

Inspection report

Wakefield Independent School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 384/6116

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 20 - 23 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

Wakefield Independent School is a non-selective, co-educational school for pupils aged 3-16. The school is a Church of England, family school but it welcomes applications from families of all denominations. Entry to the school is by interview and not by examination. This relatively small school caters for pupils who benefit from being educated in small classes in an educationally nurturing environment. Within this environment, the school aims to provide a sound programme based on a well balanced curriculum which encourages all children to realise their full potential. A strong element of the school's ethos is the fostering of pupils' emotional well-being, which the school sees as essential to the development of the well-rounded individual.

Several pupils have come to the school from other selective independent schools. Others come from mainstream schools. One in every six pupils have some learning difficulties, of which the most common are concerned with reading and numeracy. The pupils are almost exclusively white British, although there are some pupils from ethnic and religious minorities. Two pupils do not have English as their principal language. Almost all pupils are funded by their parents.

The school is situated on three relatively adjacent sites within the Nostell Priory Estate. The three sites form the bases for the three phases of education in the school. They are:-'The Rectory' (Foundation Stage and Years 1-4); Wragby (Years 5-8) and Nostell (Years 9-11).

Summary of main findings

Wakefield Independent School meets its aims and provides a satisfactory quality of education. There is a good curriculum which has both breadth and balance. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is some good and, at times, outstanding teaching in some areas of the school. Where this occurs, pupils make good progress, but this is not universally the case. Rigorous assessment procedures have only been introduced very recently, and they are not yet fully accepted nor implemented. This makes the tracking of pupils' progress difficult. Consequently assessment is inadequate.

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is satisfactory overall, but their moral and social development is more advanced.

The welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. There are very good relationships between staff and pupils. The small numbers of pupils in each class ensure that pupils are all valued as individuals.

Accommodation is satisfactory overall. There are, however, important shortcomings which stem from the age and the design of the buildings in relation to the numbers and age range for which the school caters. These hinder elements of pupils' progress. Provision of information to parents is satisfactory. The school has good procedures for handling complaints.

What the school does well:

- it has strong and purposeful leadership;
- it has established a nurturing, caring environment for pupils;
- it promotes very good behaviour amongst pupils, who behave very well and think of others in much of what they do;
- it has a good curriculum which meets the needs of pupils; and
- it has a cohesiveness in teaching across the Foundation Stage and Primary years.

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

In order to comply fully with the regulations the school should:

- ensure greater consistency in the quality of teaching and the use of assessment as detailed in section 1;
- improve the recruitment procedures as outlined in section 4; and
- increase the quantity and range of accommodation and provide sufficient toilet and changing facilities as noted in section 5.

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

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

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a good curriculum which reflects its aims. It focuses on motivating pupils to engage in learning so that they achieve their potential.

The curriculum for the Foundation Stage and for primary years is good. It is planned effectively and takes account of the needs of pupils, based on their ages and abilities. It is set against the national guidance for the Foundation Stage and the National Literacy and Numeracy strategies.

In their early years in school, children enjoy a wide range of structured play, creative activities and interesting games. The curriculum for primary pupils (ages 5-11) maintains the strong emphasis on the key subjects of mathematics and English. In addition, pupils are introduced by their class teachers to more formal study of computing, art, history, geography, science and religious studies. French and music are also taught by specialist subject teachers

As pupils move into post-primary education, they study all the subjects of the National Curriculum. The General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) options system allows older pupils to choose between a wide range of subjects, which include physics, chemistry and biology. The flexibility of the curriculum allows pupils in Year 10 to take GCSE examinations in religious studies and history. Many subjects are taught in specialist rooms. Good use is made of local leisure facilities. Very good use is made particularly of the excellent playing fields to offset the difficulties associated with the lack of a space for physical education. This lack of space undermines the range of sports activities available.

The curriculum is extended and enriched by a wide range of clubs and societies which cater for hobbies as diverse as 'Warhammer' and recorders. Residential trips, including foreign travel opportunities through cultural exchange schemes and ski trips, broaden pupils' social and cultural experience.

