



Brackenfield School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	815/6027
Unique Reference Number	121757
Inspection number	301550
Inspection dates	30-31 January 2007
Reporting inspector	Martin Newell

This 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).

Age group 2-11	Published 23 February 2007	Reference no. 301550
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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

Brackenfield School is a co-educational preparatory school providing for children aged from two to eleven years old. There are currently 164 pupils on roll. The school was established in 1977 and is accommodated in a large Victorian house built in the 1890s, although there have been more modern additions to the building. The school is located on the edge of the town of Harrogate and overlooks its own playing fields and open countryside. The school aims to 'make children happy and confident, to make the most of individual talents and for every child to leave the school with high self-esteem, ready for the next challenge.' The school's early years provision was inspected in 2005 and its childcare provision in 2006.

Evaluation of the school

Both parents and pupils speak highly of Brackenfield School and are fully justified in their views because it is a good school. It meets most, but not all, of the regulations. The individuality of pupils is recognised and celebrated. The good quality of education and care provided enables pupils to progress well and leave the school as highly motivated, confident and high achieving individuals who are more than ready to face the next challenge in their educational lives.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum that enables pupils to thoroughly enjoy their learning. Pupils get off to a good start in the pre-Nursery, Nursery and Reception classes because they are provided with a stimulating range of learning experiences. A good balance is struck between the direct teaching of key skills and plenty of opportunities for young pupils to learn through hands-on, practical learning experiences. From this early age the seeds of development as independent learners are planted and are nurtured as pupils progress through the school. By the age of eleven, pupils are very adept at carrying out independent study and research and have well developed investigative and problem solving skills in addition to their strong literacy and numeracy skills.

The curriculum is wide and varied and a strong emphasis is given to drama and the performing arts. Pupils are given the opportunity to play a musical

instrument, ranging from the cello to drums, and many pupils are accomplished musicians. Pupils perform regularly both in school and in local and regional competitions and festivals. French is taught from Nursery to Year 6 and Spanish tuition has recently begun. The school has introduced a more systematic approach to the teaching and provision of design and technology but over time this has not been the case and pupils' skills in this area of the curriculum are not as strong as they could be.

The school goes the extra-mile to provide a wide array of enrichment opportunities. Pupils go on visits to museums, art galleries and places of historical interest as well as residential visits to London, Edinburgh and France. Lunchtime and after-school clubs include chess, judo, yoga and gardening, as well as sporting activities, and pupils are regular participants in inter-school competitions and galas. All of these activities add greatly to pupils' enjoyment of school as well as enhancing their social and academic development. They also bring an added dimension to helping pupils develop a strong awareness of keeping fit, safe and healthy and to make a telling contribution to the school and wider community.

Teaching is good and is a significant factor in pupils' good achievement. Across the school, teachers plan well and ensure that work is well matched to the differing abilities of the pupils. Teachers use their subject creatively to motivate and enthuse the pupils and help to bring learning springing to life. In response, pupils are only too ready to rise to the challenges that are set. The excellent questioning techniques that teachers use keep pupils on their toes as well as deepening their understanding. Lessons are often packed with pace and the excellent relationships between adults and pupils help to create a very positive and nurturing learning environment where pupils flourish. Just occasionally, when teaching is not as strong, teachers' use of language is not as precise as it could be or expectations as to how well pupils listen to others are not high enough. However, such instances are the exception rather than the norm. Good use is made of teachers' individual skills to teach classes other than their own and the school brings in sports coaches and peripatetic music teachers to further enhance the quality of pupils' learning experiences.

Individual teachers have a good grasp of the progress that pupils in their class are making through their effective assessment procedures. However, the school does not yet collate all the available assessment information to gain an incisive overview of progress and achievement or to ascertain where for example progress may be the strongest and how much added value the school provides. The school has already identified this as an area for improvement and has started to tackle the issue.

