

Kingscourt School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	850/6034
Unique Reference Number	130278
Inspection number	330656
Inspection dates	3–4 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended.

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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, the purpose of which is 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

Kingscourt School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and eleven years of age. It was opened in April 1995. It is situated in Catherington on the outskirts of Horndean in Hampshire. Admission is non-selective. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. At the time of the inspection there were 161 pupils on roll. The school's aim is to provide 'an education built on the firm foundation of English, Maths and Science, strengthened and enhanced by enthusiastic teaching and excellent resources.'

This is the school's first inspection by Ofsted.

Evaluation of the school

Kingscourt School achieves its aim, providing a good education with outstanding features. The good quality curriculum ensures a broad and interesting learning experience for all pupils. Teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding, and in consequence pupils of all abilities make good progress. In English progress is outstanding. Pupils become highly effective learners who are exceptionally well motivated and bring great enthusiasm to their work. The personal development and behaviour of pupils are outstanding: they retain an innocence which is a rarity and respond to adults and other children with openness and unfailing courtesy. Pupils love coming to school and parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school.

The school meets all but one of the regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

The good quality curriculum provides a secure framework through which pupils learn very effectively. The curriculum provides a broad learning experience which includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, religious knowledge (RK), citizenship, personal, social and health education (PSHE), and French. Latin is included in the curriculum for pupils in Years 5 and 6 and a taster course in Spanish extends the curriculum in Year 6.

Long-term planning outlines what will be covered across the year, having regard to the programmes of study of the National Curriculum, and is effectively informed by the National Primary Strategy. Schemes of work are diligently planned for each term

in each subject. The format varies, but all are suitable for their purpose, setting out what will be taught in each term and usefully noting where productive links can be made to other areas of learning.

The planning of the curriculum is a significant strength. Ways of planning have been considered over time and different methods trialled and evaluated. As a consequence, the school has refined its planning so that its curriculum is clearly mapped across all subjects. A topic framework is used in Year 1, building on the good progress secured in the Foundation Stage. From Year 2 the curriculum is supported by an increased element of subject teaching. This curricular organisation works effectively as teachers are able to exploit their individual subject expertise. It results in a good quality progressive learning experience for pupils.

Literacy and numeracy are given a high priority and this strong emphasis contributes to the pupils' outstanding progress in English and good progress in mathematics. Personal development is fostered through PSHE, RK and assemblies, adding significantly to pupils' outstanding development in this area. Support for pupils who may experience learning difficulties is good. Provision is flexibly planned to offer additional support out of class or focussed support alongside the pupil in class.

The curriculum is extended by peripatetic specialist teaching in music, drama and games and a large proportion of pupils take advantage of the availability of instrumental music tuition. An extensive range of after-school clubs includes individual and team sports, dance, cookery and needlework, creating further opportunities for pupils to extend their experience and develop and refine their skills.

The school places great importance on enriching pupils' education through imaginative first-hand experiences. The school makes good use of its location for regular visits to theatres, museums and sites of historical interest. In addition, residential visits including some to Italy and France, contribute immeasurably to pupils' understanding of work they do in school.

The quality of teaching is consistently good and some is outstanding, resulting in commensurate progress by pupils. The teachers have a secure knowledge of the subjects they teach and have a high level of professional expertise. Lesson planning is established and is often good. The most effective planning is particularly detailed, specifying precisely what pupils will learn; the methods and approaches to be used and how tasks will be differentiated to meet the differing needs and abilities of pupils. Lesson planning almost always identifies the intended learning and teachers share the objectives with pupils, helping them to be clear about what they are expected to know and be able to do. The skilful use of information and communication technology (ICT) is an integral part of teaching, enhancing the range of teaching techniques and resources.

Teachers enjoy teaching and believe that pupils should enjoy learning. This enthusiasm is very apparent and results in pupils who love coming to school and are

able to work with unusually high levels of concentration and motivation. The outstanding relationships within classes are developed by building trust and confidence, encouraging pupils and enabling them to believe in their capacity to learn. Teachers' expectations are high and pupils respond to them wholeheartedly.

The small class sizes mean that teachers and support staff are able to give individuals direct and timely support. The strong emphasis on speaking and listening contributes significantly to pupils becoming highly articulate and confident speakers. All pupils are challenged by tasks which expect them to recall previous learning, explain their reasoning to others or express an opinion. Pupils are lively, enthusiastic learners, able to concentrate effectively and take satisfaction from their achievement.

Systems for assessment are satisfactory. Pupils' work is routinely scrutinised in class and is marked regularly and conscientiously. The marking policy is not, however, sufficiently precise, leaving too much to individual teacher preference and as a result, marking is inconsistent. Target setting is well established in English and is developing in other subjects but is not yet consistently implemented. General targets are set in other areas of learning and pupils themselves take some responsibility for deciding what these will be. The school is just beginning to establish a baseline related to the areas of learning in the Foundation Stage from which to measure pupils' progress over time.

The school usefully carries out a range of nationally validated tests which enables them to assess progress and to compare pupils' performance with that of pupils of the same age nationally.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. They are self-assured, articulate and welcoming. Behaviour is outstanding in lessons and around the school and pupils are consistently courteous and unfailingly well-mannered. They are committed to the school and their enjoyment is evident in their enthusiastic response in lessons and extracurricular activities. Their very good attendance reflects their enthusiasm.

The school has developed a comprehensive programme which covers all aspects of pupils' personal development. As a result pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence are developed very successfully. They have a clear understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of how they should treat one another. Relationships at every level in the school are excellent and this contributes significantly to the climate for learning. Pupils work together harmoniously and respectfully. Although there is limited cultural or ethnic diversity within the school, a wide range of outings, activities and links ensure that pupils gain an appreciation of the diversity of cultures and ethnicity which characterise contemporary Britain. Pupils are committed to supporting the less fortunate through regular fund raising for charities, such as for a partner school in Sri Lanka and a school in difficult circumstances in Peru.

