

Downsend School Ashtead Lodge

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	936/6548
Unique Reference Number	125432
Inspection number	320350
Inspection dates	28-29 November 2007
Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher AI

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

Ashtead Lodge is one of three pre-preparatory Lodges attached to Downsends School. It was founded in 1983 and operates from a converted residential property in Ashtead. A maximum of 58 children, aged between 2 and 6 years, may attend at any one time. The school currently supports a number of children with special education needs, although there are no children with a statement of special educational need. Two children speak English as an additional language.

There is an "early bird" facility for all children from 8 until 8.30am and an "extended day" facility from 4.00 until 5.30pm. Reception and Year 1 children are offered after school clubs. The school promotes its Quality Charter to produce; 'happy, hardworking and successful children'. This is the first published report for the school.

Evaluation of the school

The school meets its aims and provides an outstanding quality of education for pupils. There is a passion for learning and a commitment to 'a school for children who enjoy life'. The school provides an outstanding curriculum with good quality teaching and assessment. Personal development and care is outstanding because of the dedicated commitment of the head teacher and all staff. It is clear that each child is nurtured effectively and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Pupils make good progress, enjoy high levels of success and are fully prepared for the next phase in their education.

Although the accommodation presents some limitations, it does not impact significantly on the quality of teaching and learning. The school meets all but one of the regulations.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It is well-matched to the needs of each child. In the nursery classes, children enjoy a wide range of activities including painting, cookery, music, and physical education (PE). Sand, play-dough and water are used well to promote learning. Children are encouraged to use pencils and colouring pens. They are offered good opportunities to write simple words and to read. They use

computers proficiently. Facilities for outdoor play are excellent which adds to the learning in all areas. In the Reception and Year 1 classes, children experience an increasingly formal and advanced curriculum. Literacy and numeracy are taught daily while French, music and dance and swimming are taught weekly. The focus on literacy and numeracy is effective and children achieve well in both reading and writing. Speaking and listening skills are outstanding and even the youngest children engage in stimulating conversation. They told inspectors about their visit to Hampton Court where they played at jousting and they spoke eloquently about their ballet lessons. Personal, social and health education is integrated into all aspects of the curriculum and the children know how to keep safe and healthy. The curriculum is enriched with an excellent range of visits to places of interest together with suitable before and after-school activities.

Within this positive picture the curriculum is occasionally a little too formal so that children are not always given quite enough opportunity to explore and find things out for themselves. In addition, there is scope to use the full range of information and communications technology (ICT) equipment even more effectively.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall. Some teaching is outstanding and a small amount is satisfactory. Teachers know all their children very well and skilfully match teaching strategies to the needs of each child. Their knowledge and understanding of children's achievements and how they can improve is well illustrated by the lengthy, reflective reports produced for each child three times a year. It is equally well illustrated by the support given to children such as those with English as an additional language who need extra support. Teachers have high expectations but they proceed gently and patiently, moving children on at an appropriate pace. In so doing, they make learning fun. Good use is made of educational resources. Children's interests and questions raised by them are put to good use. Nevertheless, there are a few occasions when opportunities are missed to capitalise on unexpected opportunities to promote learning.

Due to the excellent curriculum and effective teaching, children's progress in their learning is good. A striking feature is the way in which they want to learn and cooperate very well with teachers. During the inspection, there were a number of instances where learning was really quite stunning; for example, children in Reception knew about the different ways in which Christmas is celebrated around the world. Nursery children knew the difference between evergreen and deciduous trees. Children's willingness to listen to their teachers and to their peers is noteworthy. This contributes considerably to their success.

There is scope to allow children to take more responsibility for their own learning. That is, to ask questions, find things out, reach conclusions and communicate findings in a variety of ways to different audiences. For example, the 'Busy' and 'What shall I do now?' tables are good examples of children managing their own independent learning.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the children

Children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding overall. Children develop markedly in confidence, sensitivity and understanding as they grow older. When speaking with inspectors even the youngest children spoke confidently and with meaning. They all had good understanding of concepts such as friendship, happiness and sadness. They were proud to be chosen for 'The Golden Board'. The school rightly acknowledges the need to develop children's self confidence even more effectively.

