

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

Independent School

Inspection report

| | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|
| DfES Registration Number | 371/6010 |
| Unique Reference Number | 106816 |
| Inspection number | 301622 |
| Inspection dates | 12-13 June 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Christine Graham 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).

© Crown copyright 2007

Website: www.ofsted.gov.uk

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

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

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School was established in 1978 and was last inspected in February 2002. Most of the 37 pupils are of White British heritage with a small proportion from other ethnic groups. There are 4 children who are 5 years old and 33 who are 6-11 years old. Until Easter 2007 the school had a class for children between the ages of three and five. However, the class teacher resigned suddenly and the school has been unable to appoint a suitable replacement. Children in this class were already five and have now moved up to the infant class. The school does not intend to admit any younger children until the staffing situation is resolved. A small proportion of pupils have learning difficulties and /or disabilities. Two children are autistic and have a statement of educational need. Two local authorities (LA) fund children at the school. The school aims to '*develop a positive attitude towards academic work promoting concentration, self-discipline and a sense of achievement.*'

Evaluation of the school

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School meets its aims. It provides a satisfactory education for its pupils and ensures that they have positive attitudes towards their work. Pupils reach standards which are in line with or above those expected for their age. The provision made for pupils' personal development is good, with particular strengths in the provision made for their social development. The provision made for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is satisfactory. The school meets most of the regulations for registration and is aware of the changes which are required.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory. It includes all subjects normally found in the National Curriculum and has a particular focus on English in the early years of school. Pupils have a good understanding of grammar and punctuation and of mathematical calculations. They learn French and experience other languages. Subjects are linked together around a termly topic and, although the rigour of the core subjects is maintained, pupils benefit from good opportunities to immerse themselves in the culture and lifestyle of a particular period or country. The curriculum is carefully planned and no topic is covered twice. Teachers use their subject expertise to provide more specialised teaching in information and communication technology

(ICT) and science. Although the school does not have a playing field it makes use of a nearby park for physical education. All pupils have a weekly swimming lesson.

The school is aware that provision for ICT is not good enough and has identified this as an area for development. There are enough computers and pupils develop a range of skills which are regularly assessed, however, ICT is not used sufficiently well in lessons. Pupils can have piano lessons, at an extra cost to parents, and perform in school plays. Pupils go on termly visits to places of interest and there is a residential visit for older pupils.

The school caters for pupils with the full range of abilities and, given their starting points, they make at least satisfactory progress. Most pupils reach standards which in line with or above those expected for their age. Pupils pass entrance examinations for a range of independent schools and some are awarded academic scholarships. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress because their learning and social needs are managed well. Teaching is satisfactory overall. In the best lessons pupils are given a variety of tasks and have opportunities to work in a group or with a partner. In these lessons pupils discuss their ideas and experiences and relate them to new learning. However, there are few opportunities of this kind. The tasks given to pupils are not always planned in the most interesting ways, particularly in English and mathematics, because the school relies very heavily on worksheets and text books to support learning.

Many pupils enjoy learning. They acquire a body of knowledge and can complete work correctly and to a good standard. However, there are not enough practical or investigative tasks and pupils have too few opportunities to write independently. As a result they lack opportunities to apply their knowledge and demonstrate their understanding. Some pupils spend too long queuing at the teacher's desk to have work marked.

Pupils under five received appropriately planned work in the Foundation Stage class which enabled them to gain the expected skills and knowledge. They were assessed using the foundation stage profile but the information gained has not been used to plan activities which would help them build on existing skills now they have moved into the infant class. In other year groups assessment is used effectively to ensure that the work given to pupils builds on their previous knowledge. Each pupil has an assessment folder which details their achievements and allows teachers to identify areas which are not yet achieved.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils work and play together well. They carry out responsibilities within the school and look after the animals. Pupils care for the animals well and learn about the natural life processes of birth and death in a very sensitive way.

The school promotes good behaviour, manners and thought for others. However, some teachers are very strict, pupils can be shouted at for quite minor matters and, occasionally, the tone used can seem a little harsh. Pupils appear unconcerned about this. They say it occurs but also say that they like the staff and are not upset or alarmed

Pupils are encouraged to talk about their own faith and culture and all world religions are taught. As a result pupils understand what it is to live in a diverse society. There are good opportunities for pupils to discuss current events and moral issues. They are taught how to keep safe and the oldest pupils receive drugs education. Attendance is good and no pupils have been excluded from school. Pupils develop good attitudes towards learning and know the importance of hard work. As a result they are well prepared for the next stage in their education and for life after school.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes satisfactory provision for welfare, health and safety. Pupils take regular exercise. They learn which foods will keep them healthy and have drinks during the day. Parents and pupils have been consulted about healthy eating and, as a result, pupils eat healthy snacks on most days of the week. Although pupils are encouraged to play with the animals they are also taught to wash their hands afterwards.

There are regular fire drills and pupils are aware of the location of emergency exits. A member of staff is trained in first aid and all accidents or illnesses are recorded and discussed with parents. Risk assessments are undertaken for pupils on educational visits and for activities outside school. All procedures to safeguard pupils are in place although the designated person for child protection is new in post and has not yet updated her training. The gender of pupils is not recorded in the school's admission register.

The school does not meet the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) as it does not have a current three-year action plan to increase disabled access to the school and the curriculum.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has carried out safeguarding checks for all staff and adults in contact with pupils. The school has a staff appointment system, which ensures that most of the necessary checks are made before staff are appointed. Contrary to its normal practice the school did not complete medical checks or references for on recently appointed member of staff.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is satisfactory. There is a regular programme of redecoration; however, the garden around the school yard is a little overgrown. There is a hall which is used for assembly, music lessons and other activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has recently reviewed its policies and other school information. School documents are well organised, up-to-date and easily accessible. The prospectus includes all the necessary information and parents can view additional information on request. Parents receive two written reports each year and there are opportunities during the school day and at more formal meetings for parents to meet teachers and discuss any concerns.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a clear, fair and well written complaints procedure. There have been no formal complaints in the last five years.

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 the designated member of staff undertakes the required refresher training on safeguarding children as a matter of urgency (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- ensure that the gender of pupils is recorded on the admission register (paragraph 3(9)).

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 ensure that references are taken up and medical checks completed (paragraph 4 (c)).

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:

- provide more opportunities for writing and for problem solving and investigative work
- support children moving from the Foundation Stage to Year 1 by ensuring that assessment information is used to plan for these activities which allow them to build on existing skills and knowledge.

School details

| | | | |
|---|--|-----------|-----------|
| Name of school | Sycamore Hall Preparatory School | | |
| DfES number | 371/6010 | | |
| Unique reference number | 106816 | | |
| Type of school | Primary | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | September 1978 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 3-11 | | |
| Gender of pupils | MI | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 23 | Girls: 14 | Total: 37 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 2 | Girls: 0 | Total: 2 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £4,122.00 | | |
| Address of school | 1 Hall Flat Lane Balby Doncaster South Yorkshire DN4 8PT | | |
| Telephone number | 01302856800 | | |
| Email address | sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Ms J Spencer | | |
| Proprietor | Ms J Spencer | | |
| Reporting inspector | Christine Graham HMI | | |
| Dates of inspection | 12-13 June 2007 | | |