Pupils respond well to the breadth of provision for music, drama and sport, which enriches their spiritual and cultural awareness. Election to the School Council provides pupils with an appreciation of the democratic process and members take seriously their deliberations on current issues, such as the school's approach to ecological matters. There are also many tasks and responsibilities within each class which pupils are eager to fulfil. All pupils are enthusiastic about their involvement in team sports, public performances and residential visits.

Pupils' strong basic skills are imaginatively applied in managing budgets and organising projects and events efficiently. This, supported by their exceptional personal qualities, ensures that they are extremely well prepared for the world of work in the future.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school has a distinctive family ethos in which pupils feel cared for and valued. The outstanding relationships between staff and pupils contribute significantly to this sense of what one pupil called 'a big, school family'.

The child protection policy and procedures are in place but have not been updated in compliance with the most recent DCSF guidance. Staff have received training but the designated person has not received training within the last two years, as required by the regulation. This training has now been booked.

Fire prevention and fire-fighting procedures are well established and equipment is regularly maintained by specialist providers. The first aid policy is satisfactory and there are several qualified first-aiders on the staff.

Aspects of food and healthy eating are thoroughly explored in PSHE and science and reinforced through the balanced and varied meals provided at lunch times. Pupils understand from their work in science that smoking is dangerous to health. In discussions with inspectors, pupils said they really enjoyed their varied sporting activities and they know that exercise is an important part of healthy living.

The school meets the requirements of 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. The school's employment procedures ensure that all required checks are carried out prior to appointment.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides suitable accommodation in a listed manor house. The large domestic rooms are used imaginatively to create stimulating learning environments. The communal areas provide attractive spaces where pupils' work is displayed and celebrated. Specialist rooms for ICT, music and drama further enhance provision. The hall in a neighbouring building provides a flexible space for PE, assemblies and drama, as well as for use as a dining room.

The pupils benefit from the school's setting in extensive grounds where they can play and explore.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents with clear and accessible information through its parents' handbook, *'The Kingscourt A-Z'*, which parents are required to have read as part of their contract with the school. It gives extensive information on all aspects of the school including its philosophy and aims. The *Court Circular* is a fortnightly emailed newsletter which keeps parents informed about dates of important events and pupils' achievements. The twice termly *Kingscourt Explorer* is a look at the recent life of the school with interesting reports and photographs.

The very high proportion of parents who responded to the questionnaire was overwhelmingly supportive of the headteacher and staff. They believe the school provides very well for their children and individual parents gave specific examples of the school's exemplary practice. Twice yearly reports keep them well informed about their children's progress.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's policy and procedures for handling complaints meet the requirements in full.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is good. Teaching is consistently good and contributes well to children's good learning and development. On entry to the Nursery, standards are slightly above average and children make good progress across the areas of learning in both Nursery and Reception classes. The majority are working at levels above those expected when they enter Year 1. Teaching is particularly effective in developing children's social and language skills. The planning for language and communication skills, including a recently introduced programme of intensive support to develop phonic awareness, has a very positive impact on learning. A key strength of the provision is the expectation that children

will begin to take responsibility for some of their own needs, contributing to their outstanding personal development.

Learning activities are effectively planned, often stimulating, and matched appropriately to the needs of the children. At times, and particularly in the Reception classes, the opportunities for children to make choices are not so well developed and activities can be rather teacher-directed. The size of the Reception group this year and the relocation of their teaching rooms have made it more difficult for these children to have ready access to the outdoor learning area. This is a constraint on the breadth of the curriculum and on children's learning. Nevertheless, the school makes every effort to compensate for these disadvantages by making the best use of the rich potential of the extensive grounds.

Pupils' personal development is outstanding. The quality of care and the welfare of children have significant strengths. Relationships and engagement with families are good. The staff commitment to pupils' enjoyment is high, as is their attention to children's healthy eating and staying safe. Provision for welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. This aspect is linked to the overall grade for the school's provision.

Assessment practice is a strength. Extremely detailed developmental records are maintained in Nursery. Staff have been working recently to develop a cohesive system which would provide an overview of progress. To this end, the school has made a start on restructuring its analysis of children's attainment when they enter Reception, so that the school will be better able to demonstrate the extent of the progress they make over time. Leadership and management is good overall, although the permanent EYFS leader is absent from school at present.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ("the Regulations"), with the exception of the one listed below.

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

- review its child protection policy and ensure that the designated person for child protection receives training every two years, in compliance with DCSF 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 regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- continue to build on the good work begun in the Early Years in tracking progress, to enable the school to demonstrate more precisely the progress pupils make over time
- review its marking policy to define the practice more rigorously
- continue work on assessment and embed target-setting consistently within the planning for all subjects.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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The quality of education

Overall quality of education		√		
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils		√		
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning		√		

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils			√	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		√		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		√		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	√			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			√	
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		√		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		√		

School details

Name of school	Kingscourt School		
DCSF number	850/6034		
Unique reference number	130278		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	April 1995		
Age range of pupils	3-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 69	Girls: 70	Total: 139
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 11	Total: 22
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,090		
Address of school	Catherington House 182 Five Heads Road Catherington Waterlooville Hampshire PO8 9NJ		
Telephone number	023 9259 3251		
Fax number	023 9259 7481		
Email address	office@kingscourt.org.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs J Easton		
Proprietor	Cognita Limited		
Reporting inspector	Eileen McAndrew		
Dates of inspection	3–4 December 2008		