All pupils study Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). There are also specific opportunities for older pupils to consider their future careers. Provision for work experience and strengthening links with post-16 providers supplement these opportunities.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. There is a great variation in the quality across the school and between teachers. There are examples of good or outstanding teaching in the Early Years and primary classes, where teachers are consistent in their approach to planning and assessment. Weaknesses occur in the teaching of older pupils, where there are inconsistencies in planning, teaching styles, expectations and assessment. Because of this variation in the quality of teaching, pupils do not always achieve as well as they might. For example, in last year's

GCSE examination most pupils achieved considerably better in English than they did in mathematics. Recently recruited staff have brought to the school fresh ideas for teaching and improved planning and assessment procedures. These are beginning to move the school forward in terms of improving the educational provision. However, these standards have not been universally adopted by all staff in the school. Likewise, while teachers of Early Years and primary aged pupils make good use of individual education plans (IEPs) for pupils who have specific difficulties in learning, this is not consistent across the school.

In the outstanding and good lessons teachers plan a range of activities which keep the pupils motivated and eager to achieve. Activities are very carefully matched to the pupils' abilities and all pupils are therefore challenged and make good progress in the lesson. Pupils behave exceptionally well, enjoy the lessons and show a real thrill at their achievements. In these lessons pupils know at the beginning what they are expected to achieve by the end of the lesson and, in one of the outstanding lessons in Year 3 on the use of a dictionary, they all evaluated how well they had achieved. Common characteristics in these lessons are excellent use of timing so that pupils work at a fast pace, high expectations for all pupils, promotion of teamwork and ongoing assessment. In the less successful lessons, pupils are not made aware of what they are expected to achieve, they are all given the same level of work or task to complete, and they have no targets to work towards. This is because the teachers are not setting the work based on the assessment of what pupils have already learnt. In some lessons, because pupils are presented with only one activity to complete, they dictate the pace of the lesson by taking a long time to complete it. Therefore higher ability pupils are not challenged to achieve, while those who experience some difficulties in grasping concepts find the tasks too difficult.

Assessment is inadequate overall. The school has recognised that it needs to develop this in line with national guidelines and has started to implement a consistent approach across the school. Assessment of pupils' attainment and evaluation of their progress are being used effectively in the Early Years and the primary classes to plan the next stage of learning in all subjects, but this has not yet permeated to all areas of the school. Consequently, older pupils do not know how well they are doing or what levels they have attained, and they have no targets to work towards. The school has no overall system in place whereby it can demonstrate the progress pupils make year on year.

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:

- *improve lesson planning, employ effective teaching methods and suitable activities and manage class time wisely (paragraph 1(3)(c));*

- *ensure that teachers have a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior attainments of the pupils, and ensure these are taken into account in the planning of lessons (paragraph 1(3)(d));*
- *ensure that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and that information from such assessment is utilised to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)); and*
- *put in place a framework by which pupil performance can be evaluated by reference to either the school's own aims, as provided to parents and/or, by national norms (paragraph 1(4)).*

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

The overall provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory, although the moral and social strands are the stronger elements.

Pupils' achievements are recognised and celebrated. For example, deserving pupils receive merits each week for good behaviour and hard work. This enables pupils to make significant strides in developing their self-esteem and self-confidence and encourages most pupils to have positive attitudes to learning.

The ethos of the school is based on a strong understanding of acceptable behaviour and of each pupil's responsibility to his or her peers and the school. Pupils respond well to this. They show respect for each other and behave sensibly. They move around the school in a considerate manner, and are courteous to one another and to staff and visitors. More vulnerable pupils are supported and encouraged by others. The small number of pupils from minority ethnic groups are integrated well but there are not enough opportunities to prepare all pupils for living in a multi-ethnic society since pupils do not sufficiently experience other cultures directly.

Many pupils make a valuable contribution to the school community by taking responsibility as prefects and house and form representatives. Assemblies are held, but they do not focus strongly on developing pupils' spiritual awareness. There is little opportunity for reflection.