The headteacher and staff set high expectations of behaviour; their behaviour is outstanding. Children rise to these expectations and meet them successfully. Children are polite and friendly to adults and very supportive of one another. They form a cohesive family group and older children act as very good role models for younger ones. They love looking after Scampi the dog, and support the charity 'Hearing Dogs for Deaf People'.

Discussion times, daily reading sessions and the use of elected class representatives help children to understand their responsibilities towards others and to the broader community. Children are understandably proud that their art work is displayed in the Ashted Library. Children share and collaborate harmoniously when involved in play activities. The small numbers of children in each class ensures that each can play a major role in the life of the school, for example when performing in a variety of productions.

Children's cultural development is good. Through the good use of books, dance, music, and local visits children have a good grounding in many aspects of their local cultural heritage and increasingly understand the impact of the wider British and European culture on their lives. The festivals of different faiths are celebrated regularly and through the outstanding curriculum they successfully learn about different cultures around the world.

Welfare, health and safety of the children

The school makes outstanding provision for the welfare, health and safety of its children. Robust policies and procedures have been established to ensure that all are well looked after and kept safe. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to promoting good conduct. As a result, children's behaviour is excellent both in class and around the school. Staff are dedicated and committed to nurturing the children in their care. They undertake all necessary training to keep up to date, particularly in regard to child protection. Children and parents are encouraged to enjoy healthy lifestyles and this is reflected in the food and opportunities for exercise provided. The school is an inclusive community in which all feel safe and valued. Children make strong friendships and they are clearly happy. No one is left out, and children demonstrate particular sensitivity towards friends including those who may have learning difficulties.

Risk assessment procedures are undertaken and fire safety has a high priority. All checks are rigorous. There are several trained first aiders at the school who follow the clearly written and appropriate first aid policy. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to regulations. The school takes seriously its duty with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and has made thoughtful improvements to its provision.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All necessary checks have been made to fully meet regulations. These are documented appropriately on a central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school is well maintained with a large, fully resourced garden to the rear. The school is surrounded by trees and parkland. It is close to a pond and common. Opportunities for learning beyond the school environment are plentiful and are used effectively to promote children's skills and understanding. The school's premises are well used for extended services. After school activities and clubs successfully promote community cohesion.

Because of limited space, there is no designated area with a nearby washbasin for use by children who are sick. However, alternative arrangements are in place.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

A wealth of useful information, which includes an expression of the school's aims and ethos, is contained in the prospectus and handbook for parents and prospective parents. The names of all staff and list of school policies available to parents is clearly displayed in the front porch. Over 40 questionnaires were received from parents prior to the inspection and the responses were overwhelmingly supportive of the school. A typical response was, 'Ashtead Lodge is a wonderful school full of happy children.'

The school invites parent-class representatives to meet, discuss and feedback on specific issues. All parents are invited to a monthly coffee morning which helps to keep channels of communication open between home and school. Each child's assessment profiles together with detailed written reports are regularly shared with parents. This excellent practice not only includes a 'settling in' report but also identifies specific areas of learning as a focus for each child's development. As a result parents have the opportunity to be fully involved in the education of their own child.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy meets all regulations and there have been no complaints this year.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, except one 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)).

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 greater opportunities for children to engage in activities which they plan and initiate for themselves
- make the best possible use of available ICT equipment to enrich teaching and learning even further.

School details

Name of school	Downsend School Ashtead Lodge		
DCSF number	936/6548		
Unique reference number	125432		
Type of school	Pre - prep		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1983		
Age range of children	2-6		
Gender of children	mixed		
Number on roll (full-time children)	Boys: 19	Girls: 13	Total: 32
Number on roll (part-time children)	Boys: 15	Girls: 12	Total: 27
Number of children with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of children who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day children)	£645 - £2510		
Address of school	22 Oakfield Road Ashtead Surrey KT21 2RE		
Telephone number	01372385439/01372385417		
Fax number	01372273816		
Email address	ashteadlodge@downsend.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Kay Barrett		
Proprietor	Cognita Group of Schools		
Reporting inspector	Sandra Teacher AI		
Dates of inspection	28-29 November 2007		