

Tower House School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector Mark Lindfield HMI

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.

Age group: 2–16

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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

The inspection of registered provision² was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.³

Information about the school

The Tower House School was established in 1982 in a former convent school building. It is a non-selective, coeducational day school for pupils between two and 16 years of age. It currently has 181 pupils on roll, with an Early Years Foundation Stage on site registered for 58 children. The school operates as three semi-distinct schools on the same site; with a nursery, junior and senior school, each with its own headteacher, but with the same proprietor.

The school was previously inspected in March 2007, and the Beehive Early Years Foundation Stage Nursery was inspected separately in May 2006.

The school aims to instil a sense of community, responsibility, concern for others and good manners. It also aims to make education enjoyable and stimulating, and to provide a safe and secure environment in which pupils feel cared for.

Evaluation of the school

Tower House provides a good standard of education, including good provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school has made a number of improvements since the last inspection, increasing provision for personal, social and health education and the range of courses on offer for older pupils. The school is successful in preparing pupils to gain entry to selective grammar and independent schools and in ensuring that pupils achieve good results in national examinations. The school's friendly ethos is clearly apparent. The pupils are polite, articulate and courteous and show positive attitudes to learning. The school meets most of the regulations; however, the safeguarding arrangements do not currently meet regulations and the procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils are unsatisfactory.

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

² 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.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49.

Quality of education

The curriculum in the main school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Pupils at Tower House School are well served by the curriculum, which is well matched to their needs and aptitudes, and this contributes much to pupils' good progress, as well as to their good personal development. There are particular strengths in the provision for English and mathematics and in the good range of extra-curricular activities, which are greatly enjoyed. Subjects cover the National Curriculum with good balance. Personal, social and health education has improved since the last inspection and is good. All pupils from Reception to Year 9 learn French, and French is an option for pupils in Years 10 and 11. Since the last inspection, the range of courses available to students in Years 10 and 11 has been extended but there is still relatively little vocational work. The curriculum prepares pupils well for their next stages in life and learning.

Teaching and assessment across the school are good overall. Teachers know their pupils well. In most lessons, they use a good range of strategies to check on pupils' learning so as to ensure each pupil makes at least satisfactory gains in knowledge and understanding. In the best lessons, teachers make clear to pupils what constitutes high performance and guide them towards it. Teaching in Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 is good overall, and at times outstanding. Specialist teachers show consistently good or better subject knowledge and their enthusiasm is conveyed to children who respond well, with obvious enjoyment and application. Planning for these older pupils ensures that they experience activities which are appropriately matched to their aptitudes and abilities. This ensures that they make good progress and the vast majority attain above-average GCSE grades by the time they leave school. There are considerable strengths in a number of areas but most notably in English, art and media studies. In the recent past a high proportion of pupils have also attained high level results in Geography and History. Several pupils go on to represent the county in a range of sports.

In Years 1 to 6, teaching standards vary but are mostly good. Teachers have very positive relationships with pupils and in the main prepare interesting lessons to vary the ways in which pupils learn. The systems for maintaining good behaviour are effective because pupils respond well to them. However, occasionally, there is a lack of concentration, when the learning activities are not suitably matched to pupils' needs and abilities, they are unclear as to what is expected of them and, consequently, do not make the progress of which they are capable. In most lessons, teachers' skills in spotting who has or has not grasped a new point are well developed. The small class sizes help to ensure that timely and sensitive support is given as appropriate. Formal assessments are recorded annually and used to inform reports to parents.

Younger pupils with additional learning needs are offered the opportunity to attend separate lessons with the school's special educational needs coordinator. Where pupils attend these sessions, they receive good levels of support which meet their specific needs in a calm, well-organised and purposeful environment and helps them to make good progress.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' behaviour is good; they show positive attitudes to work and are attentive in lessons. They contribute fully to, and are appreciative of, the friendly family atmosphere of the school. As a result, their self-esteem and confidence are developed successfully and they are articulate in expressing themselves. Pupils comment positively about the school and are courteous to others and this is reflected in their good attendance. Relationships across the school between different groups of pupils are uniformly good and mutually respectful.

Pupils' spiritual development across the school is good. It is enhanced by regular assemblies, which help to develop pupils' spiritual appreciation of the world around them. The school helps to develop in pupils a good appreciation of the diversity of contemporary Britain and pupils are respectful of other cultures and faiths. Pupils enjoyed playing host to pupils from a local language school. Parents and pupils report that they would like more frequent opportunities to take part in trips and visits. Pupils have opportunities to contribute in school and take on wider accountabilities, from junior pupils being given the responsibility of issuing house points to senior pupils taking on responsibilities as prefects. These experiences allow pupils to develop their personal qualities which, in addition to their strong development in English and mathematics, prepares them well for their future lives. The school has some links with a range of local and national organisations, and raises money for a number of charities, which develops pupils' understanding of the wider world and their place in society. Pupils' views are voiced through the school council but a significant proportion of older pupils report that they would appreciate the opportunity to be more strongly represented.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This aspect of the school's work is inadequate in a number of areas. The proprietors acknowledge that they have not kept up to date with current government requirements to safeguard children. At the time of the inspection, a single central record to show the checks made on staff did not include volunteers and those who run after-school activities. The school was, subsequently, able to provide evidence that it has taken swift action to amend the record.