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 pupils acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures, in a way that promotes tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions.(paragraph 2(e))*

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's policies and practices for pupils' welfare, health and safety are good. Child protection procedures are rigorous and are implemented effectively. All areas of welfare, health and safety are supported by clear and effective policies which make a good contribution to pupils' well-being. The school has comprehensive risk assessment procedures for a wide range of activities including off-site visits. The school has a detailed behaviour and anti-bullying policy. Pupils feel safe and confident that their concerns are listened to and that the rare cases of bullying are dealt with swiftly. The recording of incidents and sanctions meets requirements. The supervision of pupils is excellent. In Nostell, the older pupils are supervised in a supportive manner which does not restrict their opportunities for independence. Arrangements for the registration of admissions and attendance are good. The school has a good First Aid policy; staff are suitably qualified and implement it effectively. The school has not yet undertaken a thorough audit relating to disability access, nor has it produced a detailed written plan that complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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 premises.*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has a suitable number of staff whose qualifications are well matched to the range of the curriculum and to the age range of the pupils for which the school caters. The school carries out Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on staff prior to them starting at the school. The recruitment procedures are satisfactory but the necessary checking of identification and medical fitness of staff prior to their appointment is missing.

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, prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, appropriate checks have been carried out to confirm their identity, medical fitness, previous employment history, character references and, where appropriate, qualifications and professional references and to ensure that the information been taken into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(c)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The buildings in which the school is housed cover a large area and are surrounded by extensive grounds and recreational areas, including playing fields for games. There are suitable safe play areas for younger pupils. The buildings are in good repair and well maintained. Even though the accommodation is satisfactory there are specific weaknesses in each of the three buildings that affect the overall quality of the education.

The Rectory building has been appropriately developed to cater for the children in Early Years and in Years 1 to 4. While the majority of classrooms are of a good size the one currently being used for Year 1 children is too small to allow the organisation of a wide range of activities. Many of the shortcomings are located in Wragby building. This building is too small to support the whole curriculum for the pupils taught in this area, especially those who are in Years 7 and 8. The use of the central hall as a multi-purpose area for information and communication technology, music and physical education as well as assemblies is not appropriate as many of the resources for these subjects are stored around the edges of the room. This raises health and safety issues. In addition there are too few toilets for the pupils located in this building.

The building for older pupils also has some weaknesses. While there are enough classrooms for pupils in Years 9 to 11, there is not enough space to educate those in Years 7 and 8 on the same site. Although there are specialist rooms for design and technology, science and art, they are too small for practical work. This limits some aspects of the curriculum within subjects. The building has no library or food technology facilities, no facilities for the teaching of indoor sport, and no appropriate changing or showering facilities. The dining facilities are limited and do not provide the family dining ethos that the school aspires to. The school does not have a space large enough to meet as a whole for events such as assemblies, concerts or drama productions. There are also no facilities for pupils who are ill.

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:

- having regard to the number, age and needs (including any special needs) of pupils, ensure that all classrooms are appropriate in size to allow effective teaching, and make certain that no areas of the school compromise health and safety (paragraph 5(j));*
- ensure that there are sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs, which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k));*
- ensure that there are appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)); and*

- *make certain that, where food is served, there are adequate facilities for its hygienic preparation, serving and consumption (paragraph 5(m)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides parents and prospective parents with comprehensive and useful information through its parents' information pack, and by way of its prospectus. These documents contain full details of key college policies, including child protection, admissions, discipline and details of the school's curriculum provision. It also informs parents of the further range of policies which they may request to see. Parents are regularly updated by informative newsletters. Interim termly reports are produced for each pupil. These are augmented by further reports at the end of the academic year. These reports are more comprehensive, but they do not always sufficiently specify what the pupils actually know or can do.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a well set out complaints policy which meets all the requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Wakefield Independent School
DfES Number:	384/6116
Type of school:	Day School
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 –16 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 96 Girls: 100 Total:196
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 9 Girls: 4 Total: 13
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,900 – £5,835
Address of school:	The Nostell Centre Doncaster Road Nostell Wakefield WF4 1QG
Telephone number:	01924 865757
Fax number:	01924 865757
Email address:	headatwis@fsmail.net
Headteacher:	Mrs K E Caryl
Proprietor:	Wakefield Independent School Ltd.
Reporting Inspector:	Mr R Cohen
Date of inspection:	20 – 23 November 2006

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