

# **Inspection report**

## **Spring Grove School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 886/6045**

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

**Dates of inspection: 27 – 30 November 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

Spring Grove School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged between 2 and 11 years situated in the village of Wye in Kent. It is housed in a Georgian mansion built in 1674 and set in 14 acres of land. For a large part of its history, it has been run as a family school with a homely atmosphere and emphasis on good manners. In 2003, there were 79 pupils on roll. Then, the school was taken over by a new trust that appointed the present headmaster. At the time of the inspection, there were 28 pupils under compulsory school age attending part-time and 134 pupils of compulsory school age. The school has begun to expand into a two-form entry and it now has two Reception and two Year 1 classes. It has no pupils with a statement of educational need on roll and no pupils learning English as an additional language.

The school teaches a curriculum aimed at preparing pupils for the Kent selection process for grammar schools, as well as selective independent schools. It seeks to continue the tradition of providing a family atmosphere in which pupils can flourish, *'develop a spirit of enquiry...an ability to work hard and independently... a sense of social conscience...and learn the importance of being a good citizen'*, whilst being enabled to achieve as highly as possible. *'We aim to develop all the children who join Spring Grove to their full potential, academically, socially, physically and emotionally in a supportive, caring and friendly community. We also encourage all the children to support the school motto of 'Always Do Your Best.'*

### Summary of main findings

Spring Grove School is an outstanding school. In the last two years, the curricular provision has improved and expanded under the leadership of the new headmaster and his dedicated staff, and is now outstanding. The quality of teaching is good with outstanding features. There are thorough procedures in place to assess pupils' work and monitor their progress. In view of the quality of its self-evaluation, the school has the capacity to improve further. It is successful in meeting its stated aim of developing all pupils to their full potential in a supportive and friendly atmosphere. Through the pastoral system, the curricular provision and the impact of staff as excellent role models, it creates a happy and nurturing ethos. As an outcome of the school's excellent provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development, their personal development is outstanding. Their spiritual development is good. The school takes pupils' welfare, health and safety very seriously and demonstrates a high level of care. The quality of information provided to parents and other partners

is outstanding and the school enjoys the overwhelming support of parents. The school complies with all the regulations for registration.

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

- it creates a happy, family atmosphere in which all pupils are encouraged and nurtured and can flourish; as a result, the working relationships are excellent and pupils are very receptive to learning;
- it teaches a very broad and balanced curriculum; the provision for science, design and technology (DT), physical education (PE), French, art and extra-curricular activities is outstanding;
- it enables pupils to become confident, mature and thoughtful young citizens by the end of Year 6;
- it fosters lively and enquiring minds through good teaching with much that is outstanding;
- it promotes pupils' welfare, health and safety very effectively; and
- it builds a very strong partnership with parents, as indicated by the unusually high return of pre-inspection questionnaires, in which parents express their high level of satisfaction with the school.

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

The school complies with all the regulations.

### **Next Steps**

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

- continue to develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in all subjects, and continue to build up its resources;
- continue to embed the rigorous assessment procedures that are in place, including the involvement of pupils in the evaluation of their performance;
- continue to improve the quality of marking; and
- continue to develop creative writing.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

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

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

The curricular and extra-curricular provision is outstanding. The school has broadened its curriculum in the last two years and has balanced it so as to offer each pupil a well-rounded education. It teaches all the subjects of the National Curriculum and has lengthened its teaching day to improve the provision of science, ICT, and sport, and introduce French from the nursery, as well as afternoon clubs and activities. In the nursery and reception classes, it follows the national guidance for the Foundation Stage and a recent Early Years inspection found the curricular provision to be good. From the Reception upwards, the school plans the curriculum with clear references to the National Curriculum. The curriculum is well planned and implemented, and is being further improved through close monitoring and regular reviews. For example, the school has identified the planning of cross-curricular links and the development of ICT in all subjects as areas for development. It has introduced a learning development programme to extend pupils' thinking and problem solving skills from Reception to Year 6. It ensures that the curriculum enables all pupils to make good progress by implementing a thorough assessment of each pupil in the nursery with the help of a speech and language therapist, an occupational therapist and a child psychologist. This is extended to all new pupils. Parents and teachers report that pupils who lack confidence develop self-esteem within one term. The school also provides very good support to individual pupils through a coherent and very well taught support programme. Once the particular needs of these pupils are identified by the teacher, the learning support coordinator teaches them in small groups and focuses on increasing their confidence and developing their thinking skills as well as targeting their specific needs.

