

**Inspection report**  
**Hill House International Junior School**  
**Independent school**  
**DfES ref no: 207/6188**

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

**Dates of inspection: 4 - 7 September 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**

Hill House International Junior School is a large co-educational independent school for children between the ages of 4 and 13 years. There are currently 844 pupils on roll, the majority of whom are of compulsory school age (CSA). Established in Switzerland in 1949, and in London in 1951, the school continues to be led and managed by members of the founding family. It operates from five buildings within a short distance of the main premises in Hans Place in Chelsea, London. Pupils travel between buildings and facilities on foot or by minibus, as appropriate. The school has a purpose-built house in Switzerland which hosts groups of pupils for special courses throughout the year. The school is divided into a number of houses which cater for one or more year groups. Each head of house leads a team of tutors (subject teachers) and senior tutors (teachers who also have responsibility for a group of pupils' pastoral care).

Admission to the school is by interview. Most pupils entering the reception classes have some pre-school experience. The school also admits pupils into other year groups, including those moving to London from schools abroad. All pupils attend on a daily basis. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are supported in gaining proficiency. The school prepares pupils for entry to senior schools after the ages of 11 and 13.

The aims of the school are set out in the prospectus. Central to these is the belief that *'every child has a talent to be discovered and nurtured whether it be academic, artistic or sporting'* and *'each is equally valuable and important in the creation of the unique character of every child'*.

### **Summary of main findings**

This is a good school which successfully reflects its motto that *'a child's mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled'*. It fully meets its aims of preparing pupils for the next stage of their education and adult life. Pupils' personal development is outstanding and they achieve well academically. The school's curriculum succeeds in providing a wide range of interesting activities and the quality of teaching is good. Pupils feel valued and this makes an important contribution to their academic and personal development. The school's high expectations, and its emphasis on the positive encouragement of pupils of all ages and abilities, enable them to gain confidence and to develop mature attitudes to learning. Pupils' achievement in all aspects of their school life is well supported by the hard work and commitment of staff and the dedication of the leadership.

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

- its caring and supportive ethos encourages pupils to achieve their best in all that they do;
- its good teaching and assessment and broad, well-planned curriculum enable pupils to make good progress;
- it provides excellent opportunities for pupils' success in art, music and sport.
- its provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding; and
- it provides high quality pastoral care for pupils.

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

- ensure that policies and practice for the welfare, health and safety of pupils have regard to current Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance;
- ensure that appropriate checks of new staff include confirmation of their medical fitness;
- provide sufficient and suitable washroom facilities for staff and pupils, and appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999;
- provide parents and prospective parents with the required information about the school's policies, procedures and provision; and
- provide and implement a written complaints policy that has regard to all current DfES requirements.

### **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 premises.

### **Next Steps**

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

- implement plans to establish subject leaders to co-ordinate, monitor and develop the curriculum, teaching and learning throughout the school; and
- increase the opportunities for pupils of all ages to develop and use their skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

# COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

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

### The quality of the curriculum

Hill House School provides a good curriculum. The school's motto: *'A child's mind is not a vessel to be filled but a fire to be kindled'* is clearly reflected in the range of opportunities provided. The curriculum is planned with care to offer a broad range of subjects with the firm intention of helping all pupils to develop into well-rounded and confident young people.

Pupils get off to a flying start in reception classes (Small School). Staff provide an interesting and imaginative programme of activities appropriate for the age and stage of pupils' development so that they make rapid progress. The activities set encourage pupils to investigate, be creative and have fun. Personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and mathematical development are planned well to form the core of the curriculum. Plans developing pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world and their creative and physical development are thoughtfully woven into daily activities so that they learn in a stimulating environment where they are very actively involved in their learning. By the end of the reception year, the vast majority of pupils exceed the expected levels for their age.

For pupils aged 5 to 13, the curriculum ensures pupils' linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development. Regular homework consolidates and extends the pupils' learning in class. A high proportion of time is devoted to numeracy, literacy, sport, art and music. Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. As a result, when they leave Hill House, nearly all pupils are successful in gaining entry to the senior school of their first choice. Pupils' artwork is of a high standard and is attractively displayed. The curriculum is enhanced by lessons in French. Pupils' musical talents are enriched in class lessons and, optionally, through instrumental tuition in a wide range of orchestral, keyboard and other instruments. All pupils have at least one hour's taught physical education (PE) each school day. More limited opportunities are provided for pupils to develop and apply their skills in ICT across the curriculum, particularly those under 10.

