

Merlin School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	212/6144
Unique Reference Number	101065
Inspection number	301564
Inspection dates	1-2 May 2007
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton

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).

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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

Merlin School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged 4 to 8 years. It was established in 1986. There are currently 132 pupils on roll. The school is located in a very large detached period building close to Putney stations. There are two pupils with a statement of special educational needs. These are funded by the local authority and are provided with additional support. This is the first inspection of the school.

The school aims to *'give a broad and creative education, developing a thirst to learn within a supportive and inspiring environment. To encourage the individual to become independent and to have a go.'*

Evaluation of the school

Merlin School is successful in meeting its aims. It provides an outstanding quality of education. Through implementing a carefully devised and interesting curriculum, outstanding teaching and inspirational leadership, pupils make exceptionally good progress. They are very well cared for in a nurturing environment and report that they love their school.

Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. One said *'I cannot recommend the Merlin highly enough.'* Another noted *'It is a wonderful creative and nurturing environment.'* The school meets most of the requirements for registration.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is outstanding. The school teaches a curriculum which meets the needs of the age group and includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum. The curriculum is thoughtfully and thoroughly planned and ensures clear progression of learning through each subject. It prepares pupils very well for independent selective schools' entry examinations. There is an extensive programme of creative arts, especially music, which is of an outstanding standard and much enjoyed by pupils. For example, Reception class pupils learnt about pitch and rhythm and joined in enthusiastically with the Merlin song, *'Merlin's where we learn to fly...to sail away... and have a go!'* Older pupils are currently rehearsing *'Around the world*

in eighty days', and in order to ensure that they had sufficient circus skills they recently took part in a circus workshop. It is these additional factors that enhance an already good curriculum.

Throughout the school, a strong emphasis is placed on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills and the older pupils become confident, ready for the next stage of their education. A distinctive feature of the school is the use of specialist teachers from the Reception class onwards for music, mathematics, science, drama, physical education (PE), information and communication technology (ICT) and French. The pupils begin the day with 'Quickies' which is a scheme of mathematics and English devised by the school to meet each individual's need. The school effectively uses topic work, which cover a very wide range of subjects; these currently include 'Gods and Monsters, volcanoes and The Incas'. Many of these are planned in conjunction with an educational visit, enabling pupils to gain a greater insight into the subject. Pupils all have weekly games at a local sports field. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught separately by teachers with their own year group.

A wide range of extra curricular visits further enhances the curriculum which recently included a London Symphony Orchestra course; a field trip to Richmond Park alongside regular theatre and museum visits. A wide range of visitors is also welcomed including artists, authors, The Royal Shakespeare Company workshops and very recently the Circus Company. In addition, after-school clubs for drama, gymnastics, ball skills, sewing and band are running this term.

The school's policy for pupils with learning difficulties has regard to the national Code of Practice. They are very well supported and are making good progress with individual education plans.

The quality of teaching is outstanding. The teachers are enthusiastic, knowledgeable, well organised and above all they make learning fun. Pupils take an active part in lessons, are encouraged to work in small groups or pairs and share their learning with their classmates and teacher. For example in a Reception class science lesson, pupils first predicted which objects would float or sink, then carried out simple experiments to check their predictions, used simple scientific language confidently and had the opportunity to discuss their findings. Pupils are given solid foundations from the very beginning with the excellent teaching of phonics. They are taught to write in a well-formed cursive style, which will pay dividends, as they move through the school. Attention is given to encouraging careful listening and consideration for others, which helps to develop a well-rounded pupil. For example, some younger pupils were asked to devise their own ending to a story about a boy who found a star, they contributed some imaginative ideas and listened carefully to the class discussion, worked well together in pairs and produced some superb work. The older pupils are encouraged to build on these skills and produce very imaginative work. This was seen in a Year 3 lesson where they were writing mystery stories, using sophisticated similes to describe an old woman such as '*she smiled, revealing a single tooth, like an old, horrible baby*'.

Teaching assistants are very supportive both to the staff and pupils.

The assessment of pupils' learning is good. Teachers are good at continually checking learning in lessons through effective questioning. The progress and attainment of pupils during each school year are carefully charted through questioning, marking, and standardised testing. Parents receive two written reports. These reports are informative but do not always explain to parents and pupils how pupils have been successful and the next steps that they need to take to improve their work. Pupils' work is regularly and carefully marked. The school has identified this area of assessment for future consideration in its development plan.