Inspection evidence clearly indicates that the vibrant curriculum, the good quality teaching and the infectious enthusiasm and motivation of the pupils are

a winning combination that help to ensure that pupils make good progress, achieve well and attain high standards.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding and they are exemplary ambassadors for the school. They are extremely polite, courteous and highly motivated individuals who demonstrate a fervent desire to do well. Pupils approach all aspects of school life with great enthusiasm and their love of school is reflected in the high levels of attendance. Pupils have a very strong sense of what is right and wrong and genuinely look out for one another. Pupils are reflective and show high levels of concern for and interest in those less fortunate than themselves. This is demonstrated in their readiness, with no prompting from adults, to instigate fund-raising activities for charities. Pupils' literacy, numeracy and decision making skills are very well developed and these together with their confidence in expressing themselves in a confident but sensitive manner are all skills that equip them well for future life. The school council gives the pupils a genuine voice in school and they have played their part in improving resources and equipment. Pupils' cultural development is heightened by visits to galleries, to the theatre, to the ballet and their participation in many musical activities. Pupils learn much about different world faiths and cultures and links have been made with other countries such as France and Japan. Visits from people of different faiths or to their places of worship are more limited.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision made for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. All staff show high levels of commitment in ensuring the welfare of all pupils. Good quality policies are in place to promote the health and safety of pupils. Established risk assessments take place for most activities in school and for all visits out of school. Procedures for child protection are known and followed by staff. Staff supervise pupils well and pupils state that they feel safe and valued in school. Discussions with pupils indicate that bullying is a very rare occurrence and they are quick to point out that 'behaviour is great' and that there is always someone to talk to if they are worried. The excellent behaviour of pupils means that the sanctions in the school's well-structured behaviour policy are rarely put into action. They recognise the importance of eating healthily and participating in physical activities. As a result, pupils routinely enjoy healthy lifestyles and confidently adopt practices and learn enthusiastically about what is needed to ensure their own safety. The school runs drug awareness evenings for parents so that the school and parents can work together in ensuring the safety and well-being of their children.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Although almost all staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB), there are two instances where the school is not able to produce the required evidence of the documentation to confirm this. In one further case an appointment has been confirmed in advance of receipt of CRB clearance. The school is already taking steps to deal with these issues.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are good and add to the quality of pupils' learning experiences. The standard of décor, maintenance and cleaning is good. There is a designated computer suite which is used well. The school has a large hall and good facilities for pupils in the Nursery and Reception classes. Outdoor play areas are attractive, and pupils have access to a wide range of play equipment. The school also has access to playing fields, although this entails crossing the road.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides regular and informative newsletters that help parents keep up-to-date with events and happenings in school and these are supplemented by an attractive website. A very good booklet is produced annually of examples of pupils' work and the successes of the school during the year, as well as other interesting and useful information. Parents receive regular reports providing them with a good picture as to how well their children are progressing. However, the school does not provide for parents, in its prospectus or other appropriate documentation, certain key information that is required under the Education Act 2002. In addition, the school does not make clear to parents other information and policies that are available on request or how parents might access them.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has an appropriate policy in place for handling complaints and parents feel comfortable about approaching the school should they have any concerns. Some parents, as evidenced in the parental questionnaires, are unaware of the school's procedure for dealing with complaints.

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 suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff, check with the CRB, to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the proprietor's full name, address for correspondence during both term time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which he may be contacted at all times (paragraph 6(2)(b))
- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions, discipline and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- ensure that parents are aware that they can 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))
- ensure that parents are aware that they can request 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))
- ensure that parents are aware that they can request information on the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

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:

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- collate all available assessment information in a more cohesive manner to better enable teachers and the management team to track pupils' progress and to quantify the value added measure the school provides
 - continue to develop the provision made for design and technology and further improve pupils' skills and knowledge in this area of the curriculum.

School details

Name of school	Brackenfield School		
DfES number	815/6027		
Unique reference number	121757		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1 September 1977		
Age range of pupils	2-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 80	Girls: 60	Total: 140
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 13	Girls: 11	Total: 24
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,725-£5,925		
Address of school	128 Duchy Road Harrogate North Yorkshire HG1 2HE		
Telephone number	01423 508558		
Fax number	01423 524841		
Email address	admin@brackenfield.n-yorks.sch.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Judith Skillington		
Proprietor	Harrogate Preparatory School Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Mr Martin Newell		
Dates of inspection	30-31 January 2007		