While the school lacks outside play areas except for the reception classes, sport is a vital part of the curriculum. All pupils take part in regular physical exercise which includes swimming, gym and dance. The school benefits from the use of first-rate sports facilities, which are quickly accessible by the use of the school's fleet of buses. Pupils regularly take part in a wide variety of competitive sports which include tennis, football, hockey, netball and squash. There are a number of choirs and instrumental ensemble groups. Older pupils visit the school's annexe in Switzerland to participate in a range of physical and cultural activities. All this provision improves pupils' confidence and self-esteem, helping to prepare them well for the outside world.

There is an effective system for identifying and assessing the needs of pupils, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. These pupils are well supported.

There is a good programme for personal, social and health education. Pupils are keenly aware of the importance of a healthy diet and enjoy varied lunchtime menus which are of a very high standard. They are developing a good understanding of how to keep fit and safe, and are keen to take responsibility for their actions. The school is helping them to be confident learners, able to make sense of their ever-widening world. Topics such as 'Current affairs' provide good opportunities to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of citizenship, environmental awareness and of how to take part in debate. This ensures that pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education.

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

The quality of teaching is good. The inspection took place at the start of the school year and many pupils were either new to the school or had moved up to a new house.

All members of staff share a clear sense of common purpose and, together, they form a very good team. Adults work within an atmosphere of strong, mutual support and they provide outstanding role models for pupils. Pupils benefit from being taught by many specialist staff who have good subject knowledge; they are enthusiastic about their subjects and convey their love of learning to the pupils. Almost all the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agree that their children benefit from a high standard of teaching.

Where teaching is outstanding, enthusiastic and well-informed teachers provide lively, challenging lessons that fire pupils' imaginations and inspire them to learn more. The best teachers have an outstanding understanding of their pupils' aptitudes and needs. They plan lessons meticulously in order to build upon pupils' previous knowledge. Teachers establish clear routines and use time very well. They make it clear that they expect their pupils to listen to instructions carefully and that time is not to be wasted. Teachers also use vibrant question and answer sessions to consolidate and extend pupils' understanding. Pupils of all ages are actively involved in their learning; they concentrate well and work hard. As a result, pupils of all abilities make good progress.

In good lessons, teachers share their high expectations of pupils' behaviour and several clearly explained the new routines at the start of their lessons. This is time very well spent and gives pupils a good understanding of the expectations placed upon them. Within this secure framework, pupils behave very responsibly and quickly develop into mature, independent learners.

In those lessons where teaching is only satisfactory, time is lost because teachers have not clearly established class routines. Pupils are not sure as to what is expected of them and their restless behaviour is not always addressed promptly. These distractions waste time and can slow the progress and learning of their more committed classmates.

Lessons are well planned and teachers make good use of the available resources. These are of adequate quality, quantity and range, although there are limited

opportunities for staff to use ICT during lessons. This makes it more difficult for teachers to vary their teaching methods. Teachers have a clear understanding of how children learn and pupils who progress more slowly receive carefully targeted additional support. A well-established programme of regular testing ensures that teachers are able to pinpoint their pupils' relative strengths and weaknesses. They use this information very effectively when planning what pupils will learn next. The school itself generates many of the tests, but others originate from commercial organisations or the receiving schools themselves.

The system for tracking pupils' progress is effective. As pupils progress through the school, they spend between one and three years at each of the five houses. Senior tutors are responsible for monitoring the personal and academic development of pupils within their designated year group. Along with the heads of houses, they are responsible for briefing receiving teachers as pupils move between year groups and houses. Overall, this system works well, but occasionally the momentum in pupils' learning from one year group to the next is not maintained. This is because receiving teachers' methods and expectations of what pupils can achieve are not always sufficiently challenging.

One of the school's stated aims is to prepare pupils for their next school and it does this very effectively. The curriculum and teachers' planning are entirely focussed on preparing pupils for entry to their senior schools after the ages of 11 and 13. Senior staff maintain regular contact with receiving schools. Analysis of pupils' examination performance informs curriculum planning for subsequent years. The school's success is reflected in the fact that virtually all pupils gain entry to the school of their first choice. This is a testament to teachers' skills, as well as the rigour and flexibility of the school's systems for assessment, tracking and planning.

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

Yes.

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

The provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding. The school's ethos is evident in all that it does. Parents say that their children really enjoy coming to school and the pupils agree. The attention given to pupils' spiritual development is a strong influence on their acquisition of a set of values and beliefs. All pupils are provided with regular opportunities to develop their self-knowledge and respect for others. For example, they develop a sense of awe and wonder as they listen to professional musicians playing a wide range of instruments.

