

Shernold School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	8866030
Unique Reference Number	118972
Inspection number	301607
Inspection dates	13-14 June 2007
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway

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

Shernold School is a co-educational preparatory school in Maidstone, Kent, providing for children aged three to eleven years. There are 139 pupils on roll. It was established in 1935 and occupies a large Victorian house, which has been adapted for educational use, along with some additional temporary classrooms. There is a purpose built kindergarten. The school aims to provide a broad education of high quality, which enables each pupil to reach high standards and prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Evaluation of the school

Parents are almost unanimous in their praise for the school. There is much justification for their positive comments. This is a good school which provides a good quality of education. It fosters pupils' educational development well and is outstanding in its encouragement of their personal, spiritual, moral, cultural and social development. The headteacher and her staff are fully committed to the well-being and education of their pupils. They provide a stimulating curriculum that helps to develop a love of learning. The school meets almost all the independent school regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good, covering a wide range of subjects with a strong focus on the arts. It is well supported by schemes of work that give good guidance to teachers. The schemes provide a structure that ensures that pupils learn in a logical and progressive way. The kindergarten environment for the youngest children, aged three to five, is well organised and provides a good range of stimulating activities to promote learning and curiosity. There is an appropriate balance of child centred play activities and more formal learning activities. The curriculum throughout the school is enhanced by French, taught from kindergarten onwards. Many pupils attend the wide range of clubs and they enjoy the educational visits. Year 6 pupils spoke enthusiastically about their visit to Le Touquet. Every pupil is expected to take part in a performance; photographs and comments show how much they enjoy this. Good provision is made to prepare pupils for their future lives through the strong focus on basic skills.

Teaching is good overall. As a result, almost all pupils make good progress. In the kindergarten, educational activities are often challenging and help the children to make good progress. Through the school, teachers have very good relationships with the pupils and demonstrate excellent class control. As a result, pupils are fully involved in their learning, work hard and try hard to succeed. Praise is used very well to encourage and motivate them. The school has only limited provision for those with special educational needs and the teaching is sometimes unsatisfactory.

Teachers know their pupils well. They devise interesting activities and adapt them to an extent to meet pupils' needs. In the better lessons, all pupils make good progress because they are all challenged with tasks adapted to the correct level for each and a brisk pace is set. In the few satisfactory or inadequate lessons, the pace is too slow for the higher achievers or the work is too difficult for the lower achievers. Sometimes teachers spend too long explaining the task to the class in order to ensure that every pupil has understood what to do. Assessment records are kept centrally, but class teachers are insufficiently aware of their pupils' attainment in previous classes. Targets are not set for teachers or pupils, so that the few instances of underachievement are difficult to monitor or remedy.

However, the strong ethos for learning, the good curriculum and the individual attention given to pupils in the small classes ensure that almost all make good progress and reach high standards in English, mathematics and science. At the end of Year 6 around three quarters of the pupils are above the expected levels for their age, having reached Level 5 in the national tests, and a high proportion moves on to grammar schools. They grow into confident, articulate and independent learners, ready to take full advantage of the educational opportunities that will present themselves as they grow older. They enjoy studying and have a love of learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for the personal development of pupils and for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils thoroughly enjoy school and do not wish to change anything about it. Their high attendance is testimony to their enjoyment. They are prepared well for their future lives through their good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology. Their confidence is supported by their involvement in drama, especially the end of term plays in which all take a part. They make the most of the opportunities to take responsibility, such as house and form captains, form monitors and becoming a buddy to younger pupils to help them to settle in the playground when they go into Year 1.

Spiritual development is fostered well through the daily assemblies and by learning about the richness and diversity of cultures through religious education and through the recognition of a range of festivals, including maypole dancing. Pupils have respect for themselves, their peers and adults as a result of the example set by adults and in assemblies that often have a moral theme. They work exceptionally

well together and their behaviour is outstanding. They are eager to learn and to contribute to lessons. Personal, social and health education plays a major role in pupils' personal development. Educational visits such as to museums and galleries extend their cultural understanding very well.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good overall. The policy for managing pupils' behaviour is applied consistently and there is very good use of praise and rewards. This is very effective and pupils respond very well. They are closely supervised both in classes and in the school grounds. They feel safe and secure as a result and all the pupils interviewed were confident that there is an adult at the school they could turn to for help or advice, if necessary. Relationships between all adults and pupils are very good and are characterised by care and mutual respect.

There is an appropriate health and safety policy and pupils are encouraged to live healthy lives. They have a very good understanding of the importance of exercise and the older pupils show very good understanding of the importance of healthy eating and good hygiene. The school uses a local restaurant with an excellent reputation for high quality catering for its school meals. The food is very nutritious and since the restaurant became involved, the number of pupils eating school meals has increased significantly. There are regular safety checks of the buildings and grounds. Risk assessments are carried out for every area used by pupils. However, appropriate risk assessments are not carried out for visits away from the school. Procedures for administering first aid are robust and the school policy gives detailed guidance to staff. The child protection policy is up to date and there are clear procedures, understood by all, to protect pupils who might be at risk.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All the staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. All other required checks are carried out. There is a single central record that complies fully with the most recent regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

Premises and accommodation are of a good standard. There is specialist accommodation for music, art, science, information and communication technology (ICT) and cooking. These are used very effectively to enhance the educational opportunities for pupils. The ICT room, for example, has enough up to date computers linked to the Internet to allow each pupil in a class to work at an individual machine. The accommodation is not suitable for pupils with physical disabilities. The school does not intend to admit such pupils, and has not drawn up the required plan to increase accessibility. There is a good sized playground outside,

a large playing field, good shaded areas, many excellent pieces of outdoor play equipment and a large outdoor activities area for the youngest children. The assembly hall is also used for physical education lessons and is well equipped.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The quality of information for parents and carers and for families who are considering the school for their children is generally good. It is supplemented by a well constructed and informative website. Termly reports are detailed, giving good information about what pupils have achieved. They are less specific about the next steps in pupils' learning. The school does not meet two of the requirements.

Procedures for handling complaints

Most parents feel comfortable about approaching the school with complaints, but a few are unaware of the complaints procedure. There are several aspects of the school's current practice that do not meet 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 a written policy relating to the health and safety of pupils on activities outside the school which has regard to DfES guidance *'Health and safety of pupils on educational visits'* (paragraph 3(2)(c)).

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 school's policy on and arrangements for exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- report to parents particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- ensure that if the parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint there is provision for the establishment of a hearing before a panel

appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint and that the composition of this panel and its terms of operation fully comply with requirements (paragraphs 7(f), 7(g), 7(h), 7(i), 7(j)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three year accessibility plan.

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:

- track pupils' progress and set targets for pupils and teachers
- ensure that teachers use assessment information to set appropriately challenging tasks for all pupils in lessons.

School details

Name of school	Shernold School		
DfES number	8866030		
Unique reference number	118972		
Type of school	Preparatory school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1935		
Age range of pupils	3-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 49	Girls: 90	Total:139
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)	Years 1 – 4 £1,450; Years 5 and 6 £1,750.		
Address of school	Hill Place Queens Avenue Maidstone Kent ME16 0ER		
Telephone number	01622 752868		
Fax number	01622 752868		
Email address	shernold@shernold.plus.com		
Headteacher	Mrs L Dack		
Proprietor	Mrs Valerie Waite		
Reporting inspector	Paul Cosway		
Dates of inspection	13-14 June 2007		