

# Duncombe School

Independent School

Inspection report

|                              |                  |
|------------------------------|------------------|
| DCSF Registration Number     | 919/6098         |
| Unique Reference Number      | 117628           |
| URN for registered childcare | EY362174         |
| Inspection number            | 332454           |
| Inspection dates             | 3–4 March 2009   |
| Reporting inspector          | Dr Anna Coyle AI |

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended. The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

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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.

The inspection of registered provision<sup>1</sup> was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

## Information about the school

Duncombe School is a co-educational, independent preparatory school for children aged two to eleven years. Founded in 1939, it is a member of the Cognita Group. There are currently 319 children on roll. The aim of the school is to educate the whole child, fostering the individual's highest academic, creative, social and recreational standards within a happy, caring and stimulating environment. It believes in promoting respect for Christian values whilst recognising the beliefs, needs and achievement of others in a multicultural society. This is the school's first report published by Ofsted.

## Evaluation of the school

Duncombe School is a welcoming, friendly school which provides a good quality of education for its children. It meets its stated aims and ensures that all children benefit from a good curriculum that provides well for their individual needs. Children make good progress academically and achieve high standards by the time they leave at the end of Year 6. Personal development and well-being are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding, and behaviour is exemplary. Provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The school meets all of the required regulations.

## Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good. The school provides a good curriculum to meet the needs of the children, which includes experiences in all the required areas of learning. English and mathematics are usually taught in the mornings, and literacy and numeracy are covered every day in all classes. Art, design and technology,

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<sup>1</sup> Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

geography, history, information and communication technology, music and physical education are taught in weekly lessons. The school is developing its provision for music. It also provides additional opportunities for children to learn French. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities includes choir, horse riding, ballet and music tuition. Plenty of opportunities are also offered for pupils to participate in sports clubs such as football, netball, tennis and rugby.

Teaching and assessment are good. As a result, children make good progress. They attain standards that are well above the national averages in English, mathematics and science by the end of Year 6. The quality of teaching is excellent in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It ranges from satisfactory to outstanding in Years 1 to 6, but is mainly good. In the best lessons, teaching is characterised by very calm, purposeful environments in which learning is carefully planned so that children progress in achievable steps. Teachers have excellent relationships with their classes and the rapport they share with the children is enhanced by a strong sense of commitment. Excellent questioning, frequent praise and high expectations are notable features of teaching. The development of children's speaking and listening skills is particularly good because teachers include many opportunities for children to contribute to lessons. Literacy, numeracy and computer activities are taught well and children make good progress in these basic skills. Creative, physical and social skills are well advanced by the age of 11.

Children's excellent attitudes and behaviour and their quiet respect for each other and adults are key features of good learning in lessons on topics such as play writing and making glove puppets. Teachers successfully encourage the children to develop as independent learners and share their experiences with others. For example, they show a keen desire to gain new knowledge and are eager to increase their skills in geography lessons when considering ways to conserve water in hot climates. The school's good resources are used well to aid learning, and interactive whiteboards are used extensively to motivate learning. Occasionally, however, teaching does not inspire children and they struggle to maintain their interest in subjects such as mathematics when work is not matched sufficiently to their needs. The school has recently reorganised the responsibilities of the subject coordinators and is developing their roles as a priority. It accepts that not enough monitoring of teaching takes place currently to help teachers identify and share best practice across the school.

Assessment is good. Most teachers make effective use of data to help them plan their lessons and match work to the needs of the children in their classes. They keep careful records of children's progress and systematically update the information. Children who require additional help benefit from specialised support on a one-to-one basis or in small groups. Those with particular gifts and talents are challenged effectively to reach the highest levels. However, although some of the marking of children's work is excellent, it is inconsistent across the school and does not always pinpoint how well they are doing or what they need to do to improve.

## Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children is outstanding. The school values each child as an individual and successfully promotes their confidence and self-knowledge. Children settle happily when they first begin school and quickly become confident, articulate learners who show a tremendous enjoyment of all aspects of school life. Attitudes to learning and relationships between children are excellent. Many children say they love school, as confirmed by the high rates of attendance and their outstanding behaviour. They say there is very little bullying but they know to whom they can turn if incidents arise. Consequently, children feel safe in school and rightly believe that they are making good progress. Excellent opportunities are provided for the children to learn about the world around them. They learn to respect the law and value public institutions through visits from the fire and police services. They consider spiritual and cultural aspects of life by participating in interesting activities such as assemblies that focus on celebrations of Mothers' Day and Christian festivals. The curriculum helps them understand different faiths and beliefs so that they grow up to be tolerant towards others from various cultural traditions. Moral and social aspects are addressed successfully in small class discussions known as 'circle time' which take place regularly in all year groups. Children are effectively prepared for the future by staff who nurture and build upon their self-esteem so that they accept responsibilities eagerly. Many children effectively contribute to the school community by taking on roles such as school councillors, team captains, form representatives, library monitors and peer mentors. They also enjoy showing visitors around the school and organising events to raise funds for charities.

## Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school's good provision for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of the children enables them to be safe. It has a wide range of policies that are implemented effectively. These include rigorous procedures for safeguarding children and effective arrangements for ensuring child protection and educational visits. Anti-bullying procedures are in place. Admissions procedures and attendance registers meet the regulations and the school fulfils the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. A clear policy for first aid is implemented effectively and staff have received appropriate training. The school ensures that fire safety and risk assessments are carried out appropriately and records are well maintained. The school also keeps a careful log of any maintenance issues and these are dealt with very swiftly as they arise. Children are supervised effectively whilst they are in lessons and during playtimes and extra-curricular activities. They eat reasonably healthy lunches that include salad options. Water fountains are available around the school and drinks are provided in classrooms. Children take regular physical exercise during gymnastics, dance and games sessions and in after-school sports clubs.

## Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The required procedures for recruiting staff are in place. The school has checked all adults to ensure their suitability to work with children. It has a single central register which lists all the appropriate details, and this information is well maintained and kept up-to-date.

## School's premises and accommodation

The school has good premises and accommodation to meet the needs of the children and ensure effective learning. The premises are well maintained, very clean and attractively decorated. Excellent displays of children's work adorn many walls and help to provide a vibrant, colourful environment. The school is heated efficiently to provide children with warm classrooms during the winter months. There are sufficient toilets for the children and the staff. Hot water is readily available for hand-washing. The school has a specific room set aside for medical needs that is comfortable and well equipped. Any minor injuries are dealt with effectively and notes are sent home to parents to keep them informed of any accidents. The outdoor hard play areas have good even surfaces and are marked out clearly for games activities and other pursuits. Grassed areas are well maintained and the children are proud of the wild area known as 'The Dell'.

## Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents are provided with a good range of information in the prospectus and newsletters. The school also records details of its provision on its website. There are suitable arrangements in place for parents to receive regular written reports about their children's progress and they have regular opportunities to attend consultation meetings with the teachers. Many parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire were very supportive of the school. The majority say they are pleased with the education their children receive and comments include, 'All members of staff are warm, welcoming and very enthusiastic.' Parents particularly like the school's consideration of the needs of the individual child which is perceived to be a strength. School trips are said to provide 'tremendous benefit' to children's learning and parents enjoy attending assemblies, special services and lunch sessions. However, a significant proportion of parents say that they have not been given sufficient information about the complaints procedures. The school has recently revised its website to address this situation, and it has included clearer details in the school entrance to help parents access this information.

## Procedures for handling complaints

The school has an appropriate set of procedures which meet the regulations.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision is exceedingly well led by an enthusiastic and committed leader who inspires colleagues. The school provides very clean, well-organised accommodation which has plenty of excellent displays of children's work to stimulate learning and celebrate success. Adults are well qualified and they work together as an excellent team. They are quietly spoken with the children and provide a caring, welcoming and supportive environment in which children's welfare, health and safety are paramount. For example, safety gates at the top and bottom of the stairs and an attractive, fenced outdoor play area mean that children can work and play securely. Children in the Kindergarten, Nursery and Reception classes make rapid progress from their starting points and achieve very well. They learn the school routines quickly and mix happily with each other in an inclusive setting. All children are valued equally by the staff as unique individuals. Their personal, social and emotional development is outstanding. Snack times are happy occasions where children learn to take turns, share healthy fruit and give out drinks.

Excellent teaching helps the children to learn and develop very well academically through an effective balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Teachers make sure that the children have plenty of exercise and are able to play outside regularly. They promote communication, language, literacy, and numeracy skills very effectively by giving the children plenty of good opportunities to talk about their learning and share ideas on stories such as *The Gingerbread Man* and *The Tiger Who Came to Tea*. Children greatly enjoy solving simple mathematical problems and making pictures with two-dimensional shapes such as squares, triangles and circles. They increase their knowledge and understanding of the world around them through practical activities such as planting flowers, gluing and sticking shapes, rolling out dough and using construction toys. Children enjoy regular trips across to the school library and the gym. Creative and physical skills are developed effectively and children achieve well in these areas. They handle equipment confidently and are becoming confident, independent learners.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- extend the monitoring of teaching in order to identify and share best practice across the school
- improve the consistency of teachers' marking to help children know how well they are doing and how to do better.

## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

|             |      |              |            |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|
| outstanding | Good | satisfactory | inadequate |
|-------------|------|--------------|------------|

### 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 |  | ✓ |  |  |
|--|--|---|--|--|

### 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  | Duncombe School  |            |            |
| DCSF number   | 919/6098   |            |            |
| Unique reference number                                       | 117628   |            |            |
| EY URN (for registered childcare only)                        | EY362174   |            |            |
| Type of school  | Primary with Nursery   |            |            |
| Status  | Independent  |            |            |
| Date school opened  | 1939   |            |            |
| Age range of pupils   | 2–11   |            |            |
| Gender of pupils  | Mixed  |            |            |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils)                             | Boys: 128  | Girls: 123 | Total: 251 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils)                             | Boys: 15   | Girls: 15  | Total: 30  |
| Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision   | Boys: 20   | Girls: 18  | Total: 38  |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 1  | Girls: 0   | Total: 0   |
| Number of pupils who are looked after                         | Boys: 0  | Girls: 0   | Total: 0   |
| Annual fees (day pupils)                                      | £7080 – £9720  |            |            |
| Annual fees (childcare)                                       | £7080  |            |            |
| Address of school   | 4 Warren Park Road<br>Bengeo<br>Hertford<br>Hertfordshire<br>SG14 3JA                    |            |            |
| Telephone number  | 01992 414100   |            |            |
| Fax number  | 01992 414111   |            |            |
| Email address   | <a href="mailto:headteacher@duncombe-school.co.uk">headteacher@duncombe-school.co.uk</a> |            |            |
| Headteacher   | Mrs Verity White   |            |            |
| Proprietor  | Cognita Group  |            |            |
| Reporting inspector   | Dr Anna Coyle AI   |            |            |
| Dates of inspection   | 3–4 March 2009   |            |            |