

Sinclair House School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	205/6385
Unique Reference Number	100374
Inspection number	316956
Inspection dates	8-9 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew

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).

Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998.

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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. Inspection of funded nursery education was carried out under Schedule 26 of the School Standards and framework Act 1998. The provision for the two-year old children in the school was not inspected; this will be inspected in due course under Ofsted's Early Years arrangements.

Information about the school

Sinclair House School is an independent, co-educational day school for pupils aged between two and eight years of age. It was registered in 1989 as a Roman Catholic school and although it keeps this affiliation, it welcomes pupils of every faith or none. It is situated in Fulham in west London. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were 73 pupils on roll. The school reflects the educational philosophy of Maria Montessori. The school's aim is *'to establish a firm academic foundation and to nurture each child's progress and individuality'*.

Evaluation of the school

Sinclair House School is achieving its stated aim and provides a good quality of education. The curriculum is good and ensures an interesting and varied learning experience for all pupils. Teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding, and as a consequence pupils of all abilities make good progress. They become happy, very effective learners who are highly motivated and increasingly able to work independently; their personal development is outstanding. Procedures to ensure pupils' welfare, health and safety are good and parents are overwhelmingly supportive. The school meets almost all the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The good, Montessori-based curriculum provides a well-structured framework through which pupils learn effectively. The curriculum is planned to provide an individualised education matched to each pupil's assessed needs. It provides a broad and interesting learning experience which includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education (RE). It is planned within three strands: *'practical life'*, the *'sensorial'* curriculum and *'knowledge and understanding of the world'*.

Joint curriculum planning usefully outlines the topics to be covered across the school within a three-year cycle. Individual teachers plan the termly topics to ensure experience across a wide range of subjects, helping pupils to make effective connections between different areas of learning. Long- and medium-term planning

makes clear what topics will be taught but does not specify precisely what pupils of different ages will learn, making it more difficult to ensure progression in their learning. English and mathematics are given a high priority, being included in all topics and also taught as discrete subjects, contributing to good progress and achievement in literacy and numeracy. Nevertheless, the high allocation of time to these two subjects limits the time available for project work, which includes science and humanities. Where appropriate, teachers make useful links with the National Curriculum programmes of study. The '*sensorial*' curriculum reinforces learning through the consistent use of a wide variety of apparatus and materials while at the same time helping pupils to explore and develop different ways of learning. The '*practical*' curriculum encourages the development of independence and self-confidence from the Nursery where the youngest learn to collect and replace the equipment and materials they need. Aspects of personal, social and emotional development are integral to all topics and are valued as being of central importance to pupils' overall progress and achievement.

The curriculum is extended by peripatetic specialist teaching in music, drama, physical education, swimming and French and by a good range of extra-curricular activities ranging from art to karate. The school makes very good use of the city's museums and galleries to enrich pupils' learning through exciting and enjoyable first-hand experiences.

The quality of teaching is consistently good and sometimes outstanding, resulting in pupils making good progress. The teachers have a thorough knowledge of the subjects taught, and most are experienced in the organisation and management of the Montessori curriculum. This does much to compensate for the lack of detail in planning because teachers' practice is highly skilled and effective. The balance of adult-led and pupil-chosen activity is carefully considered so that pupils will have the knowledge and skills to learn independently. Interesting and varied opportunities are planned so that pupils can become increasingly able to take responsibility for their learning and to make choices about their work. This growing ability contributes to the rapid pace of lessons because pupils make productive use of the time, without coercion. Pupils make effective use of good quality specialist equipment to support and reinforce their learning.

The teaching is differentiated to meet individual needs while maintaining a strong emphasis on social development within the class group. The number of pupils is small and teachers know the pupils well, so they are able to give them precisely targeted support. Pupils with learning difficulties make good progress. All pupils, including the more able, are challenged by tasks which require them to recall previous learning, express an opinion or explain their thinking to others. The strong focus on speaking and listening helps pupils to become articulate and confident speakers, eager to share what they know with the class. They are lively and enthusiastic learners, able to concentrate for extended periods, enjoy their work and take satisfaction from their achievement.

Systems for assessment are good, and are almost always effectively implemented. Pupils' work is routinely checked in class but is occasionally unmarked. Progress is regularly assessed and recorded across all areas of pupils' academic, creative, personal, social and physical development. Teachers use this knowledge effectively in lessons, thus contributing to pupils' progress. Assessment is used to inform future provision but this is not yet written into teachers' planning. Targets are set and monitored for each pupil every term, but there is no system for tracking pupils' progress over time.

Pupils with learning difficulties have written individual education plans to help address their specific needs. The school carries out some standardised tests to compare pupils' performance with children of the same age nationally.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social, and cultural development is outstanding. Mutual respect is a significant element in the ethos of this school. Relationships between staff and pupils and between pupils themselves are very good. The staff encourage and support the pupils, who respond by trying hard at their work, enjoying school and achieving well.

Pupils develop self-confidence and self-reliance, and are increasingly able to take responsibility for their work. This lays a strong foundation for their future development and economic well-being. They believe they make good progress which will help them as they grow up. Behaviour is outstanding in class and elsewhere. The class rules give pupils a clear moral code and they are able to distinguish right from wrong. Pupils are able to take turns, listen to each other, cooperate willingly and respond with ease and openness. Pupils say they enjoy coming to school, and their attendance is consistently very good. They contribute to the life of the school through their plays and presentations for each other and their Christmas concert for parents. Pupils are helped to be mindful of the needs of others through raising money for charities.