The school strives to secure good provision in English and mathematics by implementing the national literacy and numeracy strategies and promoting analytical skills. There is an emphasis on reading that is planned daily and pupils achieve very highly in this subject at both key stages. They achieve well in writing but this could be further improved by developing creative writing further in key stages 1 and 2. The school provides excellent opportunities for speaking and listening and pupils make very good progress in these areas. The English curriculum becomes more formal as pupils move through the school and prepare for their examinations. Teacher assessments show that pupils generally make good progress across the school. The results of the Key Stage 2 national tests of the last two years confirm that pupils achieve highly in English and mathematics, and very highly in science. Their results in the Eleven Plus examination indicate that they are all successful in securing a place at the school of their parents' choice.

The provision for science, DT, art, PE and French is outstanding. These subjects are successfully taught by specialists. Pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is effectively promoted through many planned curricular activities, circle time and staff guidance throughout the day. Year 6 pupils follow an accredited First Aid

course. The resources are sufficient in quality, quantity and range to support the curriculum and the school continues to build them up.

The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of daily afternoon clubs and activities that are both well attended and supervised. Through the clubs, pupils can engage in such varied pursuits as dance, drama, face painting, cookery, technology, basketry, board games, swimming, trampoline, archery, boules, tennis, badminton, golf, fencing, horse riding, football and cricket. This rich variety of clubs reflects the dedication of the members of staff who run them. There are weekly fixtures against other schools throughout the year for soccer, rugby, cricket, netball, hockey and rounders. The curriculum is also enhanced by termly educational visits that support all areas of the curriculum.

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

The quality of teaching is good and a high proportion of teaching is outstanding. The teaching and learning policy has recently been reviewed and teaching is regularly evaluated by senior managers with the aim of raising the quality to the highest level.

The outstanding teaching meets the criteria set out in the prospectus, '*... teachers strong and wise who teach because they love the teacher's task and find their richest prize in eyes that open and minds that ask.*' Pupils are motivated by stimulating and challenging activities. Teachers love teaching, inspire pupils by their enthusiasm and have very high expectations of what pupils can achieve. All pupils are engaged and if some fail to respond, they are pleasantly, but firmly encouraged to participate. The lesson moves at a brisk pace so that no time is lost. Regular assessment is used by the teacher to ensure that all have understood. Above all, the teacher stands back to allow pupils to solve problems, thus encouraging their independence and thinking skills.

Subject expertise is strong. For the past two years, teachers have taken part in many in-service training courses. Planning, with a few exceptions, follows the school guidance and builds effectively on what has gone before. A recent priority has been to make sure that work matches the needs of each pupil and planning takes account of this. However, this is better developed in English and mathematics than in other subjects.

A key strength in the teaching is the excellent relationships between teachers and pupils. Pupils feel confident to participate in lessons without fear of making mistakes, and if they do, of learning from them. Many teachers are skilled at asking probing questions that encourage pupils to extend their ideas and develop their language. As a result, by the end of Year 6, most pupils are confident and articulate speakers. Most teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. Pupils take pride in their work and present it neatly.

In a few lessons, pupils are not given the opportunity to develop independence as learners. If expectations are not high enough, then pupils do not achieve enough. On the other hand, there are examples of pupils responding successfully to excellent opportunities to solve problems and to evaluate their own work, such as in art and

mathematics. However, self-evaluation by pupils is not a common feature across the school.

Younger pupils benefit from the close links and effective teamwork between staff in the nursery, reception and Year 1 and 2 classes. Teachers plan together so that continuity of learning is assured. Teaching assistants plan with teachers so they are clear about their roles. They support classes skilfully.

New methods of assessing pupils' work have been introduced. The procedures are excellent, but are not yet used consistently by all teachers. Assessment and its use in the Reception class are excellent. Here, each pupil's progress is followed on a chart and targets are set for English and mathematics. Targets are now set in English and mathematics for pupils from Year 1 upwards but pupils are still unclear about them and they are not referred to when books are marked. Work is marked regularly, but there are few diagnostic comments to help pupils with the next steps in learning. This is recognised by the school.

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

Yes.

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

The school makes excellent provision for pupils' personal development. The provision for moral, social and cultural development is stronger than the provision for spiritual development. Assemblies and religious education make a very strong contribution to spiritual development. The local vicar comes in weekly to take assemblies and there are strong links with the church. Displays of pupils' paintings around the school, lovingly framed, contribute to the ethos. Lessons such as science awaken curiosity and thought about the world. Magical moments in lessons with younger pupils such as the eager anticipation of what is in a box, take pupils beyond the material world. Sometimes, there are missed opportunities to take advantage of these moments.

The very strong sense of family supports moral and social development most effectively. Teachers know their pupils very well and use this knowledge thoughtfully to promote personal development. Lunches are a family occasion, teachers sitting with their classes. A major strength is the award of the MAD (Making a Difference) armband which is awarded to pupils who uphold the 10 school values that are prominently on display. Pupils wear the armbands with great pride. The theme for the week emphasises values such as care for one another, friends and respect. The PSHE and citizenship programme is another vehicle for promoting social and moral development. Through circle time, pupils develop a feeling of pride and self worth. Reports to parents cover pupils' conduct and emotional behaviour. Pupils relate positively to adults and to one another, behave very sensibly, are courteous and generally support one another. Most pupils value the award of stars. Many strive to receive the ultimate accolade of a headmaster's book token.

