

Benedict House Preparatory School

Independent Preparatory School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	303/6060
Unique Reference Number	101484
Inspection number	316916
Inspection dates	4-5 October 2007
Reporting inspector	John Francis

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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Benedict House is a co-educational preparatory school for pupils aged 3 to 11. Founded in 1989, it has the aim of providing the highest level of tuition for its pupils. There are currently 82 pupils on roll 35 boys and 47 girls. The school is non-selective but very few pupils have learning difficulties or disabilities. There are many pupils from minority ethnic families. The school aims: *'to bring the benefits of self-improvement and confidence through the enjoyment of school life'*.

This is the first published inspection report for the school.

Evaluation of the school

The school meets its aim. The quality of education and the teaching are good. This enables pupils to make good and often better progress as they move through the school. The happy family atmosphere promotes the pupils' personal development extremely successfully. Pupils become mature, responsible young people. Their behaviour is very good and they value each other and their teachers. Parents appreciate these features and most speak very highly of the school. The school meets almost all of the regulations for the registration of independent schools.

Quality of education

The school provides a good curriculum offering a broad range of subjects with a carefully planned balance of time to each. As a result, pupils make good or better progress as they move through the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the vast majority of parents consider that their children are making good progress. The school takes full account of the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage to plan a most interesting and imaginative programme of activities appropriate for the age and stage of development of pupils in the Nursery and Reception class. These encourage pupils to investigate, to be creative and to have fun. The great majority of pupils exceed the expected early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1.

Pupils in Years 1 to 6 are taught all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education. Whenever possible there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' key skills, such as speaking and listening, writing and numeracy. The pupils learn French and have the option of Spanish as an additional class. Some specialist coaching is

provided for physical education and games from Years 1 to 6, and all pupils have the opportunity to swim regularly. The school also places great importance on creative development. The computer suite supports work in most subjects. The school's programmes for personal, social and health education and citizenship clearly reflect its aims and ethos. Pupils are developing a good understanding of how to keep fit and safe and they are keen to take responsibility for their actions. The school is helping them to be confident learners.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. Staff set high expectations for both work and behaviour and pupils respond by working hard and behaving very well. There is a friendly, relaxed, yet purposeful working atmosphere in lessons. As a result, pupils make good or better progress as they move through the school and excellent progress in their personal, social and emotional development. In the Foundation Stage, teachers provide a very wide range of learning activities that enable children to make good progress in all areas of learning.

The teachers are well informed, enthusiastic and committed. Relationships between adults and pupils are good, leading to an extremely positive climate in classrooms, promoting effective learning. The teachers' lesson plans identify what the pupils will learn and this is shared with them at the beginning of the lesson. Pupils report that teachers help them to learn and explain things clearly. The teachers set a good pace to lessons, which start and finish promptly. Homework is set and marked. This consolidates pupils' learning and has a positive impact on their achievement. There is conscientious and effective assessment of pupils' learning in lessons, where teachers use effective targeted questions to check if pupils understand the lesson. While marking is supportive and helps pupils to begin to judge their own work, it sometimes misses a key aspect that would move learning on more quickly. The use of short-term targets to help avoid some of these recurring errors is not fully established.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. Pupils' social development is excellent and they develop into mature and responsible young people. They grow in self-confidence and take pride in themselves as they move up through the school. Behaviour is very good. The standards pupils achieve and the emphasis placed on speaking and listening helps them to develop good communication skills preparing them well for the next stage of their education.

Pupils are very willing to take on class responsibilities, performing their duties diligently. Each class has roles of responsibility for pupils and many play an important part in the day-to-day smooth running of the school. The school council provides pupils with a voice in the management of the school. Pupils learn about public institutions in Great Britain and issues such as how the electoral system works.

Lunchtime and after-school clubs provide pupils with good opportunities to play and work together harmoniously.

Pupils receive clear religious and moral guidance with which to make choices in their everyday lives and in their relationships with others. The attention given to pupils' spiritual development is a strong influence on their personal development. The school promotes a very good understanding of moral principles that allows pupils to tell right from wrong. The pupils value their own culture and that of others of different backgrounds. Study of world faiths and other cultures in RE, assemblies, history, geography and French has a high profile and the pupils have a growing awareness of their place in a multi-cultural world.

