

Inspection report

Wimbledon Common Preparatory School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 315/6062

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

Wimbledon Common Preparatory school is located close to Wimbledon Common and occupies a large house with a playground and a garden, set back from a busy main road. Its ethos is based on non-denominational Christian principles although it welcomes boys from other faiths. The school is non-selective. There are 129 boys who are mostly of white British origin, but there are also some from other ethnic groups. There are no boys identified as having special educational needs.

The school strives to create a friendly nurturing environment, where each boy is seen as an individual, based on its motto of '*Industry with cheerfulness*'. There are eight classes with up to 20 boys in a class. The aim is to give boys a sound academic foundation, thereby gaining entry to a range of preparatory schools in London. The school has been owned privately until July 2006 when it was bought by the Corporation of Kings' College School..

Summary of main findings

The school achieves its primary aim of preparing boys well in the basic skills of mathematics and English for their next phase of education. With small class sizes and good support from parents, boys make good progress. New boys settle quickly and happily. Behaviour is very good.

The curriculum is broad and, over the year as a whole, well balanced, except for the provision in information and communication technology (ICT), which is limited. Teaching is good and boys generally do well in the entrance examinations for which they are prepared. Though the standard of individual welfare is good, policies relating to this aspect need to be more systematically implemented. The accommodation is satisfactory overall but cramped in some aspects.

What the school does well:

- it enables boys to make good progress in English and mathematics;
- it promotes good behaviour and attitudes to learning;
- it creates a happy and friendly atmosphere for boys to thrive; and

- it promotes its motto successfully, so that boys are cheerful and enjoy coming to school.

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

- ensure that the designated child protection officer and all staff receive appropriate training to comply with current guidance;
- implement its policy relating to external visits and activities;
- ensure that all classrooms are appropriate in size to allow effective teaching;
- ensure there are sufficient washrooms for pupils;
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill; and
- ensure that parents and prospective parents are made aware of the school's complaints procedure.

Next Steps

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

- give stronger emphasis to the use of ICT; and
- enhance access to equipment and resources, such as sand and water, for investigations and structured play.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school offers a sound and balanced curriculum which enables boys to make good progress, particularly in the core subjects of English and mathematics, where most reach levels which are beyond the expectation for their age. All other subjects are taught, but limited emphasis is given to the development of ICT skills.

There is a brief curriculum outline in the school prospectus which lists the subjects taught. The teaching is based on schemes of work which are more detailed for English and mathematics. There are documents to support progression and continuity in the teaching of other subjects. These schemes are supplemented by plans of work for each year group which contain some detail on the use of resources and teaching methods.

There is also a scheme of work for personal, social and health education (PSHE). While there are no discrete lessons for PSHE, elements are taught in science and assemblies; other aspects are taught as they arise naturally.

Entrance to the school at four is by interview and is non-selective. Subsequent entrance is by interview and informal examination. The school does not have comprehensive information about boys' prior attainment although records from previous schools are obtained. The school teaches more academic subjects in the longer morning sessions, with time for creative aspects in the afternoons. There is a strong focus on examination preparation in the autumn term for the older boys, with a wider curriculum in the second half of the school year.

There is a reasonable range of extra-curricular provision, particularly relating to music, and supported by other areas including sport and art. There are competitive football and cricket fixtures against other local schools, which boys relish. A multi-sports programme is offered through the year and there are holiday sports clubs; sports trophies are awarded. There is a club for art and many boys take advantage of the music tuition which is available.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is good. In the lessons observed, none was inadequate, while two thirds were of good quality, including one outstanding lesson. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is a strength.

Boys develop fluency in the four rules of arithmetic. They are also encouraged to write creatively with good attention to presentation, content and grammar. For example, in English, the youngest boys write letters to Santa and 'finger space' between words to improve their written presentation. Teachers make very good use of question and answer sessions to ensure boys have understood, as well as providing them with the opportunity to contribute their own ideas and knowledge.