Cultural development is also excellent. Pupils have many opportunities to visit art galleries, museums, the local library and theatres. The teaching of French is very

strong so pupils learn about another culture. Pupils are enthusiastic about the weekly French café and are willing to speak French in order to buy croissants and 'pain au chocolat'. Visits to France, including exchange visits and letters to France enhance this provision. Pupils have the opportunity this year to visit Malta to play sports. Teachers draw on the backgrounds of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds to teach about diversity of cultures. This is further extended by the school tradition of holding a 'food from around the world' week.

By the end of Year 6, pupils are confident, mature and thoughtful young citizens, a result of the excellent provision.

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

Yes.

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

The school promotes the welfare, health and safety of its pupils very effectively. It implements consistently a good range of useful policies that aim to minimise risks incurred by pupils at all times. All staff receive training at First Aider level. The procedures for child protection have recently been updated and are in line with the latest legislation. The school has a high level of safety awareness and carries out rigorous risk assessments before school outings and for the school site. It meets all fire safety regulations.

Pupils and parents report that they appreciate the caring environment provided by the school. They feel that the positive and encouraging attitude of the staff helps pupils settle in happily when they join the school. One pupil said '*I love everything about my school.*' Nearly all pupils choose to eat the well balanced, cooked meals offered by the school rather than bring packed lunches.

The behaviour policy reflects the school's ethos and is implemented consistently in and out of lessons. Staff are excellent role models and have very high expectations. As a result, pupils are very well behaved, and show consideration to others. Pupils are closely supervised throughout the day and their attitude, behaviour and performance are monitored daily. As a result, problems are addressed very quickly and there has been no need for serious sanctions.

The school maintains an admission and attendance registers in conformity with the regulations. Although it emphasises the desirability of good attendance and punctuality, a small core of parents brings their children late in the morning. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act and there is a comprehensive plan to improve accessibility to the premises and the curriculum for disabled pupils.

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

Yes.

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

The school has recently updated its staff files and now has rigorous procedures in place to carry out all the necessary checks on staff prior to their employment to verify their suitability to work with children.

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

Yes.

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

The accommodation is good. The Georgian buildings have been completely refurbished since 2003 and provide an attractive and unique setting. The school faces challenges when planning future use of this Grade 2 listed building. Specialist rooms are available for ICT, science, DT and art and rooms are available for music. PE is taught in the hall, the fields or a hard-surfaced area. Each classroom has a library and pupils use the local library for visits and research. The fields around the school are used for recreational purposes. They are spacious and well maintained. They are divided into play areas to suit pupils of different ages. A heated open-air swimming pool is available for use when the weather permits.

Hot meals are prepared in the kitchen on the premises. Hygiene certificates have been awarded to all who work in the kitchen. The dining room is also used for breakfast, snacks and after school clubs.

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

Yes.

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

The quality of information sent out by the school is excellent. The aims of the school are clearly presented in the school prospectus. Included in the prospectus is an electronic version of the parents' guide. A wide range of information is also available on the excellent web site which is updated daily. This includes all the school policies. Written policies have been produced for almost every aspect of school life. These provide good guidance to staff and good information to parents. Parents comment very favourably about the school especially the changes brought about by the new headmaster.

Parents receive excellent information about the progress their children are making. They meet their children's teachers every six weeks to discuss how they are progressing. Each half term parents receive a written report and twice a year they are given a full written report that gives detailed information about progress made by their child in each subject. Comments are also made about their child's behaviour



and organisational skills. In a few subjects, teachers write helpful suggestions for the next steps in learning but this is not widespread.

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

Yes.

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

The school has an open door policy that enables parents to share their views and concerns on a daily basis, and to meet teachers every six weeks. This minimises the need for raising complaints. No formal complaints have been registered in the past few years. The school also has effective procedures in place for handling complaints, but not all parents understand them, as reported by a very small minority of them in the pre-inspection questionnaires.

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

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Spring Grove School
DfES Number:	886/6045
Type of school:	Day
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	2 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 57      Girls: 77      Total: 134
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 15      Girls: 13      Total: 28
Annual fees (day pupils):	from £2,820 (nursery) to £8,349 (Year 6)
Address of school:	Harville Road Wye Kent, TN25 5EZ
Telephone number:	01233 812337
Fax number:	01233 813390
Email address:	office@springgroveschool.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Craig A Gibbs
Proprietor:	Spring Grove School 2003 Ltd (Charitable Trust)
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi
Date of inspection:	27 – 30 November 2006

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