Fund-raising for charities here and overseas is a regular feature of school life, often organised by the pupils themselves. They are fully aware that there are those less fortunate than themselves.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

There is good provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. The school is a safe place in which to work and learn. There is a range of carefully thought out policies, implemented effectively. These include anti-bullying, the welfare, health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour and child protection. However, while staff understand their responsibilities, there is no named person as child protection officer or any recent training. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to managing behaviour and the pupils' behaviour is good both in lessons and around the school. The supervision of pupils is good. All pupils' activities both on and off the school site have had suitable risk assessments. There is appropriate provision made for first aid with trained staff and appropriately stocked first aid boxes easily accessible. The school keeps admission and attendance registers in accordance with regulations. The school does not yet fulfil its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act to produce a three-year plan to show what it will do to meet the requirements for access to the building or the curriculum for those with disabilities.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau. For new staff, the school carries out appropriate checks on identity, qualifications and previous employment history.

School's premises and accommodation

The school consists of three large Victorian houses, linked by the rear playground. This provides suitable accommodation with appropriately sized classrooms and hall space. The school provides a colourful and attractive learning environment, enhanced by stimulating displays of pupils' work. There is suitable space for the Nursery and Reception classes including good outdoor play provision. They have use

of the enclosed playground and grassed area and a good range of large toys to play on. The playground for older pupils is spacious with good facilities for games and physical education. Seating on the grass alongside the hard play area provides a quiet area for pupils to play or eat lunch in good weather. There are sufficient toilets and hand washing facilities. The school is suitably maintained, clean and tidy. While decoration is generally satisfactory, some areas of the school, such as pupils' cloakrooms and toilets are in need of redecoration. Suitable arrangements for emergency evacuations are in place. However, there is no suitable provision for pupils who are ill.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides a good range of information for parents and prospective parents. There is an attractive, detailed prospectus, which gives a very good flavour of life at the school, reinforced by the school's website. However, there are some gaps in the information provided including contact details, information about staff and details of the complaints procedure. Parents receive regular newsletters keeping them up to date with developments. The school values the contribution that parents make, but a small minority of parents would like to be more involved in their children's learning. Parents receive two reports each year and have opportunities both at formal consultation evenings and through informal meetings with staff to know the progress their children are making. However, in their questionnaire returns, a few parents expressed a wish for more opportunities for consultation. The school had already, prior to the inspection, set in place improvements to the current reporting system. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their children's education. However, a minority expressed some disappointment over what they considered the relatively few trips and visits pupils made. This inspection team and the pupils, in discussion, consider these are sufficient and appropriate.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures comply fully with the regulations and specify clear time scales for the informal and formal stages of any complaint.

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 there is a named person for Child Protection and that training for all staff is up to date. (paragraph 3(2)(b))

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

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

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 full name, address for correspondence during both term time and holidays and a telephone number or numbers on which the proprietor may be contacted at all times (paragraph 6(2)(b))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j))
- provide particulars of the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

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 point for development:

- improve systems for setting pupils targets for both long-term and short-term improvement through making better use of the information from regular assessments and teachers' marking
- redecoration of the pupils' cloakroom and toilet areas.

School details

Name of school	Benedict House Preparatory School
DCSF number	303/6060
Unique reference number	101484
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent
Date school opened	5 January 1989
Age range of pupils	3-11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 33 Girls: 43 Total: 76
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 2 Girls: 4 Total: 6
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 7,185 (Juniors); £6,765 (Infants); £6,435 (Reception); £3,135 (Nursery)
Address of school	1-5 Victoria Road Sidcup Kent DA15 7HD
Telephone number	0208 300 7206
Fax number	0208 309 6014
Email address	office@benedicthouseprepschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Mrs A Brown & Mrs J Day
Proprietor	Mrs A Brown
Reporting inspector	John Francis AI
Dates of inspection	4-5 October 2007