

Overstone Park School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	928/6063
Unique Reference Number	122150
Inspection number	320001
Inspection dates	29-30 January 2008
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne 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).

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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

Overstone Park School is an independent non-selective day and boarding school consisting of three departments: crèche, nursery, pre-preparatory; preparatory school and high school for children aged 0 to 16 years on the outskirts of Northampton. The crèche, nursery and pre-preparatory provision up to Reception age was subject to an Ofsted Early Years' Inspection in November 2006. The school had a material change in January 2005 which resulted in registration for boarding provision. The school also had a social care inspection in January 2007. There are currently 93 children in the main school from Reception to Key Stage 4, who are mostly taught in classes comprising of two year groups, with the exception of Year 11. Twelve pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, including a very small number who have statements of special educational need. A few pupils speak English as an additional language. The school was opened by the current proprietors almost 25 years ago. It was awarded Investors in People status in March 2000 and this was renewed in 2003.

Evaluation of the school

Overstone Park School provides a satisfactory quality of education overall. It has some good features. The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and the school provides good care for, and promotes good behaviour amongst, its pupils. Teaching is satisfactory overall. Sometimes it is good. This is mirrored in pupils' progress. Most, but not all, of the regulations are met.

Quality of education

The quality of education is satisfactory overall. The curriculum is based on the National Curriculum and incorporates all the essential elements, including basic skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

The curriculum is satisfactory overall with many positive elements, including particular strengths in the provision for sports, music, drama and French. Visiting teachers enrich the curriculum and add significant curriculum breadth across the school. Many pupils learn to play an instrument. In part this is due to the excellent range of tuned instruments available and the access to good music specialists. The curriculum policies and planning documents provide useful guidance for teachers to plan lessons. Curriculum monitoring is mostly informal. Written plans mostly make

the learning objectives clear but do not give sufficient guidance for preparatory school teaching. Consequently here, some pupils are not consistently well challenged. The school is reasonably resourced; its facilities for sport, music, art and ICT are good, although the teaching does not make the best use of resources in all lessons.

The quality of teaching and assessment is satisfactory, with some lessons that are good. In the best lessons, teachers have good subject knowledge, make the lesson objectives clear, move the lesson on at a good pace and provide stimulating activities appropriate to the range of pupils in the class. Consequently pupils are not listening for too long and are actively engaged; thinking things through for themselves. Teachers make lessons interesting when they are confident about their subject matter. Pupils enjoy lessons when practical work is set, and in these lessons they make good progress in their learning. Pupils' independent writing skills are not always extended effectively, particularly in Reception and Key Stage 1, because pupils mainly copy teachers' writing or text from books. However, the presentation of their work is of high quality. They are competent in spelling and in handwriting, which is given good emphasis. By Key Stage 2, their written English is developing well, particularly in factual writing and poetry. Lesson objectives are not always precise or engaging enough to be effective. Pupils are consistently given helpful learning targets through the regular reporting process. Although work is marked regularly and pupils are awarded grades, there is too little advice through marking on how they could improve a piece of work. There are no effective systems in place to check on the quality of teaching and learning and provide all staff with guidance on how to improve their teaching. Some staff lack in depth knowledge of the subjects they are teaching; in other lessons subject knowledge is good. This disparity means that the quality of teaching and learning is not always consistent across the school.

