

# **Inspection report**

## **Golders Hill School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 302/6063**

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

**Dates of inspection: 16 – 19 October 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**

Golders Hill School is an independent co-educational pre-preparatory school for pupils aged two years to seven years, situated on two neighbouring sites in Golders Green, in the London Borough of Barnet. It was founded in 1908 and the headteacher has been in post for 20 years. The nursery opened 13 years ago and now comprises of three classes taking children from two to three years who all attend part-time. The four kindergarten classes take children aged three to four years and the vast majority also attend part-time. There are three reception classes taking full-time pupils, two Year 1 classes and two Year 2 classes. At the age of seven, most pupils move on to a range of prestigious independent schools in north London. However, girls usually move on earlier, with the effect that boys vastly outnumber girls in most year groups. There are currently 90 full-time pupils on roll and 91 part-time. No pupils have special education needs. At the time of the inspection, there was one pupil learning English as an additional language.

The school aims to provide *'an education of the highest quality'* and to not only *'nurture the child's ability in the traditional subjects but also foster a variety of talents so that each individual can achieve their full potential.'* *'The school ethos is that happiness is essential to the acquisition of knowledge and that learning should always be fun.'*

### **Summary of main findings**

Golders Hill School is a good school that enjoys a high level of parental confidence and satisfaction. It succeeds in meeting its stated aim of providing a happy learning environment in which each pupil can flourish. The teaching staff form a cohesive team who provide a broad and balanced curriculum and teach effectively with visible joy. Staff know each of their pupils very well and enable most of them to make good progress across the curriculum and very good progress in literacy and numeracy. The school promotes pupils' moral, social and cultural development well and puts a great emphasis on pupils' personal development and well-being. This is clearly reflected in pupils' good behaviour and the very good relationships they enjoy with staff and their peers. The school communicates effectively with parents. It complies with all the regulations for registration.

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

- it creates a happy and friendly atmosphere where pupils form secure relationships based on care and mutual respect, and enjoy learning;

- it teaches a broad and balanced curriculum with a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy; the provision for literacy is a particular strength and most pupils achieve very highly in this area;
- its teaching is good and ensures that pupils achieve as highly as they can in all areas of learning, and prepares them well for the next stage of their education;
- it promotes particularly well the moral, social and cultural development of pupils;
- it promotes pupils' welfare, health and safety very effectively; and
- it provides good quality information to parents and prospective parents and enjoys the overwhelming support of parents.

### **Next Steps**

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

- extend the good practice and rigour in the planning and assessment of literacy and numeracy to all areas of the curriculum, particularly to history, geography and religious education (RE) in Years 1 and 2;
- ensure that assessment in the Foundation Stage is rigorous and that the next steps for learning are consistently identified;
- develop a system to monitor rigorously the quality of teaching, learning and assessment across the school; and
- plan more opportunities for the sharing of best practice across the school.

# **COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION**

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

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

The quality of the curriculum is satisfactory overall. The school is successful in providing its pupils with a broad and balanced curriculum. The Early Years inspection, which took place in the kindergarten and reception classes (Foundation Stage) at the time of this inspection, found the provision to be good in these year groups. In the reception classes, where some children have reached compulsory school age, the curriculum is planned effectively and takes account of the national guidance for the Foundation Stage and the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies. However, the curriculum in Years 1 and 2 is planned with uneven rigour, which makes its quality good in parts whilst being satisfactory overall.

In Years 1 and 2, there is a strong emphasis on literacy and numeracy, and the teaching in these subjects is deliberately more formal as pupils are prepared for the entrance examinations to the prestigious junior schools of north London. The curriculum in these two subjects is rigorously planned and expertly taught, enabling pupils to make good to very good progress, particularly in literacy where they achieve very highly. The school strikes a very good balance between the formal aspects of writing, such as grammar and spelling, and creative writing, which is developed to an impressively high standard. Homework is also rigorously planned in these classes to consolidate and extend pupils' learning. The teaching of reading is systematically planned and well taught from reception onwards. The science curriculum follows the National Curriculum closely and is taught as topic work, in rotation with history and geography. However, there is no whole school approach to the planning of the curriculum for history and geography. Although staff are careful to avoid repetition when choosing the themes of study every year, the absence of a whole curriculum overview means that the school cannot monitor rigorously the continuity and progression of learning in these subjects.

Religious education is taught through assemblies with a focus on all festivals within the multi-faith setting. It is strongly supported by parents and is extended through art and story time, as was the case of the Hindu festival of Divali during the inspection. However, it is not underpinned by a written curriculum. The provision for physical education (PE) is satisfactory, with one session in school and one swimming lesson per week for each class from the reception onwards. Music and French are taught by specialist teachers. Pupils' personal, health and social education is effectively promoted through a host of planned curricular activities, staff guidance at break times and through circle time.

There are currently no pupils with a statement of special educational needs and the school has sound procedures in place to ensure that pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. Furthermore, as class sizes are small and the ratio of adults to pupils is good, pupils receive close support. However, on occasion, the process of drawing up individual education plans, that would be shared with all staff and parents and therefore ensure consistency of support, is unnecessarily slow.

