

The Village School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	202/6353
Unique reference number	100077
Inspection number	341959
Inspection date	1 October 2009
Reporting inspector	Michael Best

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

Age group: 4–11

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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.¹

This was a light touch inspection 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 Village School was established in north west London in 1985. It is a non-denominational preparatory school for girls between 4 and 11 years of age. There are 98 pupils on roll, eleven of whom are in the Reception year of the Early Years Foundation Stage. No children receive nursery education funding. No pupil is at the early stages of learning English as an additional language. No pupil has a statement outlining their special educational needs and/or disabilities.

The school was last inspected by Ofsted in February 2007. The current headteacher took over the school as sole proprietor following the retirement of the previous headteacher in August 2007. A number of improvements to the accommodation and learning resources have been made and the school has established a rolling programme for reviewing and revising its policies and practices. Three members of the teaching staff joined the school at the start of this school year.

The school aims to provide pupils with 'high quality teaching and learning, delivering a curriculum for the development of the whole child in a safe, secure, happy caring and stimulating environment.'

Evaluation of the school

The Village School ensures a good quality of education overall. It meets its aims successfully and provides pupils with a good start to their full-time education. All the regulations are met. The quality of provision has been maintained, and improved further, since the last inspection. Pupils benefit from a good curriculum, which includes an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities. The very large majority of pupils make good progress because the overall quality of teaching and assessment is good. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and their behaviour are outstanding, as is the provision for their welfare, health and safety, with rigorous arrangements in place for child protection.

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good overall. It is satisfactory in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school provides pupils with a good, well balanced and wide-ranging curriculum that is appropriate to their ages and aptitudes. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in developing its provision for information and communication technology (ICT) and this is now taught to all age groups. The amount of time allocated to subjects is suitably balanced and the structure of the teaching day supports this effectively. The curriculum for each subject is documented by year groups: the best practice systematically identifies the progressive development of pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding. The provision for basic skills in literacy, numeracy, ICT, speaking and listening is good and prepares pupils effectively for their future economic well-being. The curriculum is successfully enriched by languages, arts and sporting activities. Personal, social and health education, together with citizenship, is taught across the curriculum, and through discrete lessons recently introduced in Years 5 and 6. Pupils have many opportunities to contribute to and take on responsibilities in the school and wider community. The school's outstanding programme of extra-curricular activities and off-site visits is rich and varied, particularly the range of sporting activities and the provision for drama. Take up is high and pupils thoroughly enjoy participating. This wider curriculum significantly helps pupils to become well-rounded individuals who are knowledgeable about a wide range of issues, and able to develop and pursue new interests to a high level.

The overall quality of teaching and assessment is good, enabling pupils to make good progress. The good quality of teaching reported at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes to work. Relationships are good and pupils are keen to learn. They listen attentively, carry out instructions promptly and take a pride in their work. In the best lessons, pupils' interest is stimulated effectively, and staff encourage them to think and develop their confidence as independent learners.

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. Children are settled and happy in the warm and welcoming Reception class. However, arrangements for checking what children know and can do, both when they start school and as they move through their Reception year, are underdeveloped.

The school evaluates pupils' performance effectively by reference to its aims and through assessments at the end of Years 2 and 6 to national norms. Teachers regularly mark and grade pupils' work, and give both written and verbal encouragement and guidance. However, ongoing assessment does not systematically

inform teachers' planning of the next steps in pupils' learning. In the most effective practice, teachers' lesson plans draw on their knowledge of what pupils already know and can do: they clearly identify the skills, knowledge and understanding pupils are expected to gain in the lesson, together with success criteria by which these can be measured, and share and review these with pupils. Such good practice is not, however, consistent across the school. The school reports that, during the past year, staff have been discussing how to develop their assessment practice. A new assessment policy has been adopted recently and is being implemented. The policy is of good quality and addresses the issues highlighted in the previous and current inspections.

Teaching assistants and other classroom helpers are deployed to support pupils' learning effectively. Classrooms are well resourced, with interactive whiteboards recently installed in a number of classrooms. Teachers are successfully developing their use of this new technology to promote different styles of learning and to develop pupils' thinking. Good use is made of timetabled 'homework' sessions during the school day where members of staff are available to give pupils help or guidance as required. Pupils still have work to do at home but this arrangement, which finds favour with pupils and parents alike, is successful in helping them to develop their independent working skills.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is outstanding, as is their behaviour. The high standards reported at the time of the last inspection have been maintained. Pupils' attitude to school is extremely positive: in discussion and in their responses to the inspection questionnaire, they say they are very happy in school. They particularly value the secure, stable and supportive environment the school fosters. Attendance is high and pupils participate enthusiastically in lessons and the wide range of school activities. Pupils are proud of their school and act as good ambassadors when out on trips and visits. They value each other's individual interests, opinions and strengths, and willingly offer help to others who have lost their way around the school or are feeling a bit down. They are courteous to each other, staff and visitors and are proud of their contribution to the school and the wider community.