Boys appreciate their teachers. A musically talented teacher enabled boys to make outstanding progress in singing hymns tunefully. The enthusiasm they bring to their learning also contributes to their achievement. On one occasion, the youngest boys were engrossed in practical activities of their own choosing, requiring the teacher to intervene by saying: *'I'm sorry, boys, you will have to put all that away now, it's time for play!'*

Relationships between boys are very good. Whilst they readily suggest answers, sometimes competitively, they do so safe in the knowledge that they will not be teased if they are wrong. When provided with opportunities to work collaboratively, they show considerable maturity, for example, in rehearsals for their Christmas performance. Even though the attention of some boys occasionally wanders, they seldom interfere with the learning of others.

The teachers' subject knowledge is good in most subjects, apart from in ICT. The quality of teaching is enhanced by specialist expertise in physical education and games. Typically, teachers move around the class to monitor boys and give appropriate praise and support. Classroom assistants work well with teachers and are particularly effective in supporting boys in reading. Where space allows, teachers make good use of whole class, small group, pair and individual work. In the smallest classrooms there is too little room to offer much practical activity.

Teamwork is effective, for example in drama where teachers work collaboratively and combine their classes. Whilst this provides an awareness of the quality of teaching among peers, the formal monitoring of teaching and learning is underdeveloped, particularly since the headteacher has a full-time teaching commitment as well as offering extra-curricular music lessons.

The quality of planning is satisfactory and most teachers use half-termly plans to guide their lessons. Assessment of learning in literacy and numeracy is good and teachers keep comprehensive personalised records. Whilst this method promotes effective planning, there is no central storage of assessment information to monitor overall progress systematically.

The resources for literacy and numeracy are of reasonable quality and quantity and are used effectively. Resources for other subjects are satisfactory with the exception of ICT. The lack of computers in some classrooms and the absence of access to the internet reduces the range of teaching and learning opportunities available to teachers and boys. Similarly the lack of opportunities for sand and water play for the youngest boys restricts practical activities. Classroom walls are frequently adorned with boys' work, indicating how their achievements are valued.

The work done by boys is marked regularly and marking often includes encouraging comments as well as specific guidance as to how to improve. Evidence from boys' books, with many pages completed without error, suggests that sometimes the work is too easy for some boys. Typically, all the boys are provided with the same work in lessons although expectations of completion are different as are levels of support provided.

The school has a comprehensive record of boys' subsequent schools. About half the boys go to a prestigious local school with demanding entry criteria, a third to another local school, and small numbers to eight other schools. The aspirations of most parents for their sons' subsequent education are achieved.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of boys is good, with some strong aspects. Boys report that they are happy at the school and enjoy the range of activities available. They feel that bullying is rare but dealt with effectively when it occurs.

Spiritual development is promoted with daily prayers and grace before lunch. Hymn practice is a regular feature of the weekly assemblies and boys learn to sing well. Adults from other communities occasionally take an assembly and there are lessons in religious education to promote a wider awareness of other faiths.

Moral education is strongly promoted in the daily life of the school, as well as in PSHE so that boys develop a good sense of right and wrong. Charity collections are made. The harvest collection was for a local homeless shelter and money has also been collected for a national children's charity who visit the school. Cultural awareness is supported with external visits to galleries, museums and a local farm. Posters on festivals such as Diwali are displayed in classrooms. There are regular drama productions. During the inspection, each year group was preparing a Christmas production.

The PSHE scheme includes life skills, cultural awareness, respect and caring, and personal health and safety. Health education is also included in the science curriculum. There are opportunities for boys to take responsibilities such as form duties and monitor positions. This helps to develop their social awareness but opportunities to develop independence and use initiative are sometimes missed. Behaviour in the school is very good. There are relatively few misdemeanours and these are dealt with effectively. There is a reward system with a 'gold' book for younger boys, while older boys are awarded colours for their work and behaviour.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for boys' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The care and concern afforded to each boy is good. The small size of classes means that they receive good levels of attention and supervision from staff. However, some policies need to be implemented more systematically.

The school, with its new proprietor, is in the process of reviewing its policies and procedures; some do not meet requirements. Though there is a nominated person

for child protection matters, the relevant training has yet to be completed. The supervision of boys on-site is appropriate at all times but risk assessments are not routinely undertaken for off-site visits.