Pupils' emotional and spiritual development is fostered from the early years as they learn to reflect on their own and others' feelings. Work in RE extends understanding of the notion of belief through studying major world faiths. The curriculum provides opportunities for pupils to learn about life, public services and institutions in their own society and to explore and appreciate the achievements of other cultures. Visits out of school foster and extend this understanding, helping to encourage racial tolerance and harmony.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The staff have very good relationships with pupils, contributing to the family ethos in which pupils feel valued and secure. The child protection policy and procedures are in place but the designated person has not received training within the last two years and updating of staff training is also overdue.

The policy for safeguarding the health and safety of pupils on visits out of school takes account of guidance from the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF).

Fire prevention and fire-fighting procedures are comprehensive and equipment is checked regularly by specialist providers. Recent fire risk assessments have been carried out on both school buildings. These have not yet been sent to the Fire Officer. First aid is well supported by a clear policy and qualified staff.

Aspects of nutrition and healthy eating are explored in curricular topics and reinforced through daily snack and lunch times. Parents are actively encouraged to supply healthy foods for their children. Pupils increase their daily exercise by walking to and from the locations for their sport and swimming activities, and understand that exercise is an important part of healthy living.

The attendance registers do not differentiate between authorised and unauthorised attendance and in one class the attendance register is marked only once a day in the morning.

The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level. However, the school does not always request written references in addition to the other checks carried out. The register which records employment checks complies with the regulations.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is situated on two sites on opposite sides of the road. The main house has been adapted to provide mostly suitable accommodation. However, the room for the oldest pupils is small, limiting the opportunities for practical activities. The Nursery provides good quality, spacious accommodation well designed for its purpose. Arrangements for pupils who may become ill do not meet requirements since they have to wait for their parents in the school office. The school is in the process of buying its premises and intends to address this matter within its overall plans to improve accommodation. Good use is made of the available space on both sites to maximise potential and create interesting and stimulating learning environments.

The outside play space is well thought out and inviting for the younger pupils. Older pupils have no outdoor play space at the site but have sports activities every afternoon and on most days this includes walking to nearby facilities for sport or swimming.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents with extensive and useful information through its prospectus and parents' handbook. The prospectus gives clear details of the school's curriculum and approaches, explaining the philosophy which underpins its practice. The handbook for parents includes a good range of the policies which support the provision. The references in the handbook to the responsibilities of governors do not reflect what happens in practice as it is the principal who actually carries out the duties concerned. Similarly, some references in the handbook adopted from other sources are not accurately customised to reflect the practice of this school. The school has begun the process of amending these references.

Parents who responded to the questionnaire were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and believe that they are kept well informed about their children's progress. The school's website contributes an additional, informative dimension to its communication with parents and the wider community.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has recently reviewed its policy and procedures for handling complaints and now meets the requirements in full.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DCSF guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- maintain an attendance register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (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 (including volunteers), carry out appropriate checks including character references and, where appropriate, professional references and take such information into account in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(2)(a)).

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(1)).

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:

- refining planning to include learning objectives and
- developing assessment procedures to track pupils' progress over time.

Inspection of funded nursery education

Effectiveness of the funded nursery education

The quality of teaching and learning is good.

Children are making good progress towards the early learning goals and benefit greatly from the quality of teaching carried out by staff. Children have numerous opportunities to show initiative, develop independence and explore well organised and exciting activities. However, opportunities for mark making in the role play area are limited.

The staff members are good role models who create a climate of mutual respect and trust in which all children flourish.

The school's provision for cultural education and preparation for life in a multi-cultural society is very good. For instance, children gain an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures through discussions and activities on other countries and the celebration of festivals.

Assessment systems are consistently good. Effective systems are in place to monitor and evaluate the nursery education. Curriculum planning is good. However, planning lacks the detail and clarity to allow staff to know the learning intentions and differentiate the activities to meet the individual needs of the children.

Leadership and management are good. There is a very secure organisational structure in place. The head teacher fully supports the staff in their roles. Key issues identified at the last inspection have received good attention resulting in positive outcomes for children.

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is fostered effectively. Children learn to respect each other and develop a strong sense of what is right and wrong. Their behaviour is consistently good.

The partnership with parents is good. The quality of information to parents is good. Useful information is provided through its prospectus and website. Good systems are in place to inform parents about children's achievement and progress.

Children with learning difficulties and those with English as an Additional Language receive consistent and appropriate support. Consequently the needs of all children are met.

Recommendations or actions to improve the funded nursery education

To improve the quality and standards of the nursery education the registered person should take account of the following recommendations:

- improve opportunities for mark making to enable children to attempt writing for different purposes using features of different forms
- improve planning systems to give clarity to enable staff to understand the possible learning intentions and differentiate the activities to meet the individual needs of the children

School details

Name of school	Sinclair House School		
DCSF number	205/6385		
Unique reference number	100374		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	581621		
Type of school	Montessori		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1989		
Age range of pupils	2-8		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 22	Girls: 14	Total: 36
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 16	Total: 37
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 22	Girls: 13	Total: 35
Annual fees (day pupils)	£2,700-£7,650		
Address of school	159 Munster Road		
	Fulham		
	London		
	SW6 6DA		
Telephone number	0207 736 9182		
Fax number	0207 371 0295		
Email address	carlotta@sinclairhouseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Carlotta O'Sullivan		
Proprietor	Mrs Carlotta O'Sullivan		
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew AI		
Childcare inspector	Martha Darkwah		
Dates of inspection	8-9 November 2007		