Pupils enter the school with attainment levels that are above those expected nationally. The strong teaching they receive, together with consistent support from home, ensures that pupils make outstanding progress as they move through the school. By the time they leave they are achieving very high standards and this is reflected in the high numbers of pupils who are accepted for entry at selective independent schools.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The school places strong emphasis on building confidence and promoting self-esteem. As a result of this encouragement, pupils enjoy coming to school and are enthusiastic and excited about their learning. Older pupils use phrases to describe their school experience such as '*the band is cool*'...*I enjoy the topic work especially the Second World War when we visited the Imperial War Museum*'; with a younger pupil saying, '*I love my teacher*.' There are rewards and incentives to celebrate success and pupils recognise and celebrate the achievements of others. The school's ethos ensures that pupils learn to distinguish between right and wrong. A well-structured programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship underpins this. Teachers have very high expectations of behaviour. This is evident in lessons and around the school and the behaviour of pupils is outstanding. There are excellent relationships between pupils and adults and amongst the pupils themselves. Pupils are encouraged to make a positive contribution to the community. Many respond by volunteering to help teachers in class. Older pupils give help and support to younger pupils particularly new arrivals, and take charge of playground equipment. Pupils begin to develop a good understanding of their environment and public institutions, such as the police, fire and ambulance services. This is well supported by visitors from the community. Regular religious education lessons and assemblies provide pupils with a short time for spiritual reflection. The school curriculum and assemblies ensure that pupils are beginning to develop a clear understanding of their own cultures and the diversity of their environment. An extensive programme of visits enriches this, which recently included a church and a local Mosque.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. It is a safe place in which to work and learn. It encourages pupils to be aware of their own safety and well being. Health and safety and behaviour policies are implemented effectively. The school is aware of the latest guidance for safeguarding children but not all staff have yet received up-to-date training in safeguarding matters. This is currently being remedied. All pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and enjoy the wholesome school lunches and take regular exercise. The school is vigilant with regard to fire safety. All areas of the school have been risk assessed and detailed risk assessments are carried out before each visit outside school. All staff are trained in first aid, well-stocked first aid boxes are located where needed, and accidents are diligently recorded. Pupils are very well supervised at all times and attendance is very good. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Procedures for checking the suitability of staff to work with children meet all current requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises and accommodation are good. The school is located in a very large detached period house, which has been carefully adapted for use as a school. It provides an attractive learning environment which is made even more stimulating by the use of well mounted, imaginative displays of pupils work, celebrating achievement. The building is spacious with many well-used specialist rooms, including a very grand ballroom, which is extensively used for drama, music, PE, dance and assemblies. The school is fortunate in having additional well-equipped facilities at the rear of the school for music, ICT and art. There is a suitable room for use when pupils are ill but it does not currently comply with regulations, as it has no running water supply. The large playground at the rear of the premises is very well equipped for playtimes. The building's interior is very well maintained and decorated, but the outside woodwork is in need of some attention.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school gives parents a good range of information through the prospectus, the parents' information pack, regular newsletters and The Merlin News. The majority of parents responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire and expressed a very high degree of satisfaction with the school. Parents are given a written report during the autumn and summer term and have regular consultation evenings. The school makes parents welcome and is happy to arrange a meeting at a convenient time.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a set of procedures which meet the 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:

- ensure that all staff receive safeguarding training in line with Department for Education and Skills guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (2007)* (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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

- provide facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

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:

- implement the strategies for assessment identified in the development plan
- improve the external appearance of the woodwork.

School details

Name of school	Merlin School		
DfES number	212/6144		
Unique reference number	101065		
Type of school	Pre-Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1986		
Age range of pupils	4-8		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll	Boys: 99	Girls: 33	Total: 132
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 1	Total: 2
Annual fees	£ 8,514		
Address of school	4 Carlton Drive Putney London SW15 2BZ		
Telephone number	0208 788 2769		
Email address	Secretary@merlinschool.net		
Headteacher	Mrs Katherine Prest		
Proprietor	Sir Alford Houstoun-Boswall		
Reporting inspector	Jill Bainton		
Dates of inspection	1-2 May 2007		