

The Children's House Upper School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	206/6383
Unique Reference Number	130243
Inspection number	333840
Inspection dates	13 May 2009
Reporting inspector	Michèle Messaoudi

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

The Children's House Upper School is an independent, pre-preparatory, coeducational day school for pupils aged between four and seven years. It is situated in a quiet residential area in the London borough of Islington. The school is owned by the Children's House School Limited, a charitable trust and company limited by guarantee, whose members are the parents of the school. The school opened in September 2005 with two Reception classes and has grown naturally, opening Year 1 in 2006 and Year 2 in 2007. Of the 58 pupils currently on roll, 26 are of Reception age and 12 are partly funded under the state nursery scheme. Pupils come from a mix of ethnic backgrounds and six of them are bilingual. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs but the school provides additional support for pupils who have moderate learning or linguistic difficulties. The school places a strong emphasis on helping children to develop as *'creative, independent thinkers and to develop genuine feelings of concern and respect for others and their environment.'* The traditional values of courtesy, consideration for others and good manners are central to its ethos. The school was last inspected in March 2006.

Evaluation of the school

The Children's House Upper School makes outstanding provision for pupils' education, personal development and welfare, and it fully meets its aims. The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. The school is led by a very dedicated and thoughtful team of staff who are passionate about developing the full potential of each child and work in close partnership with parents. Most parents are extremely positive about the school's work and feel involved in their children's learning and in the development of the school. The school has addressed all the issues highlighted in the last inspection and complies with all the regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. Its most salient features are its creativity, breadth and balance. These help pupils develop a very wide knowledge and skills base, discover what their individual talents are and nurture them so that they can pursue their interests at a higher level after they leave the school. The breadth of the curriculum encompasses an array of creative and physical activities in addition to National Curriculum subjects. Careful planning ensures that pupils make systematic progress from year to year. Learning is coherent and enjoyable because subjects are linked together in creative themes. Science, history, geography, art and design and technology are taught in concentrated blocks of time. This enables pupils to become absorbed in a topic and develop a great depth of understanding that is enhanced very well by the very rich programme of educational visits and events. The planning flexibly accommodates the needs of pupils who seek places in selective junior schools and the needs of those who do not. It also makes the most of teaching expertise. French, dance, music, violin, ball skills and information and communication technology (ICT) are taught by specialist teachers. Seasonal extra-curricular activities include drama, cookery, sewing, football, art and craft and yoga. Since the last inspection, the school has established the Key Stage 1 curriculum successfully. It has improved the provision for ICT which is now good, extended the music provision with the addition of a violin programme for all pupils and introduced weekly gardening as part of a local community garden regeneration project. The programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) reflects the ethos of the school. Provision for pupils who need support in their learning or linguistic development is excellent, underpinned by the expert knowledge of the teacher who coordinates this area.

Teaching and assessment are outstanding. Teachers and teaching assistants have an excellent understanding of how children learn best, and work very closely together to meet pupils' individual needs. A high adult to pupil ratio ensures that staff know pupils really well. Teaching is never less than good with much that is outstanding. It is based on excellent knowledge of subject areas and pupils' prior attainment, good understanding of specific needs, and careful preparation and planning. Open questions are used very effectively to make pupils think and solve problems through consistent challenge and stimulation. Practical tasks make learning relevant and interesting. Very good use of time and resources ensure that pupils' interest is sustained. However, as interactive whiteboards have only just been installed, their use to support teaching and learning is not yet established. There are very effective assessment procedures in place that help teachers monitor pupils' individual progress rigorously. Pupils know how well they are doing and how they can improve through the 'traffic light' system, verbal feedback, marking and constructive written comments on their work.