There are adequate resources to support the curriculum. The school is continuing to upgrade its information and communication technology (ICT) resources and is constructing a dedicated area to be equipped with the latest technological facilities. At present and until the completion of the upgraded ICT room, ICT resources consist mainly of programmable toys, which are used effectively

The school runs chess and sports clubs as regular activities outside lessons. The oversubscribed weekly chess club fosters healthy competitive spirit by entering pupils in local and national competitions. The Friday sports activity, which takes place in a local sports centre and is attended by nearly two thirds of the pupils between reception and Year 2, offers them very good opportunities to develop their football, hockey and gymnastic skills. Thematic work is further enhanced and enriched by well chosen educational visits. However, a small minority of parents feel there is not a sufficient range of activities including trips or visits outside lessons.

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

The quality of teaching is good and there are examples of outstanding practice across the school. Assessment is mainly satisfactory with some good and very good features.

The reason why teaching is good is partly due to the excellent procedures in place for the induction of new teachers. These teachers feel very well supported and informed before they are put in charge of a class. In addition, the school has a pool of 'floating' staff who can be redeployed at short notice. This contributes greatly to the continuity of good teaching and provides a caring and familiar learning environment for pupils at all times. However, there is no formal system in place to monitor the quality of teaching and learning and to share the existing best practice

All teachers have good subject knowledge and all teaching assistants make an effective contribution to pupils' learning. Staff form a very cohesive team and within year groups, they plan together and review the work frequently. Their lesson planning is at least satisfactory. Staff teach pupils in small classes, know them very well and build successfully on what each child knows. The best lesson plans clearly evaluate what the pupils have achieved against what was intended to be learned. They identify the key language for the lesson, detail varied activities that match the needs of every pupil in the class closely, and list activities to be used at the end of the lesson to assess pupils' understanding and learning. All staff are very skilful in using questions where pupils can provide a range of different answers. Lessons fully engage all pupils from the start of the lesson and develop their thinking skills. This is a strength of teaching. However, in a small minority of lessons, the teacher did not respond sufficiently to pupils' misunderstandings. Most staff maintain a very good pace throughout the lesson and, as a result, pupils perform their tasks with a sense of urgency and produce good amounts of work. However, in a few lessons, the introduction was too long and pupils could not sustain their concentration.

In the best lessons, pupils achieve very highly because the teaching is stimulating and consistently challenging. For example, in one science lesson, the teacher conducted a well-focussed introduction during which she constantly probed pupils' understanding, inviting them to propose explanations. She gave very high quality

feedback after each response, which enabled the pupils to refine their answers and increase their understanding. She planned several activities, one of which was a very well designed experiment aimed at discovering how shadows are formed, in which each pupil had a clear role. As a result, those who had been engaged in projecting light inside a tunnel, those who had moved inside the tunnel to make shadows, and those who had observed the experiment, developed different skills which empowered them to discuss their thought processes and the experiment critically at the end. Despite the excitement felt by the participants, the session was managed with utmost calm and order, enabling pupils to concentrate very well throughout.

The Early Years inspection found that assessment is satisfactory and developing in the Foundation Stage. However, it is still not rigorous enough to ensure that children's next steps for learning are consistently identified. The school places a strong emphasis on the assessment of pupils' learning in literacy and numeracy throughout the school with the addition of verbal reasoning in Years 1 and 2. In literacy and numeracy, both the teacher and the teaching assistant give very precisely targeted individual support that is based on their very good knowledge of the pupils' needs gained from continuous assessment of their learning from the first week of school. However, the quality of assessment is variable in other subjects in Years 1 and 2 as there is no system in place to ensure consistency of practice. There are examples of very good practice in science, where pupils' strengths and weaknesses, and next steps, are clearly identified. The quality of marking is good and teachers show pupils exactly how to improve.

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

Yes.

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

The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Although satisfactory, the spiritual strand is the weakest element.

According to the school's statement of aims and objectives, '*Golders Hill School was established to help its pupils grow in their self-confidence and self-esteem and community spirit. Our goal is for every child to finish Golders Hill feeling proud of who they are and thrilled in what they can do.*' The school achieves these objectives through a number of positive strategies used across the age range. Staff encourage pupils to discuss, with confidence, different topics in timetabled circle time; pupils are encouraged to take an active part in assemblies; all Year 2 pupils exercise responsibility as prefects; and the behaviour policy and whole school rewards system support these aims. During the inspection, pupils were observed consistently speaking with confidence within a harmonious and mutually supportive community of pupils. An example of this was where pupils in a reception class clapped spontaneously when classmates did good work. Pupils show respect to each other and to adults. They are well prepared for their role as responsible citizens by being made aware of how they can contribute positively to their environment, through assemblies, thematic work and the study of role models.

The school is a warm, caring community in which all pupils are valued. Staff are consistently very good role models who establish very good working relationships. As a result, pupils are able to move swiftly from one task to another and work equally well in pairs, in groups or individually. Staff enable pupils to tell right from wrong and implement a wide range of behavioural strategies. Pupils generally behave well and listen attentively and courteously to adults, and respond to instructions promptly. However, one or two pupils in a number of classes visibly lack self-discipline and self-awareness.

