



The River School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES registration number	885/6030
Unique reference number	117041
Inspection number	296891
Inspection dates	1-2 March 2007
Reporting inspector	Peter R. Jones AI

Inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

Age group 3-16	Published 28 March 2007	Reference no. 296891
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The River School was founded in 1985 and is a Christian school managed by the Worcester Christian Education Trust. There are 123 boys and girls on roll, aged from 4 to 16 years. The Brook Nursery, which is part of the school with 24 children on roll, moved recently from a separate site some distance away onto the school site. The inspection of this provision is reported at the end of this report. The school does not select pupils according to their ability or religious affiliation. Pupils are of mixed ability and the school's policy aims to give access to pupils from a range of social backgrounds. The school sees the Bible as the basis for its educational philosophy and practice. A total of 34 pupils have special educational needs, and one has a statement.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education and pupils make good progress. The good curriculum and quality of teaching ensure that pupils achieve good standards throughout the school. The great majority of parents are positive about the school and value the support their children receive. As one parent put it: *'Each child is treated as an individual'*. This is reflected in the school's provision for the personal development of pupils. The school complies with nearly all the independent school regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils. The quality of the curriculum for Key Stages 1 and 2 is good. Emphasis is placed on English, mathematics, science and this is enhanced by a range of additional subjects. Rather than religious education, pupils have Bible study. The impact of the emphasis on literacy and numeracy is evident across the lower school, for example, in the good standards of writing and mathematics.

In the lower school pupils are provided with good opportunities to learn a suitably wide range of skills and develop their knowledge through a range of interesting experiences, such as gardening. There is a good balance between academic and sporting activities. However the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the curriculum is not well

developed, and staff are not all aware of what ICT resources are available or how to use them.

The curriculum at Key Stage 3 provides suitable experiences. Provision for music and design and technology is disrupted this year in Key Stage 3 and ICT is not well developed. The Key Stage 4 curriculum, and the way it is taught, generally match pupils' needs. All pupils take GCSE English, mathematics and science as well as religious studies, and are offered a reasonable choice of other GCSE subjects. Vocational pathways are limited to non-award bearing courses and the school is rightly considering appropriate forms of accreditation to meet the full range of pupils' ability and aspirations. The provision for pupils' personal, social and health education (PSHE) is good, and is integral to the whole curriculum across the school.

Teaching and assessment are good in meeting the full range of pupils' needs. The quality of teaching in the lower school is good. The knowledge that staff have of each pupil's abilities is good and underpins the good learning that takes place. Teachers make use of a good range of methods and resources in the main, but ICT is not always used effectively to promote pupils' learning. Learning assistants and care staff work very closely with teachers and make a valuable contribution to both the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. They have good relationships with the pupils and know them well. Teaching makes good provision for pupils with learning difficulties.

In the upper school, teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use it well to engage pupils in discussion and encourage them to form opinions. Teachers work hard to reinforce pupils' understanding of ideas and concepts. The use of questioning and encouragement to participate is a strength in upper school teaching; for example, in a Key Stage 3 French lesson a word game was used to ensure that each pupil had the chance to improve their speaking and listening skills. In some lessons, the impact of good teaching is limited by the lack of up-to-date teaching equipment and technology. In science, the lack of a fume cupboard limits the range of demonstrations and experiments.

Teachers know their pupils well, successfully assess how they respond to their daily targets and tasks, and conduct tests to monitor their progress. The school is beginning to co-ordinate marking and assessment systems to make better use of the information gathered, so that tracking pupil progress over time and reporting to parents becomes more effective. In Key Stage 4 good use is made of GCSE assessment schemes to help pupils achieve results which are well above national averages.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes good provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils have positive attitudes, attend well and enjoy school. Their behaviour is good and they are generally considerate and thoughtful. The provision for moral development is supported very effectively by the school's behaviour policy. This is known to all and woven through all aspects of the school day. It helps pupils to make appropriate choices and distinguish between right and wrong. Many of the classroom activities in the lower school encourage pupils to work cooperatively in groups, in pairs or on their own. Pupils have many opportunities in lessons for reflection on ideas, experiences and moral issues. In a Year 9 lesson, a discussion on scientific experimentation on animals, allowed pupils scope to form and express views and challenge others. Reflective times during lower school assemblies enable pupils to give thanks and to consider the needs of others, although in senior assemblies there is not always enough opportunity for participation by pupils.

