

Merton Court School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	303 6053
Unique Reference Number	101482
Inspection number	310565
Inspection dates	20 – 21 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Ian Hartland HMI

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

Merton Court School is a family-run co-educational independent day school which provides for children from 2-11 years of age. The principal is the proprietor. It is located in Sidcup in the south-east region of outer London and is set within 17 acres of grounds, which include woodland and a nature reserve. There are 316 children on roll. The school was first established in 1899 and recently celebrated its centenary. It was registered under recent legislation in 2003. The school prepares pupils for entry into both maintained and independent schools. The early years provision was last inspected by Ofsted in September 2006. The school aims *'to create a strong family ethos and an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness in a caring environment.... where traditional values and a progressive environment meet to give every child the best possible start in life.'* Although the school has a Christian ethos children from different traditions are welcome.

Evaluation of the school

Parents and the pupils themselves are very positive about the school and are right to be so; it is a good school where the pupil's behaviour is outstanding. The school provides a good education and caters very effectively for the needs of the children. The quality of the curriculum and of teaching are good. As a result, the pupils become confident and articulate learners who are enabled by their teachers to make good progress. They achieve outstanding results in the national tests taken in Year 6. The provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The children are happy at school. They feel safe and comfortable as they know each other and the staff well. The school meets almost all of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good and is supported by suitable schemes of work and study programmes. It is broad and balanced and the wide range of extra-curricular activities and clubs both excites and motivates the pupils who speak with much praise and pleasure about the range of activities open to them. The curriculum provides for all pupils across the range of abilities to

make good progress. The Foundation Stage curriculum is well planned and makes good provision for the six areas of learning. Some planning focuses too much on activities and does not provide sufficiently clear learning objectives which specify what children should gain from each activity. The school is very well resourced and pupils have access to excellent outdoor play facilities which develop their physical and imaginative skills very well. The primary age pupils have access to all National Curriculum subjects, religious education (RE) with modern foreign languages taught from reception through Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. A high priority is given to aspects of English including, reading, writing, spelling, grammar and comprehension. There is specialist teaching in French, Spanish, information and communication technology (ICT), music, swimming and games. Appropriate links are made across subjects through themes such as 'Every picture tells a story' which links work in literacy and art. The curriculum develops pupils' basic skills and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development well. There is a personal, social and health education programme called 'life skills' which incorporates RE and is usually taught on a half-termly rotational basis.

A good range of visits and visitors further enhance the curriculum on offer. Pupils have the opportunity to travel to Spain in Year 6, which supports their study of Spanish. Visiting speakers from different countries such as India, Nigeria, South Africa, Russia and Greece develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of other cultures. The school does not place labels on pupils who have learning difficulties or disabilities but does identify well those with such difficulties and provides additional learning support to pupils who have specific needs such as dyspraxia. Formal individual education plans are not usually employed but the school does provide planned intervention programmes, some for a period of six weeks, tailored to address the identified learning need.

The quality of teaching is good overall. In the Foundation Stage good lesson planning and teaching, the effective use of resources along with the eagerness of the children eager to learn, results in them making good progress. In the main school, lesson planning is securely based on longer term planning. The teachers successfully establish a calm, purposeful and respectful atmosphere through their patient and encouraging manner. The small classes allow them to provide good support for individuals. A good example of this was in an English lesson when the teacher spoke to the whole class, following a time spent speaking to individual pupils, about the problems some pupils experienced with a number of questions set for them to answer. Very good relationships exist between the staff and pupils and between the pupils. The pupils feel very safe and comfortable in the classrooms because staff and pupils all know each other so well. Pupils concentrate very well and are consistently responsive to instructions and eager to answer questions. The pupils' behaviour in lessons is excellent. Their enjoyment is demonstrated by the high levels of engagement in all learning activities.

The teachers' questioning is generally effective with a range of different pupils invited to reply. Lessons generally proceed at a brisk pace and teachers make good use of the recently installed inter-active whiteboards. The pupils are well managed and experience a suitable range of activities in lessons including reading, writing, group and pair work as well as whole class teaching. Some work is undertaken by pupils who are grouped by ability so that work can be set at an appropriate level. Where the teaching was less strong there were too few links with previous lessons and learning, lessons proceeded at a slower pace and work was not always set which matched the learning needs of the different abilities in the class, especially in providing sufficient challenge for the more able. In these lessons, the intended outcomes were not always clearly shared with the pupils, especially when ICT was combined with learning about a specific subject. The school uses an appropriate framework for assessment. The marking is regular and usually contains comments on the quality of work and the amount of effort expended but does not consistently indicate to pupils what they need to do to improve. Marking is strongest in English where there are usually detailed comments and clear targets for improvement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. School assemblies make a good contribution to pupils' spiritual and moral development through the range of topics introduced, for example those which focus on key Bible characters. Lunchtimes are well organised by the staff on a rota system so pupils can eat with their own year group. All children say grace after their lunch. The teachers have very high expectations of behaviour and the pupils develop a very clear sense of right or wrong. Their behaviour in and around the school is exemplary which reflects the strong Christian ethos that pervades the school. The pupils are successfully helped to develop into lively, mature young people who are able to think for themselves and unafraid to express their views. They are polite and friendly to visitors and very supportive of one another. They form a cohesive family group and the older pupils also act as very good role models for the younger ones.