Although the majority of pupils are Jewish, this is a multi-faith school, where pupils celebrate and join in the festivals and cultures of all the main faiths. This encourages respect for other religions and cultures and some understanding. However, the spiritual uplift is somewhat lacking as there is little opportunity for reflection. There is no fixed RE curriculum and the lessons to be learnt from the religious practice are somewhat lost in the search for celebrating all the religious festivals of several faiths, which is a lot for young pupils to absorb.

***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. A good range of useful policies is in place to ensure the safety and well-being of pupils in various circumstances. Pupils, staff and parents report that they appreciate the safe, warm family environment provided by the school. Parents describe it as 'a nurturing school'. They feel that the school helps pupils settle in well when they join the school. The procedures in place to facilitate the transition between the new and leaving teachers are outstanding. This provides great stability and continuity of learning for pupils. The school has suitable First Aid procedures and many staff have received appropriate training as first aiders. The school's procedures for child protection are in line with the latest legislation. The school holds twice termly fire drills and weekly fire alarm tests and keeps appropriate records. It meets all fire safety regulations.

The behaviour policy reflects the school's ethos and is implemented consistently in and out of lessons. The vast majority of pupils are well-behaved, self-disciplined and show consideration to others. A benefit of the high adult to children ratio is that pupils are closely supervised throughout the day, in and out of school. They respond well to the reward system in use and no serious sanctions have been recorded.

The school has recently reviewed its strategies to promote healthy living and eating and has improved its practice to a good standard. For example, fruit snacks have been introduced and the school encourages the reduction of the consumption of biscuits and crisps at lunch time.

The school keeps an admission and an attendance register which meet regulations. It takes its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act seriously and has devised a suitable three-year plan. This shows how it will improve accessibility to

the premises for disabled people and how it will make the curriculum accessible to pupils with disabilities.

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

Yes.

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

The management committee that runs the school ensures that there are 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 premises provide a suitable environment for teaching and learning in a safe and secure setting. The school is housed in two neighbouring sites, situated at close proximity to each other. Classrooms are generally spacious enough for the size of the teaching groups. They are clean, tidy and well decorated, and some are enhanced by attractive displays of pupils' work. Furniture and fittings are appropriate for the ages and needs of all pupils. There are adequate washroom facilities for staff and pupils. A comfortable office doubles up as a sick bay where pupils are closely supervised by staff until their parents collect them. Flooring and fittings are in good condition.

At present, the provision for outdoor play is just adequate as the playground of one of the sites is currently out of bounds while building work is in progress. The new area is planned to provide a designated ICT area, a new entrance for the school, with disabled access, and a restored play area.

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

Yes.

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

The school provides a range of good quality information for all parents and prospective parents.

The prospectus contains clear and helpful information about the school's ethos, aims and organisation. Parents are made aware that the information that must be available to them on request, including school policies, is available from the school office.



Regular newsletters give parents a good flavour of the life of the school. Parents are very supportive of the school and take an active part in its running. This is demonstrated by the high return of pre-inspection questionnaires and the very positive responses. The vast majority of these parents indicate that the school keeps them well informed about all aspects of school life. Parents of pupils in Years 1 and 2 are invited to a curriculum meeting, where teachers explain the features of the curriculum. However, this good practice is not extended to the Foundation Stage classes. The parents' notice board is a practical means of communicating day-to-day information. There is a detailed staff handbook that outlines all aspects of the school's running.

Parents have regular opportunities, both informal and formal, to meet with teachers to discuss their children's progress. They receive an annual written report, which provides good detail of what has been taught. However, this often lacks information about what has been learned or what is needed for a pupil's next stage of learning.

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

Yes.

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

The school has appropriate procedures for dealing with complaints on an informal or formal basis. It has an open door policy that enables parents to share their views and concerns on a daily basis. This has the effect of minimising the need for raising complaints. It also has effective procedures in place for handling complaints. As a result, over the past years, the minimal number of complaints received has been resolved very promptly at the informal stage.

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

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Golders Hill School		
DfES Number:	302/6063		
Type of school:	Day pre-preparatory		
Status:	Independent		
Age range of pupils:	2 – 7 years		
Gender of pupils:	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 82	Girls: 8	Total: 90
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 61	Girls: 30	Total: 91
Termly fees (day pupils):	2 - 3 years: nursery £1,675 (mornings only) £346 (2 afternoons per week)		
	3 - 4 years: kindergarten £1,680 (mornings only) £ 196 (one afternoon per week)		
	4 - 7 years: reception to Year 2 £2,590 (including swimming, ICT and French)		
Address of school:	666 Finchley Road London NW11 7NT		
Telephone number:	020 8455 2589		
Fax number:	020 8209 0905		
Headteacher:	Mrs Amanda Eglash		
Proprietor:	Golders Hill School Limited		
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi		
Date of inspection:	16 – 19 October 2006		

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