Cultural development is provided for well, and pupils' awareness of multicultural issues is developed with an emphasis on tolerance and harmony between cultural and religious traditions, with art lessons giving good aesthetic and cultural experience. The high standards achieved in GCSE examinations, and the focus on the development of good social skills and moral behaviour contribute effectively to preparing pupils for future economic well-being. The school has good links with the local sixth form college, to which many of their pupils progress, and with the local Connexions service. Pupils make a good contribution to the community through fund-raising and support for charities. Some of the older pupils indicate that they would like to be given more responsibilities and to have a greater say in the organisation of the school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory with some good features. The ethos of the school successfully promotes a sense of mutual support and respect. Staff are committed to ensuring the day-to-day well-being of their pupils. The supervision of pupils is good and the behaviour policy clearly sets out rewards and sanctions. Pupils feel safe in the school and they know who to turn to if they are troubled. Most of the essential policies and procedures have been established in line with current legislation, but staff training on child protection and the policies on child protection and out-of-school visits are out of date. There is some encouragement of healthy eating at mealtimes and snack times, particularly in the lower school, but there is limited provision for extra-curricular games to promote physical fitness and missed opportunities in cookery lessons to learn about healthy diets.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school keeps a central record of details about members of staff and always takes steps to ensure that staff have Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and other checks before confirming their appointments.

The school's premises and accommodation

Premises and accommodation are of a satisfactory standard. The school is set in a Grade 2 listed building in spacious grounds which provide a pleasant environment for learning. The classrooms are generally fit for purpose although some of them are small, and accommodation for science is limited. The art room block is dilapidated and has limited space for three dimensional work and the school has plans to replace it. In the main hall, which is spacious and well used, a leaking roof is responsible for the unpleasant smell of dampness.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information provided for parents and prospective parents is satisfactory. The school provides clear information about its ethos and the curriculum it follows. The majority of parents feel they are kept well informed about their child's progress, but some express the view that they need to be better informed about the progress their children are making.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has recently updated its complaints procedure, which now meets current regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

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

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children at the school (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare and implement a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school (paragraph 3(2)(c)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- ensure that all the school buildings provide reasonable resistance to penetration by rain, snow, wind and moisture from the ground (paragraph 5(f)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improve the co-ordination of assessment across the school
- provide additional opportunities for pupils to use ICT to improve their learning
- ensure the provision for musical and technological experience in Key Stage 3 builds appropriately on Key Stage 2 experiences.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good. Well planned, rewarding topics and lessons, with achievable learning outcomes, promote children's progress. Plans incorporate differentiation to ensure effective support for children with learning difficulties or disabilities, or who speak English as an additional language.

Children are eager to learn, readily contributing to lessons as a result of the staff's good interactions and use of practical activities. Children's letter recognition and early writing are developing well. They count confidently and attempt simple number operations when buying items from the classroom 'shop'. They recognise patterns and shapes and have an awareness of time.

Children's independence is fostered, especially at snack time. They are inquisitive, relishing being outside, where they garden, explore and climb. Children throw and catch with increasing skill. They are energetic, but lack of challenging indoor apparatus and wheeled toys inhibits their progress. Children

express themselves imaginatively through detailed drawings, role play, dressing up and exploration of sounds and materials.

Nursery children's progress is consistently observed and summarised. Parents contribute to their child's record. In Reception, sufficient evidence is gathered to demonstrate children's skills, but assessments are not yet cross referenced to the early learning goals.

Children appreciate diversity, as they learn about disability and aspects of other people's lives. Resources reflect positive images and children's home languages are acknowledged. Children behave and interact well, responding to the school's Christian values which underpin all they do. Children are helpful and polite. Staff are kind and caring, valuing children's efforts and calmly managing any misbehaviour. Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered.

Partnership with parents and carers is good. They are warmly welcomed, coming in to settle their children and exchange information. They contribute to their children's learning, and discuss their progress at parents' evenings. Parents are given details of forthcoming topics, but receive limited information about the Foundation Stage.

The leadership and management of funded children is good. Teachers and assistants effectively promote children's learning. Learning environments are inviting, sessions are well organised and generally well resourced. The quality of the children's nursery education is maintained as a result of regular evaluations of activities and the nursery's ongoing review of good practice. Children benefit from staff accessing training and a commitment to improvement, including increased use of the school's grounds. Overall children's needs are met.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality of nursery education further the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- improve children's access to more challenging wheeled toys and indoor physical play apparatus
- improve consistency in recording reception children's progress in relation to the early learning goals

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- provide parents with an explanation of the intentions of the Foundation Stage and the six areas of learning.

School details

Name of school	The River School		
DfES number	885/6030		
Unique reference number	117041		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY260328		
Type of school	Christian independent		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1985		
Age range of pupils	3-16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 68	Girls: 55	Total: 123
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 12	Girls: 13	Total: 25
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 12	Girls: 12	Total: 24
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 3420		
Address of school	Oakfield House Droitwich Road Worcester Worcestershire WR3 7ST		
Telephone number	01905457047		
Fax number	01905754492		
Email address	info@riverschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr Timothy Crow		
Proprietor	Worcester Christian Education Trust		
Reporting inspector	Mr Peter Jones AI		
Childcare inspector	Rachel Wyatt CCI		
Dates of inspection	1-2 March 2007		