Pupils develop a high level of self-confidence, use their initiative and take responsibility. Older pupils have clear ambitions in terms of their next school, and with regard to their achievements in sports and arts. Pupils have a great many opportunities to appreciate and reflect, for example, through the expressive arts, or the appreciation of the impact of history from their visits to the Anne Frank exhibition or the 1940s prefabricated house. They gain a good awareness of other cultures through celebrations and stories in assembly. They have a secure understanding of the public services and institutions in England. The annual visit of the fire service is very popular, particularly as the crew were called away to an emergency on the last occasion. The rich mix of backgrounds and faiths represented in the school is well

illustrated in the contributions of pupils and parents to a recently published recipe book in aid of their tsunami appeal. This underpins pupils' excellent understanding of their own, British and other cultures which is actively promoted through the curriculum and reflects the ease with which pupils work and play in harmony with each other.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Arrangements to ensure the care and well-being of pupils have been strengthened since the last inspection and are now outstanding. The school's provision for safeguarding pupils is of a very high standard: arrangements are robust and are regularly reviewed. Clear and explicit policies and procedures successfully promote the welfare, health and safety of all pupils at all times. These comply fully with government legislation and guidance, are rigorously and consistently implemented and regularly monitored. Staff training is up-to-date and a programme of refresher and developmental courses is established. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire, parents express their overwhelming confidence in the school's procedures for welfare, health and safety. Risk assessments are carefully made and recorded. Any pupils at risk are identified early and effective arrangements are put in place to support them. Pupils are supervised well in school, on journeys to nearby facilities and on trips outside the locality. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities and a high level of commitment in promoting pupils' health and safety.

Pupils have strong friendships with each other and enjoy trusting and mutually respectful relationships with staff: the school is a thriving and inclusive community. Pupils are happy and open in their relationships. They actively follow healthy lifestyles and confidently adopt practices that ensure their own safety. Instances of bullying and other forms of harassment are rare, and the school deals with any that do occur swiftly and effectively. Arrangements to promote good behaviour are highly effective and result in a calm environment for learning. The school works well with parents and other agencies to ensure that pupils feel safe and valued. The school takes seriously its duty under the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 and maintains a rolling three-year plan of improvements to its provision.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All the required checks are undertaken rigorously and recorded systematically in a single central register, ensuring the careful safeguarding of pupils.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation meet all the regulations, are safe and conducive to effective learning, and are maintained to a very high standard. The provision for outdoor games and play in the grounds is excellent and the multi-purpose hall provides an outstanding venue for a wide range of taught and extra-curricular activities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides all the required information for parents, carers and others on its website and in its prospectus.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for handling complaints comply fully with the regulations. There were no formal complaints in the last school year.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision is satisfactory. Children enter the Reception class with skills and experiences which are above those expected for their age, especially in their communication and literacy development and personal and social skills. Children's early skills in literacy and number are assessed when they start in the Reception class and regularly throughout the ensuing year. However, staff do not make observations based on the other areas of learning to ensure an accurate picture of the children's starting points and their subsequent progress in order to rigorously meet their different learning needs. Children make satisfactory progress overall, achieving well in their literacy skills and their personal, social and emotional development.

Staff provide a good range of suitable activities and learning opportunities to interest and engage children. They work well in partnership with parents to ensure a smooth transition from home to school. Children enjoy school: they display positive attitudes towards learning and respond appropriately to instructions. They are happy and articulate in their use of the English language. They behave well in their class and around the school. As a result, learning flows without interruption. Children enjoy healthy eating and benefit from the outdoor play which effectively supports their physical development and well-being. Relationships are respectful and this contributes significantly to their successful personal, social and emotional development. As a result, children feel safe and secure and can approach members of staff for support when they need it. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Staff work closely as a team. Safeguarding procedures are robust and all the appropriate checks are in place.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

In order to comply with the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage the school must:

- assess what children know and can do in all of the Early Years Foundation Stage areas of learning when they start school
- ensure a regular programme of rigorous observations to record children's achievements and progress towards the Early Years Foundation Stage early learning goals, and use the information from such assessments systematically to plan their next steps in learning.

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:

- embed the recently adopted policy for assessing pupils' standards of work and progress
- share and develop good practice in teaching by ensuring that information from assessments is used systematically to set challenging yet achievable objectives and success criteria, and that these are shared and reviewed with pupils in lessons.

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 good are the outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	
What is the quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	
How effectively is the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?			✓	
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?			✓	

The quality of boarding provision *(leave blank if not applicable)*

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	The Village School		
DCSF number	202/6353		
Unique reference number	100077		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1 September 1985		
Age range of pupils	4–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Girls		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 98	Total: 98
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£11,820		
Address of school	2 Park Hill Road Belsize Park London NW3 2YN		
Telephone number	020 7485 4673		
Fax number	020 7267 8462		
Email address	admin@thevillageschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Miss Carol Gay		
Proprietor	Miss Carol Gay		
Reporting inspector	Michael Best		
Dates of inspection	1 October 2009		