

The Unicorn School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	931/6109
Unique Reference Number	123322
Inspection number	333078
Inspection dates	9 December 2008
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl 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.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Unicorn School is a co-educational school for moderately and severely dyslexic pupils aged 6 -12 years. There are 63 pupils on roll. There are some pupils who are dyspraxic and dyscalculic. The number of pupils on roll with dyscalculia has increased in recent years. The school first opened in 1991 and has recently moved to new and larger premises, a large detached Georgian house, near the centre of Abingdon. It was last inspected in October 2006.

The school aims to '...reintegrate pupils into mainstream with renewed self esteem, plus strategies for learning...'

Evaluation of the school

Unicorn School provides a good quality education. It is successful in fulfilling its aims. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' literacy skills and increasing their confidence and self esteem. Consequently, pupils make good progress in their learning and personal development. The school has maintained its high standards in curriculum, teaching, assessment and pupils' personal development which were judged as good in the last inspection. The provision for ensuring the welfare, health and safety of pupils, while satisfactory, could be enhanced in order to achieve best practice. Some aspects of health and safety, the appointment of staff and the suitability of premises have been improved since the last inspection but there remains a small number of regulations that are not met. The room for pupils to use when they are ill does not meet requirements. Parents and pupils are rightly very positive about the school and what it provides.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. It has all subjects of the National Curriculum including French for the oldest pupils. There is due emphasis on English, mathematics and science and most pupils make good progress and develop confidence in these areas. Some pupils make outstanding progress with their reading. Pupils' progress in

mathematics is not as consistent across the school as it is in reading. The school has identified this and has prioritised it as an action point on the school development plan. The daily one-to-one sessions ensure that pupils' very specific needs are met. Teachers make good links between subjects. This means that key skills are reinforced in a wide range of subjects and helps pupils write effectively for different purposes such as science reports, historical accounts and leaflets in geographical studies. Pupils enjoy their daily individual sessions with teachers. The activities and tasks in these one-to-one lessons meet very specific needs and effectively support the targets on pupils' individual learning plans.

There are regular lessons for religious education and personal, social and health education (PHSE). Information and communication technology (ICT) has a positive impact on pupils' learning. It is used effectively to support pupils in specific tasks and also to broaden opportunities more generally across the curriculum. The curriculum is suitably enhanced by visits to places of interest, having visitors to speak and providing opportunities for pupils to take part in clubs and activities such as rifle shooting and sailing. Some parents would like to see a wider range of sports made available. The school is aware that this is an area that could be developed.

Teaching and assessment are good. Teachers have very good relationships with their pupils and high expectations. Teachers' subject knowledge is mostly good. Pupils say they like their teachers and appreciate the support they get, especially in the one-to-one sessions. Pupils work hard and behave well in lessons. Teachers are very aware that most pupils find writing and reading challenging, but do not let this detract from the content of lessons which is appropriate to pupils' ages. There are good opportunities in most lessons for pupils to put forward their views and ideas, for example discussing science investigations and collaborating in English while designing posters to advertise the charity Barnardos. These activities help pupils make good progress in speaking and listening. Very occasionally, discussions or introductions in lessons are rather lengthy.

Assessment is thorough. As well as the on-going assessment in the one-to-one sessions, work is regularly marked and where it is best there are helpful comments to suggest what improvements could be made. The school uses standardised tests to measure pupils' achievements against national expectations and is developing ways to improve the presentation of information to make it easier to monitor the progress pupils make year-on-year.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' personal development is good and a significant strength of the school. Attendance is good and pupils say that they enjoy coming to school. Behaviour is good. Pupils are polite and courteous. The school is very successful in helping pupils to develop their self esteem. During discussions pupils said they felt more confident about their learning than they did in their previous schools. Typical of parents' comments was, 'Now she laughs when she recounts what she has done in the classroom and is full

of enthusiasm about what she has learned....' Pupils are able to contribute to the school community through the school council, taking part in teams, gaining house points for personal achievements and supporting the playtime 'buddy' system. The school council have made decisions about purchasing outdoor equipment and holding a school disco. Pupils have raised money for several good causes and taken part in local art events and the 'Abingdon in Bloom' festival. The good progress pupils make in their literacy skills, regular use of ICT, the development in their self confidence and willingness to learn, all significantly help them in their next educational steps and future economic well-being.

Pupils learn about public institutions in their PHSE and citizenship lessons. They also learn about other faiths and cultures in these and other lessons but their awareness of different cultures in terms of racial harmony and tolerance is less well developed.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

Provision for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The school meets all but one of the regulations because medical checks on new staff are not made prior to their appointment being confirmed. While procedures, in practice, are satisfactory there are aspects of written policies that require attention in order to ensure that they better reflect the latest guidance. Pupils are well supervised throughout the day and they move around the school safely. Child protection procedures are satisfactory, though not all staff have had the appropriate training. The school has already organised further training, for all staff, to take place in the near future. A fire risk assessment has been undertaken and staff have had appropriate training to use hand appliances. A suitable range of health and safety assessments have been completed but the school is awaiting a full assessment of its new premises. First aid provision is satisfactory but the quality and organisation of equipment and materials is not all it could be to give the best provision.

Pupils say they feel safe in school and that bullying is not a concern for them. In PHSE and science lessons pupils learn about themselves, keeping healthy and relationships. They are encouraged to bring healthy snacks to school for break times and eat fruit at lunchtime. Physical education, including swimming, provides regular opportunities for exercise.

There is a satisfactory policy and plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 but, like some of the schools other written policies, it would benefit from more specific detail.

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 suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that checks have been made on medical fitness (paragraph 4(2)a).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide suitable accommodation 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:

- Develop the use of assessment information to give greater clarity about pupils' progress and achievements.
- Develop the teaching of mathematics to meet the specific needs of the increasing numbers of dyscalculic pupils.
- Improve the organisation of first aid provision and generally improve written policies to reflect latest guidance and practice.

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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School details

Name of school	The Unicorn School		
DCSF number	931/6109		
Unique reference number	123322		
Type of school	Special		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1991		
Age range of pupils	6-12		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 55	Girls: 8	Total: 63
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 2		Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils)	£13680		
Address of school	20 Marcham Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1AA		
Telephone number	01235 530222		
Email address	unicorndyslexia@hotmail.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Jaqueline Vaux		
Proprietor	The Unicorn School for the Dyslexic Child		
Reporting inspector	Daniel Towl HMI		
Dates of inspection	9 December 2008		