



The Village School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number 202/6353
Unique Reference Number 100077
Inspection number 302729
Inspection dates 27-28 February 2007
Reporting inspector Bradley Simmons 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).

Age group 4-11	Published 16 March 2007	Reference no. 302729
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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

The Village School was established in north-west London in 1985. It is a non-denominational selective preparatory school for girls between 4 and 11 years of age. It is a small school with 98 girls on roll, and at the time of the inspection no class contained more than 15 girls. The school is wholly owned by the headmistress and the deputy headmistress.

The school aims to provide pupils with a *'full and rounded entitlement to learning by delivering a curriculum for the development of the whole child.'*

Evaluation of the school

Parents are very keen on The Village School. One referred to it as 'the best kept secret in NW3.' Another noted: 'I love this school'. It is indeed a good school, with some outstanding features. Over the past 22 years the headmistress and deputy headmistress have successfully built a school where the quality of care and teaching are consistently good. With the support of committed parents, girls make good, and often outstanding progress to attain high academic and social standards by the time they leave.

Quality of education

The school is successful in fulfilling its aims. The curriculum is good and has some exemplary elements. These include French, Latin, culture and history of art, which augment the subjects of the National Curriculum. The curriculum is thoughtfully planned and ensures clear progression of learning through each subject. It prepares pupils well for independent selective schools' entry examinations. However, the necessary emphasis on the academic is properly balanced by an outstanding programme of physical activity and the creative arts, which is much enjoyed by pupils.

Throughout the school, a strong emphasis is placed on developing pupils' speaking and listening skills and the older pupils become confident, mature young women, ready for the next stage of their education. Information and communication technology (ICT) is taught to the younger pupils. Older pupils have no access to computers or the internet at school, although the vast

majority have this at home. Personal, social, and health education is carefully integrated throughout the curriculum. The curriculum is enriched with visits which are linked well to the topics being studied. School clubs, such as singing, debate and drama, as well as residential visits, further enhance pupils' experience.

Inspectors received a very high number of responses to the pre-inspection parental questionnaire. These demonstrate that the overwhelming majority of parents believe that teaching is good, and they are correct to do so. Teaching is at least good in all classes, and has some excellent aspects. For example, in an outstanding mathematics lesson on circumference for a Year 5 class, the teacher began the lesson by giving pupils very good feedback on their performance during the previous lesson. Misconceptions were addressed, and corrections built upon to clarify the next steps in learning. The teacher targeted questions to challenge pupils and thus extend the learning of pupils of all abilities. As a result, pupils worked with zest and made outstanding progress. In a very good handwriting lesson in a Year 1 class, the teacher checked assiduously to ensure every pupil was holding her pencil comfortably and forming letters consistently, providing the very best foundation for the excellent standards reached in handwriting throughout the school.

A very small minority of parents have doubts about how thoroughly their daughters' learning is assessed. Assessment is generally good; younger pupils are heard to read three times weekly. Consequently any difficulties are swiftly identified. The progress and attainment of pupils during each school year are carefully charted through questioning, marking, and testing. However, the flow of information about individual pupils' academic performance as they move to a higher class is not as sharp. At present, teachers are reliant on their own quick assessments of their new pupils at the beginning of each school year, rather than on a solid assessment, for example, of each pupil's phonic or spelling ability. This lack of precision in assessment may occasionally lead to pupils repeating work at the beginning of a new school year.

Pupils enter the school with attainment levels that are well above those expected of five year olds nationally. The strong teaching they receive, together with consistent support from home, ensures that pupils make good, and often 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 very high numbers of pupils who are accepted for entry at selective independent secondary schools.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are outstanding. Pupils are exceptionally well-mannered and responded with courtesy and judicious consideration to inspectors' questions. The rate of attendance is high. There is a daily assembly; pupils listen to a religious story, sing, reflect and have the opportunity to read the prayer of the day. Pupils clearly enjoy their learning both in and out of the classroom. They take pride in their work and in meeting their teachers' high expectations. There are increasing opportunities to develop the notion of social contributions and civic responsibility as pupils move through the school, including being an elected form captain. The school organises pertinent and valuable visits to religious and cultural locations to develop pupils' understanding of life in a plural society. For example, during the inspection, Year 1 pupils visited Regents Park mosque to find out more about one of Britain's major faiths. In its work, however, the school does not neglect to inculcate pupils with a clear foundation of British history and tradition.

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. Health and safety and behaviour policies are implemented effectively. Pupils from different year groups are adamant that there is no bullying at this school. 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 take regular exercise, and the vast majority do so. 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. A large number of 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. 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 are robust, and meet all current requirements. The fact that the school has already prepared the 'single central record' of staff checks before this requirement comes into force underlines its clear understanding of the importance of such checks.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is accommodated within a large, three-storey Regency house. It is well decorated and very effectively maintained. A number of specialist rooms serve to enhance learning for pupils. A marvellous theatre is used exceptionally well: at the time of the inspection, upper school pupils were practising to perform *Macbeth*, younger ones to perform *Cinderella*. The quality of outdoor provision is unusually high for a London day school: it includes a full size netball court, and a large grassed area containing an exciting adventure playground. In addition, space is provided where pupils grow fruit and vegetables. A medical room has been opened recently where pupils who are ill may rest whilst waiting for a parent.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a comprehensive range of information for parents, and supplies more on request. Some parents queried the nature and purpose of homework, much of which is undertaken at school. Inspectors found that homework builds coherently on work studied in class. The lunchtime sessions during which it is completed provide an opportunity for pupils to hone their ability to work independently. The school accepts that the rationale for homework needs further clarification.

Annual reports are of a satisfactory quality, but often concentrate on pupils' attitudes to subjects; a clear analysis of their progress and understanding is generally missing. Indeed, a number of parents note that they would like more information on their daughter's progress. At present, it is not possible for parents to compare their daughter's academic performance against national norms, because only internal school grades are reported. The school recognises that the use of annual standardised tests would increase its accountability to parents and serve to confirm its success in its work.

Procedures for handling complaints

Several parents are not clear about the school complaints procedure. However, it is available on request from the school office, and meets all 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 DfES guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (2007)* (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

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:

- improve provision for ICT
- sharpen end of year assessment procedures so that receiving teachers have a very detailed picture of pupils' skills in reading, spelling, writing and mathematics
- introduce standardised testing to give parents a comparison of their daughters' performance against national norms.

School details

Name of school	The Village School
DfES number	202/6353
Unique reference number	100077
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1 September 1985
Age range of pupils	4 -11
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Girls: 98 Total: 98
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,900
Address of school	2 Park Hill Road Belsize Park London NW3 2YN
Telephone number	0207 485 4673
Fax number	0207 267 8462
Email address	admin@thevillageschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Mrs Fanny Prior
Joint proprietors	Mrs Fanny Prior Miss Carol Gay
Reporting inspector	Bradley Simmons HMI
Dates of inspection	27-28 February 2007