The school promotes an excellent understanding of moral principles that allow pupils to tell right from wrong. Good achievement, exemplary behaviour and helpfulness are recognised, for example, through the award of merit points at the end of each lesson. Good use is made of whole school assemblies to illustrate particular moral issues so that pupils develop a clear awareness of the effect their actions have on themselves and others.

Pupils' social development is outstanding. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils, who show each other mutual respect and kindness and help and encourage one another. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to co-operate and they are very willing to take on responsibilities, performing their duties diligently. The very strong emphasis on the development of good speaking and listening helps pupils develop good communication skills and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. Regular participation in team games and school productions gives pupils very good opportunities to live harmoniously.

Provision for pupils' cultural development is outstanding. Staff, parents and pupils work well together in a very positive atmosphere. The day-to-day life of Hill House School is enormously enriched by the presence of pupils from around the world. Music lessons, together with regular opportunities for performance, make an outstanding contribution to their development. In art, pupils are gaining an understanding of a variety of techniques and styles. Pupils participate in the richness of world cultures through geography, French and assemblies. Regular visits to the school's base in Switzerland, where pupils participate in a wide range of activities including skiing, help to promote awareness of other lifestyles. The school's charity work highlights the role the pupils can play in the local and wider community.

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

Yes.

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

On a day-to-day basis, the school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. Staff know their pupils well and take an active interest in each individual's welfare and progress. The school's high quality pastoral provision, managed by senior tutors who each have responsibility for between 50 and 60 pupils, successfully reflects the school's founding ethos. Relationships between staff and pupils are outstanding. Pupils are enthusiastic about coming to school and respond well to the established routines and full timetables they follow. In discussion, pupils say that the staff are approachable and responsive, and that they appreciate the mutual respect and friendly atmosphere that underpins lessons and other activities.

There are effective arrangements for the induction of new pupils. Tutors promptly identify an individual's particular needs and respond appropriately to them. For older pupils, residential visits to the school's annexe in Switzerland are central to developing relationships, teamwork and trust. Communication between staff is efficient and effective, and tutors meet regularly with their colleagues to discuss and resolve any concerns, keeping in regular touch with parents as necessary.

Each head of house provides their staff with guidance about health and safety, First Aid, child protection, behaviour, sanctions and rewards and the prevention of bullying, but there are no agreed whole-school policies in these areas that consistently reflect current DfES guidance. Although senior staff meet to discuss

and review day-to-day practice, the school does not have effective arrangements for regularly monitoring, reviewing and revising its policies.

Pupils consider the school's use of sanctions and rewards to be fair and reasonable. Merit marks in lessons, leading to fortnightly awards, celebrate pupils' efforts and personal progress. These help to promote their confidence and sense of responsibility successfully, and are reinforced by high expectations. The supervision of pupils, both in school and when moving between sites, is of a high standard. There are effective procedures for making risk assessments for educational visits.

Pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They move around the school in a sensible and safe manner. Exceptionally, where pupils' behaviour falls short of the school's high expectations, staff take prompt and appropriate action. Senior tutors maintain detailed records and involve parents, where necessary. The school has not excluded any pupil in the last reporting period.

The admission register complies with statutory requirements. Tutors systematically take attendance registers at the start of each session. Staff follow up pupil absences promptly.

Fire alarms are regularly tested, and include periodic, timed evacuations of the school buildings. Extinguishers and emergency exit signs are inspected and maintained by specialist companies and the Fire Officer's recommendations have been acted upon promptly. The school does not currently have any pupils on roll with physical disabilities and has not yet undertaken a detailed survey of its accommodation in order to draw up a comprehensive three-year access plan under the DDA.

***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:*

- *prepare and implement a written policy to prevent bullying which has regard to the DfES guidance: 'Bullying: don't suffer in silence' (paragraph 3(2)(a));*
- *prepare and implement a written policy to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DfES guidance 'Safeguarding Children in Education' (paragraph 3(2)(b));*
- *prepare and implement a written policy to promote good behaviour amongst pupils which sets out the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 3(2)(d));*
- *ensure that health and safety procedures have regard to the DfES guidance 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and Powers' (paragraph 3(4)); and*
- *prepare and implement a written policy for First Aid (paragraph 3(6)).*



**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 established suitable procedures for ensuring that, prior to them taking up their responsibilities, all new teaching and non-teaching staff are checked with the appropriate authority to verify their suitability to work with children. Although the school is aware of its responsibilities with respect to most aspects of the requirements, procedures for checking the medical fitness of staff to undertake their duties are not in place.