Regard for health and safety is supported by a suitable policy. There are secure procedures to record fire-alarm testing, fire drills and regular electrical tests. The most recent fire report has identified some risks and plans are in hand to address these areas. Access to fire extinguishers is sometimes obstructed due to storage limitations. There is good provision for First Aid, supported by a recently revised policy and appropriately qualified staff.

Attendance and admission registers are maintained correctly. Accidents and incidents are properly recorded. The school's behaviour policy is clear and effective. Following an audit, the school has recently devised a plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but two of the regulations.

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 the designated child protection officer and all staff receive appropriate training to comply with current guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)); and*
- *implement its policy relating to external visits and activities (paragraph 3(2)(c)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has suitably qualified and experienced teachers and teaching assistants. There are thorough procedures for checking staff before they take up their appointment. Character references and professional references are also sought. Staff are informed that their appointment depends on gaining enhanced clearance from the Criminal Records Bureau. Relevant documents and copies of evidence used for staff selection are stored securely in staff files held centrally.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is housed in a large family home built in the late 19th century. The building is suitable for its purpose, although there are some shortfalls in the accommodation. The teaching areas are located on three floors and comprise eight classrooms, a music room and a small hall used for physical education and assemblies. Teachers make good use of the classrooms, some of which have limited space for storage and resources. The rooms are of varying size and one

classroom is too small for the number of boys currently in the class. There are insufficient toilets. Facilities for boys who become ill during the day are unsuitable because there is no ready access to a wash-basin or toilet.

The playground is a good size for safe play and is also used well to support physical education and games lessons. The boys also have access to a small grassed area, which is being developed to rectify the lack of large play equipment. The school makes good use of the excellent playing facilities of its neighbouring school. The premises are generally well maintained, although some exterior window frames require attention. The new proprietor has plans to refurbish the building, provide more computers and install central heating.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that all classrooms are appropriate in size to allow effective teaching (paragraph 5(j));*
- *ensure there are sufficient washrooms for pupils (paragraph 5(k)); and*
- *provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school prospectus is brief and contains limited information, including an overall curriculum statement. It is supplemented by newsletters which provide a range of useful information, though a reference to the complaints policy has been omitted. A high percentage of parents reported that they were not aware of the complaints policy. A new prospectus is being prepared with the intention of supplying all the necessary information in a more comprehensive format.

The school provides two reports a year on boys' progress but some do not contain grades for effort and attainment. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires almost a third of the 77 parents who responded said that they did not feel well informed about their sons' progress. However, there is an annual meeting for parents to discuss their sons' progress and at other times as necessary. The responses in the parental questionnaire were positive, with over three fifths strongly agreeing that their sons like the school and make good progress through good teaching.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one regulation.

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 parents and prospective parents are made aware of the school's complaints procedure (paragraph 6(2)(j)).*

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

There is a recently devised complaints policy, amended in October 2006. The policy is common to the several schools owned by the proprietor. It would be helpful to ensure the details relate more directly to this school. There are several stages: informal and formal resolution, as well as access to a panel hearing by a named person independent of the school. Timescales are set out and the school plans to keep a written record of all formal complaints since the policy was introduced.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Wimbledon Common Preparatory
DfES Number:	315/6062
Type of school:	Pre-preparatory
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	4 - 8 years
Gender of pupils:	Male
Number on roll:	129
Annual fees:	£5,070 - £5,550
Address of school:	113 Ridgway Wimbledon London SW19 4TA
Telephone number:	0208 946 1001
Fax number:	0208 946 1001
Email address:	Info@wimbledoncommon.prep.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr Neil J Worsey
Proprietor:	The Corporation of Kings' College School
Reporting Inspector:	Mr R Kapadia HMI
Date of inspection:	27 - 30 November 2006

© Crown copyright 2006. This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

School inspection reports are available on the Ofsted website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

The website lists Ofsted independent school inspection reports, together with information on the work Ofsted does in the independent sector.