Regular formal assessment enables staff to establish pupils' progress. School data shows that over time pupils make good progress, including those pupils identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities. In the lessons seen during the inspection, pupils generally made satisfactory progress in their learning. Where pupils were challenged well, some made good progress, but this is not consistent across the school. The school assesses the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities effectively and is committed to including them fully in the life of the school. These pupils benefit from the small class sizes and the individual support and extra tuition provided. Individual education plans provide some useful information, but not all are sufficiently detailed or contain specific enough targets. Work in lessons and in exercise books shows that current pupils are achieving satisfactorily overall. School data, including results of internally marked end of key stage tests in Years 2, 6 and 9, shows that pupils in previous years have reached above average standards. The school prepares all its pupils for GSCE examinations and for their future academic or vocational courses. Results at GSCE are good overall although too low in some subject areas.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They are encouraged to treat others as they would wish to be treated, which has a very positive effect on their social and moral development. Most pupils enjoy school and are keen to comply with teachers' expectations. They concentrate well, often work effectively in pairs and small groups and are well motivated; all skills that stand them in good stead for the future. Pupils' behaviour is good. They display high levels of self-discipline in the majority of lessons and around the school. They are courteous and considerate. Pupils' positive attitudes to school are reflected in the good levels of attendance. They are regularly involved in fundraising for various charities. Pupils' cultural development is enhanced by the wide range of cultural backgrounds represented amongst pupils and staff. Their understanding of other cultures is nurtured through the curriculum and special events. Citizenship lessons and visitors to the school provide pupils with a broad general knowledge of public institutions and services in this country.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is good. There are robust procedures in place for child protection and health and safety, so that pupils are able to work and play in a safe and secure environment. The school's proprietors have worked diligently to ensure that the premises and equipment are maintained in a satisfactory condition. There is a good behaviour policy which is implemented effectively and well understood by staff, pupils and their parents. Many pupils say that adults are approachable if they need help and that rare incidents of poor behaviour are swiftly dealt with. The school's curriculum ensures that pupils are aware of the need to eat healthily and take regular exercise. The attendance and admission registers comply with regulations. The proprietors are aware of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and have a policy in place, and have recently compiled a three-year plan to show how the school will comply with the regulations.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school complies with regulations for the appointment of staff. All applicants, including non-teaching staff, are checked with the Criminal Records Bureau and their references and qualifications are corroborated. All the required information is kept on a single central record which is easily accessible to the responsible authorities.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises are suitable and the grounds are extensive. Good use is made of the available space; the grounds are well used to enrich the curriculum. Classrooms are of adequate size and other facilities include the hall, science

laboratory, two libraries and the ICT suite, which are well used to enhance teaching. There are satisfactory dining and food preparation facilities. The youngest children have an outdoor area for their own use. There is ample outdoor space for physical education and pupils have the use of a local swimming pool and sports hall. The accommodation for pupils who are taken ill is not suitably equipped with a washbasin and therefore does not meet the requirement.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school meets the requirements in respect of the provision of compulsory information by informing prospective parents directly at an initial meeting of what information is available to them in the school foyer or upon request. The school provides detailed termly written reports of their child's progress and attainment in all of the main subject areas taught. The quality of information provided to outside bodies is acceptable and meets requirements. It is clear to prospective parents exactly what the provision is for children with learning difficulties and/or disabilities or who speak English as an additional language as this is again one of the issues discussed in depth at the initial meeting. The school is non-selective and each place granted is reviewed on the school's ability to meet each child's needs. Parents are verbally provided with information regarding the complaints procedure and a policy is in place to inform parents in the event of such a complaint.

Procedures for handling complaints

At the time of the inspection, the procedures for handling complaints do not yet meet five of the current regulatory requirements. The school's written complaints policy would be made available to parents if such a request was made.

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 the curriculum (standard 1) and must:

- ensure that all teachers have appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught (paragraph 1 (3) (e)).

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 (I)).

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

- ensure that where 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 (paragraph 7(f))
- ensure that where there is a panel hearing of a complaint there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
- ensure the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and stipulates that the complainant, proprietors and head teacher, and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i))
- ensure the procedure provides for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j))
- ensure the procedure provides that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).

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:

- plan teaching and learning more effectively, making learning objectives more meaningful and specific and taking further account of the challenge necessary for all pupils
- ensure that lessons consistently provide more active learning opportunities for pupils.

School details

Name of school	Overstone Park School		
DCSF number	928/6063		
Unique reference number	122150		
Type of school	Wide age range		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	4 September 1983		
Age range of pupils	3 - 16		
Gender of pupils	mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 61	Girls: 32	Total: 93
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 7	Girls: 3	Total: 10
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	From £6180 for reception and Year 1 pupils up to £7500 for High School pupils		
Address of school	Overstone Park Northampton Northamptonshire NN6 0DT		
Telephone number	01604 643787		
Fax number	01604 670445		
Email address	opschool@aol.com		
Headteacher	Mrs M Brown		
Proprietor	Mr C & Mrs M Brown		
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI		
Dates of inspection	29-30 January 2008		