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

*The school complies with 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 appropriate checks of new staff include confirmation of their medical fitness (paragraph 4(c)).*

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

The school's accommodation is in good condition and provides appropriate facilities for the number and needs of its pupils. A regular programme of refurbishment and redecoration provides suitable teaching accommodation, including specialist facilities for the sciences, art and music. There is one ICT suite, equipped with an interactive whiteboard, at the Hans Place site. There are appropriate library facilities in each building. The school makes good use of high quality specialist sports facilities.

The majority of teaching rooms are of adequate size for the number of pupils using them, suitably furnished and equipped, and maintained in a tidy and clean manner. The quality of lighting and ventilation in classrooms is satisfactory. Heads of houses monitor health and safety matters within their buildings and the management responds promptly to any concerns. In the latest statutory inspection of the school's catering facilities, all criteria were met.

Pupils in the reception classes have regular access to an all-weather area adjacent to their classrooms. Other sites do not have their own playground and grassed areas. However, all pupils are timetabled for at least one hour's PE per day at a variety of easily accessed sports facilities.

Toilet facilities are well maintained and suitably ventilated. There are adequate numbers of sanitary fittings and washbasins for the numbers of pupils currently on roll at some, but not all, of the houses. There is a suitable number of washrooms for

staff but some of the washbasins for both staff and pupils lack a hot water supply. The school provides suitable facilities for pupils who are ill at some, but not all, of its houses.

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

*The school meets most, but not all, 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 all washbasins have an adequate supply of hot water in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(a));*
- *ensure that there are sufficient sanitary fittings and washrooms for all pupils which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k)); and*
- *provide appropriate facilities for all 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 communicates satisfactorily with parents. It is not entirely clear about all the information that it is required to provide to all parents, and prospective parents, and how this should be distributed.

The prospectus clearly explains the school's aims, ethos and organisation, and provides good information about the taught curriculum together with the sporting and musical opportunities available to pupils. However, the prospectus and other documents do not provide parents and prospective parents with all the required information on the school's policies, procedures and provision.

The quality of reports to parents is good. The school provides parents with an annual progress report, with older pupils receiving reports in December and July each year. These reports provide detailed and helpful information about pupils' levels of effort and attainment, and include advice on the next steps in their learning. Tutors' comments, whilst clear about areas for improvement, are positive and encouraging. In addition to these written reports, all parents are invited to meet their children's tutors once a year. The majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school keeps them well informed about the progress being made by their children but a significant minority said they would like to be better informed. Those parents who wish to discuss their child's progress at other times are invited to make an appointment to see their child's senior tutor. In preparation for these meetings, subject tutors provide senior tutors with written comments.

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

*The school meets most, but not all, 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:*

- *provide parents and prospective parents with particulars of:*
  - *the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e));*
  - *educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f));*  
*and*
- *make available and ensure that parents and prospective parents are aware that they may request:*
  - *particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h));*
  - *details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).*

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

The school's procedures do not meet requirements. It does not have a written complaints procedure. At present, parents discuss any concerns with senior tutors and these are passed to heads of houses and other members of the leadership team, where necessary. Although the majority of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire said they were familiar with the school's procedures for handling complaints, a significant minority of parents indicated that they were not. Similarly, whilst the most parents said they were comfortable about approaching the college with questions, suggestions or problems, a minority were not.

**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;*

- *prepare and implement a written complaints procedure (paragraph 7(a));*
- *ensure that it is available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 7(b));*

- *set out clear timescales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c));*
- *allow for complaints to be made and considered initially on an informal basis (paragraph 7(d));*
- *provide for a formal complaint to be made in writing if parents are not satisfied with the response to an informal complaint (paragraph 7(e));*
- *make provision, if the parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));*
- *provide, where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, for one person on the panel to be independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g));*
- *allow for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h));*
- *provide for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulate that the complainant, proprietors and headteacher, and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i));*
- *provide for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)); and*
- *ensure that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

## SCHOOL DETAILS

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| Name of school:  | Hill House International Junior School |
| DfES Number:   | 207/6188                               |
| Type of school:  | Preparatory                            |
| Status:  | Independent                            |
| Age range of pupils:   | 4 - 13 years                           |
| Gender of pupils:  | Mixed                                  |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils):                             | Boys: 520    Girls: 324    Total: 844  |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need: | Boys: 1    Girls: 0    Total: 1        |
| Annual fees (day pupils):                                      | £7,200 - £9,000                        |
| Address of school:   | 17 Hans Place<br>London<br>SW1X 0EP    |
| Telephone number:  | 020 7584 1331                          |
| Fax number:  | 020 7591 3938                          |
| Headteacher:   | Richard Townend                        |
| Proprietors:   | Richard and Janet Townend              |
| Reporting Inspector:   | Michael Best                           |
| Date of inspection:  | 4 - 7 September 2006                   |

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