Since the last inspection, the school has put in place systems to make the required checks prior to the confirmation of the appointment of staff. These now include checks on past employment history, references, identity checks and health checks but these have not been completed with sufficient rigour in a minority of cases. Urgent action has been taken to address this situation.

The school does not currently have a three-year plan to support adults and children with disabilities, as required by the Disability Discrimination Act. A range of suitable risk assessments for activities out of school are in place. Arrangements for

monitoring fire safety comply with requirements and fire drills and checks to extinguishers occur regularly, although the school has been slow to respond to the lack of correct signage. The child protection policy meets current guidelines. The school has a suitably trained designated person and has completed formal training for all members of staff. Pupils respond well to the consistent expectations on them to move around the numerous stairways and corridors safely.

Procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils lack rigour; checks on electrical appliances are incomplete and the arrangements for the safe storage of hazardous chemicals do not comply with regulations.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has in place a central record which gives details of all the statutory checks which have been carried out on permanent staff. However, the single central record does not meet the regulations to include all members of staff and volunteers, which leads to the inadequate judgement under welfare, health and safety of the pupils. The school is now aware of this and is amending its recording for the future.

School's premises and accommodation

Some improvements have been made to the premises since the last inspection with the refurbishment of the gymnasium floor and outdoor playgrounds. The school is accommodated in a large Grade 2 listed building, which provides enough teaching spaces and also some specialist rooms. Classroom interiors have been refreshed and decoration around the school is generally satisfactory, although it is showing its age in many places. Staff and pupils have created some interesting displays that clearly convey the breadth of pupils' work and interests. Although the school does not currently have a medical room with separate washbasin, arrangements to care for pupils who fall ill at school are in place and staff are attentive and quick to make contact with parents. The majority of physical education lessons for older pupils take place in a local sports centre. Pupils who participate in physical education on the school site have access to separate changing rooms but these lack shower facilities.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The information available to parents meets the requirements and they are provided with a prospectus and examination results. The parent and pupil handbooks are informative and helpful. School policies are provided to parents on request and the school's arrangements for consultation meetings and reporting on pupils' academic progress are regular and frequent.

Procedures for handling complaints

The procedures for handling complaints meet all requirements.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The provision for Early Years Foundation Stage children is good and all requirements are met in full. Children settle in quickly and clearly enjoy their time in school; their attendance is excellent. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points and enter Key Stage 1 with knowledge and skills that are above those seen nationally.

Children work very well with adults and with one another, demonstrating good social skills and very positive attitudes to learning. They respond well to the good range of resources, which help to ensure they are actively involved in self-chosen activities, and the sound of laughter and obvious enjoyment are common. In this supportive environment children achieve well across all areas of learning. There is an appropriate balance between adult-directed activities and those chosen by the children themselves. There is a strong emphasis on developing language skills within the Reception class but this is not a consistent strength across the setting and opportunities are sometimes missed to talk and discuss.

Children demonstrate that they are beginning to understand their own responsibilities and they behave very well. They are provided with strong role models by a close-working team, who discuss and share ideas. Good, thorough assessments of children's achievements take place on a planned and regular basis, and also less formally, to capture the moments when a child achieves something for the first time. These are recorded in a learning diary and provide a useful profile of children's achievements.

Leadership and management are good and practices include monitoring the activities and provision within the setting. The well-organised systems ensure its smooth day-to-day running. Staff are keen to develop the provision further. The outside play areas are not suitable for extending learning opportunities for children, although the school has taken action to remedy this. The safeguarding and welfare of the children are effective and are given a high priority. Improvements since the last inspection include a more thorough and rigorous system of monitoring arrivals and departures of staff and children. The current toilet facilities are cramped and children have limited privacy. Staff have clearly communicated to parents the lack of nappy changing facilities but ensure appropriate steps are taken to maintain hygiene. Relationships with parents are good and they are kept well informed by staff and through the school noticeboard.

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 those listed below.⁴

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

- maintain due regard to the DCSF guidance Health and safety: responsibilities and powers (DCSF 0803/2001) (paragraph 3(4)).

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 (including volunteers) ensure that all appropriate checks are rigorously carried out and completed (paragraph 4 (2)(a))
- complete appropriate enhanced criminal record bureau clearance for all members of staff (paragraph 4 (2)(b))
- ensure that the single central record includes details of all members of staff (paragraph 4C(2) and (3)).

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

- provide suitable shower facilities for pupils over 11 years of age involved in physical education (paragraph 5 (k))
- provide suitable facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended, the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁵

What the school could do to improve further

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

- ensure consistent standards of teaching and learning across the school.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm.

⁵ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1.

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 EYFS?		√		
What is the quality of provision in the EYFS?		√		
How effectively is the EYFS led and managed?		√		
Overall effectiveness: how well does the school meet the needs of children in the EYFS?		√		

School details

Name of school	Tower House School		
DCSF number	880/6004		
Unique reference number	113612		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	303007		
Type of school	All through		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1982		
Age range of pupils	2–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 102	Girls: 77	Total: 179
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 26	Total: 47
Number of pupils aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys:10	Girls:13	Total:23
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£ 4,944 - £7,488		
Address of school	Fisher Street Paignton Devon TQ4 5EW		
Telephone number	01803 557077		
Fax number	01803 546038		
Email address	enquiries@towerhouseschool.com		
Headteacher	William Miller		
Proprietor	Stephen Fuzzard		
Reporting inspector	Mark Lindfield HMI		
Dates of inspection	23–24 September 2009		