As a result of the outstanding curriculum and teaching, pupils make outstanding progress from Reception to Year 2. They attain standards that are at least above national expectations for their age in all subjects. Provision for reading, writing and mathematics is very strong and many pupils attain standards that are well above national expectations in these subjects. All Year 2 pupils gain a place at a school chosen by their parents, including selective schools.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school makes outstanding provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. When asked what they like best about their school, pupils say, 'We like our school because it is small and makes us feel at home; teachers look after us very well and we feel very safe and very happy; we are responsible for our work and for other people.' Their love for their school is reflected in their good attendance, their outstanding behaviour and attitude to learning, their pride in their work and their affection for the staff. Staff are excellent role models who help pupils establish very positive relationships and a keen sense of social responsibility based on mutual respect within a caring family atmosphere. From Reception, pupils mix successfully and work and play harmoniously together. The strong moral values which underpin the school ethos are clearly reflected in pupils' conduct as they display high standards of courtesy, consideration and good manners. The newly formed school council is contributing to the school community by organizing a cake sale to raise funds to improve the playground. Pupils' sense of belonging to a tightly-knit community is reinforced by their parents' involvement in school activities and by the school's identity as a true 'community school.' Pupils' sense of responsibility extends to the environment. They look after the school property well and are very enthusiastic about the plot which they maintain in the local community garden. Regular fund-raising for charities and meaningful links with a children's home in South Africa make them aware of those less fortunate than themselves.

The school has greatly improved its provision for pupils' multicultural education since the last inspection. Pupils learn about the major world religions through religious education, assemblies, celebrations of religious festivals throughout the year, visiting places of worship and listening to visitors talk about their faith. Following a visit to a Hindu temple, the school was recently complimented on the respect shown by the pupils. From Reception, pupils learn about people who contribute to society through their occupations. This is enhanced by links with such services as the local police. Pupils' creative skills and spiritual development are greatly enriched through art and opera workshops, and termly presentations to parents. Pupils are prepared extremely well for their future by the excellent basic skills they develop in literacy, numeracy and ICT, coupled with their ability to work independently and in teams, think creatively and solve problems. Their success as runners-up in a national competition involving making mint products from conception to manufacture reflects how the education they receive inspires them to excel as creators and entrepreneurs.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The school has addressed the weaknesses highlighted in the last inspection regarding the maintenance of attendance registers. Policies and procedures for safeguarding children in all circumstances are robust. This is evidenced by the rigour of the pre-appointment vetting checks on staff which are recorded as required, the various risk assessments made, and the low incidence of accidents. Plans are in hand to upgrade the medical facilities by next September and provide soft playground surfacing to further assure pupils' safety. The school places a very high priority on well-being and

safe learning, resulting in very few instances of bullying, no racist incidents and no exclusions. As a result, pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 feel very safe and very well cared for. They and their parents say that they are very appreciative of the meticulous application with which the school promotes equal opportunities for all. Pupils gain an excellent awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles through the curriculum, assemblies, educational visits, themes such as 'healthy living week' and the healthy snacks offered at play time.

The school fulfils its obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Most children make outstanding progress in all areas of learning in relation to their varying starting points. They acquire reading and language skills that are well above expectations by the end of Reception. This is because of the structured approach to teaching letter sounds and the diligent way in which the teachers hear and support each child in daily reading. The children play well together and on their own. They are given time to consolidate their learning in the purposeful, calm, yet stimulating environment where every child is treated as a unique individual. The children show high levels of independence, imagination and curiosity. These qualities are used effectively by staff in developing the topic work which is often extended by the children's ideas, for example when making puppets. The staff offer very good support to children, particularly in developing their vocabulary. The staff plan the day well and give sufficient time to each element of the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum. There is a good balance between teacher-led activities and those which children choose for themselves. The children frequently work and play outside in the very well equipped and utilised outdoor area often sharing this time with older children, which they say they enjoy. Very strong partnerships with parents ensure that parents feel fully involved in their children's school life and are well informed of their progress. Children are assessed carefully and continuously throughout the year and their achievement is effectively recorded. However, the teachers' assessments are not always linked closely to the expected goals of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The provision is well led and managed. The staff work as a close team to plan and organise the day. Those in charge have high aspirations for improving the quality through constant review and reflection.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

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 creative ways of using interactive whiteboards and computers to support and extend teaching and learning
- in the Early Years Foundation Stage, ensure that information from assessments is always closely related to the expected early learning goals.

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	The Children's House Upper School
DCSF number	206/6383
Unique reference number	130243
Type of school	Day pre-preparatory school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	September 2005
Age range of pupils	4–7 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll	Boys: 32 Girls: 26 Total: 58
Annual fees	£10,200
Address of school	King Henry's Walk Islington London N1 4PB
Telephone number	0207 3542113
Fax number	0207 9234336
Email address	jill@childrenshouse-upperschool.co.uk
Headteacher	Mrs Jill Rothwell
Proprietor	The Children's House LTD
Reporting inspector	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi
Date of inspection	13 May 2009