievement, started when children begin school from the age of two, document each child's progress using photographs, samples of work and adults' comments. These are a wonderful memento for parents of their children's time at school.

The pupils' personal development is underpinned by the school's good provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The majority of pupils work with much interest and enjoyment; they persevere with tasks and take pride in their

work. Their good attendance is testament to their eagerness to come to school. The teaching encourages their very good attitudes to learning and, for example, pupils are conscientious in completing the regular and worthwhile homework tasks that reinforce learning from lessons. High standards in basic skills are good preparation for later education and give pupils self-confidence. When given the opportunities, pupils show that they can work well together and support each other in learning. They contribute to the wider community through environmental projects such as recycling, and have won several awards for growing flowers to enhance the school environment. Last year, the school surveyed pupils' views and has incorporated some of their ideas on the toilets and the playground into plans for improving the school. However, the school agrees that giving pupils opportunities to show initiative and take on more responsibilities in school is an area of future development. The school encourages pupils to accept responsibility for their behaviour through helping to devise the school and class rules. Consequently, pupils learn about respect, rights and responsibilities and know right from wrong. Good opportunities to perform in assemblies and shows help pupils to build up confidence and self esteem. During the inspection, pupils' behaviour in assembly was impeccable as they listened attentively to each class reciting poems and celebrated each other's achievement; participation levels in this family event were very high. The school's strong emphasis on cultural development underpins the very good racial harmony. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures through a good range of visits to places of worship and through parents and staff sharing their own experiences of celebrations such as Jewish New Year and Ramadan.

A raft of well-considered policies supports the day-to-day running of the school and ensures that the provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Procedures are satisfactory. Staff supervise pupils closely and are alert to their social and emotional needs. Pupils are confident that teachers help them and will listen to their concerns; they feel safe in school. A consistent and positive approach to behaviour management allied to high expectations means that pupils work in a well-ordered learning environment. Staff undertake regular checks of the buildings and its equipment for possible hazards. The high standard of decoration, maintenance and cleanliness in both buildings ensure that pupils have an attractive and stimulating place for learning. Procedures for recording accidents, and for administering First Aid, including medication, are very thorough. Similarly, procedures for checking the identity, medical fitness and suitability of staff to work with children before they are appointed are rigorous. However, staff have not had up-to-date training in child protection procedures and the designated member of staff who oversees this important aspect of safeguarding pupils' welfare is yet to receive appropriate training for the role. The school has acted speedily to rectify these deficiencies and training for all staff has been arranged for the very near future.

The school gives parents good quality information through its brochure and website, through regular newsletters which update them on school life, and with its readily available range of policies. There are plenty of opportunities for parents to be involved in school life, for example by visiting and contributing to the curriculum, which many take. The school undertakes its own parents' survey and has responded to their views by, for example, arranging weekly appointments to meet with their

child's teacher. This 'open door' policy encourages parents to raise areas of concern at the earliest opportunity and, as a result, the school's formal written procedures for dealing with complaints has not been required to date. The vast majority of parents are highly satisfied with the school's work. Their positive views can be summed up by one parent's comment that, *'We have nothing but praise for the school and are proud to be part of its community'*.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended 17 Jan 05, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- Comply fully with guidance from the Department for Education and Skills for *'Safeguarding Children in Education'* by ensuring that all staff have appropriate up-to-date training in child protection (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- in Transition and Prep I improve the balance between adult-led activities and those that children choose for themselves; and
- offer pupils further opportunities to take responsibility for managing their own learning and to show initiative.

School details

Name of school:	The Mulberry House School		
DfES Number:	202/6392		
Type of school:	Pre-preparatory & Preparatory		
Status:	Independent		
Date school opened:	1989		
Age range of pupils:	2 - 7+		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll :	Boys: 109	Girls: 66	Total: 175
Annual fees (day pupils):	£6,227 - £11,468		
Address of school:	7 Minster Rd	68 Shoot Up Hill	
	London	London	
	NW2 3SD	NW23XL	
Telephone number:	020 8452 7340		
Fax number:	020 8452 7340		
Email address:	info@mulberryhouseschool.com		
Headteacher:	Bethan Lewis-Powell		
Proprietor:	Bethan Lewis-Powell		
Reporting Inspector:	Jane Wotherspoon HMI		
Dates of inspection:	4 - 5 October 2006		

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