The 'life skills' curriculum provides good support for pupils' social and moral development. This, along with the warm and supportive relationships, enables the pupils to become confident and self-assured. Pupils are taught how to develop good relationships with each other. The teachers are very successful in fostering pupils' enjoyment of school and their positive attitudes towards learning. In the Foundation Stage, pupils' personal, social and emotional development and well-being are good. The children are happy, well adjusted and focussed on learning. They enjoy positive relationships with each other and with adults. They work and play well together, and take responsibility for tidying up after activities. They behave very well and are very responsive to adults.

Pupils have good opportunities to take on responsibilities. Older pupils take on the role of prefects and have lunch-time duties, where they help by giving out cups and pouring water for others and ensuring cutlery and crockery is properly stacked after meals. Other pupils act as class monitors. Pupils have a satisfactory knowledge of public institutions and a good understanding of other cultures both within the United Kingdom and the wider world. They understand what is meant by the term racism and why it is unacceptable. The pupils are given good opportunities to voice their opinions and their views about ways to improve the school through the school council. Pupils understand well their responsibilities to others and to the broader community and make a good contribution to charities. Pupils have good literacy, numeracy and ICT skills that prepare them well for the next stage of their education.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's provision for the pupil's welfare health and safety is good. Their welfare and general well-being is given a very high priority. There is a series of detailed policy documents which meet requirements. A safe, healthy and strongly nurturing environment has been created for the pupils. Pupils get plenty of exercise and make good use of the all weather, grass and hard court facilities and the school's swimming pool. Healthy food is provided at lunchtimes with many salad options. There is an appropriate behaviour policy with a suitable system of sanctions to deal with incidents of inappropriate behaviour. There have been no serious incidents which have led to sanctions. Pupils report that there is virtually no bullying. The scale of the school ensures that the staff know the pupils well and can supervise them effectively at all times.

There is appropriate provision for First Aid with many staff qualified to administer it. First Aid boxes are appropriately stocked. Accidents are carefully recorded. The child protection policy meets requirements. The school has made the necessary provision for fire safety. The fire drill book is up-to-date and equipment is regularly checked. The health and safety policy is appropriate and includes risk assessments. The school correctly maintains an admissions register but the attendance registers are not kept fully in accordance with requirements. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school undertakes the full range of checks to ensure the suitability of all staff to work with children and young people.

School's premises and accommodation

The school building is deceptive. When viewed from the main road it appears as a large detached house. However the house has been significantly extended at the back and the indoor facilities include a large hall and a good-sized indoor swimming pool. There are specialist facilities with two rooms for ICT and a library. Although some classrooms in the main school building are small they are more than adequate for the number of pupils in each class. There is a further purpose-built facility for the youngest children who are very well provided for. The school has very good outdoor facilities, which include a large area of playing fields, an all-weather games area, hard surfaced play areas as well as extensive woodland and a nature reserve. There are appropriate facilities for pupils who are unwell.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Much useful information, which includes an expression of the school's aims and ethos and a list of all staff is contained in the school's prospectus and accompanying set of notes and policies. A range of school policies are available on request. The school does not make clear its provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language. Most parents report that they are happy with the quality of the information they receive and with the progress that their children make.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a detailed written complaints policy which sets out the procedures it will follow in the management of any complaint. It contains information on all of the specific elements required by the regulations. There have been no formal complaints from parents.

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 the attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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 schools provision for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(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:

- ensure pupils are clear what knowledge, understanding and skills they are expected to gain in lessons, especially when they are learning about more than one curriculum subject
- ensure marking consistently indicates to pupils what they need to do to improve.

School details

Name of school	Merton Court School
DfES number	303/6053
Unique reference number	301565
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent Day
Date school opened	1899
Age range of pupils	2-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys:159 Girls:134 Total:293
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 12 Girls:12 Total: 24
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0 Girls: 0 Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0 Girls: 0 Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Rising 3 and 4 year olds (5 mornings) £5565 Rising 3 and 4 year olds (full time) £7350 Infants, 5-7 year olds £7605 Juniors, 7-11 year olds £8010
Address of school	38 Knoll Road Sidcup DA14 4QU
Telephone number	020 8300 2112
Fax number	020 8300 1324
Email address	office@mertoncourt.kent.sch.uk
Headteacher	Mr Dominic Price
Proprietor	Mrs Elizabeth Price and Mr Christopher Price
Reporting inspector	Ian Hartland HMI
Dates of inspection	19 – 20 June 2007