

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	371/6010
Unique Reference Number (URN)	106816
Inspection number	344457
Inspection date	11 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Amraz Ali HMI

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 08456 404040, or email enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk.

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Royal Exchange Buildings
St Ann's Square
Manchester
M2 7LA

T: 08456 404040
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
W: www.ofsted.gov.uk

No. 090071

© Crown copyright 2009



Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002¹, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005², 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.

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

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School, situated in Balby, to the west of Doncaster, was established in 1978 and was last inspected in June 2007. The school is registered for up to 45 pupils between the ages of three and eleven. There are currently 28 pupils at the school; most are of White British heritage with around a third from other ethnic groups. A small proportion of pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities and one has a statement of special educational need and is funded by a local authority. Pupils are organised into three classes; infant, junior and senior. Early Years Foundation Stage provision is made for two children between the ages of three and five who are taught in the infant class alongside pupils aged between five and seven years of age.

The school aims to 'give each pupil an all round education, developing each individual's potential by encouraging traditional values to develop a positive attitude towards academic work, concentration, self-discipline and a sense of achievement.'

Evaluation of the school

Sycamore Hall Preparatory School meets its aims and provides a satisfactory quality of education for its pupils. The quality of education has been maintained since the previous inspection and although there were improvements immediately following the inspection, there has been limited progress in complying with regulations. An all-round education develops pupils' positive attitudes towards their work and others and promotes their good personal development. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and is reflected in the good behaviour of pupils. The provision for the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils is inadequate. The school meets most of the regulations for registration.

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

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

Quality of education

The quality of education is satisfactory overall. However there are shortcomings in the provision of an appropriate curriculum and teaching provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The satisfactory curriculum for pupils above the age of five has a clear focus on English and mathematics and includes all National Curriculum subjects. Consequently, by the time they leave almost all pupils have a good understanding of grammar, punctuation and mathematical calculations. There is an emphasis for the oldest pupils on verbal reasoning to assist them in their preparation for the entrance examinations for their next schools. All pupils learn French and the oldest pupils talk very positively about this; they are able to rehearse some common French words and greetings. Subjects are linked together around a termly topic which allows pupils to find out about a broad range of subjects related to a particular historical period or country. For example, the senior class has recently studied China which allowed them to find out about its culture, some religious beliefs as well as historical and geographical facts. A particularly strong feature is the weekly swimming lesson for all pupils, which they say they enjoy and which ensures that they can all swim confidently by the time they leave the school. Teachers' subject knowledge and expertise is used to good effect, allowing, for example, all junior and senior pupils to benefit from one teacher's information and communication technology (ICT) skills and from another's science knowledge. Although the ICT provision has been improved since the previous inspection and one of the classrooms hosts a small suite of computers, the use of ICT remains underdeveloped across the school. After-school clubs are well attended and for an extra charge pupils are able to take piano lessons.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory overall. There are strengths in the positive relationships between adults and pupils, and also between the pupils themselves. Pupils like school and enjoy their learning. The small class sizes are beneficial because this ensures that pupils receive individual support when it is required. Pupils' behaviour is good and all adults set high expectations in terms of pupils' attitudes to their learning. Teachers ensure that classrooms are purposeful learning environments and so little time is wasted. As a result, pupils produce a good quantity of work during lessons. The most successful learning stems from the opportunities pupils have to enjoy practical work. For instance, investigative work in science, and estimation and measuring in mathematics, captures pupils' imaginations so they engage fully in their learning. The youngest pupils enjoy using the role play and playing games and reading books. However, the opportunities for children to undertake activities of this kind independently are limited.

The focus of lessons is often to develop pupils' knowledge rather than their problem-solving and investigative skills. Teachers make good use of questioning to check pupils' understanding and to consolidate what they know. In less successful lessons, teachers do not develop pupils' independent learning skills well enough. Although adults provide regular verbal feedback to pupils during lessons about how to improve

their work, written feedback through marking is more variable, both in consistency and quality. Although satisfactory overall the quality of teachers' planning is variable and sometimes overly brief and learning objectives are sometimes unclear. Pupils' progress is satisfactory. The evaluation of pupils' progress in lessons is inconsistent so that the match of work to pupils' abilities is not always accurate. Regular written reports are provided for parents on the progress made by their children.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good. Pupils' behaviour is good and they have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They are polite, helpful and friendly. They cooperate well with one another and positive relationships between staff and pupils create a very welcoming and harmonious school. New pupils say that they were made to feel welcome. Younger pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage say that they enjoy playing with their older classmates. The school recognises the importance of pupils' differing religious and cultural backgrounds and pupils say that everyone is treated equally. As a result, pupils understand what it is to live in a diverse society. There are good opportunities for pupils to discuss current events and moral issues. Pupils are keen to contribute to school life and are proud of their roles such as prefects and house captains.

Pupils contribute to the wider community by taking part in a range of fund-raising activities, for example, pupils themselves recently decided to raise money for earthquake victims. They are taught how to keep safe; they know the importance of water safety and some of the dangers of using the internet. Attendance is good and no pupils have been excluded from school. Their academic skills and their positive attitudes to learning mean that they are well prepared for the next stage in their education. The wide range of themed topics that pupils study and their regular discussions of current events ensures that they have a broad understanding of English public institutions, such as the monarchy, democracy and the justice system.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety is inadequate for pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage and for those who are aged five and above. A major oversight in making required checks on staff has meant that the school's procedure for recruiting staff has not been followed, including regarding references relating to medical checks. Not all members of staff have been entered into the school's single central register and not all staff recruited have been subjected to enhanced checks by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Risk assessments are in place for the site and activities outside school. Although there are regular fire drills and the fire safety equipment is checked regularly, the school does not have in place a policy on fire prevention, an up-to-date risk assessment for the building, nor has training on fire safety been provided for any member of staff. All accidents and illnesses are recorded and treated. However, the identified member of staff responsible for first aid has not had the required recent refresher training. In

addition, the designated person for child protection has also not had the required updating training. The school does now meet the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and it has a three-year action plan to increase disabled access to the school and to the curriculum.

In discussion with pupils, and from their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, it is clear that they feel safe and well cared for. Pupils are always appropriately supervised while on school premises. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities to take vigorous exercise, such as skipping and swimming. They learn about the benefits of healthy eating and the importance of regular exercise, some are able to access drinking water and all were seen to enjoy fresh fruit for lunch. Pupils eat healthy snacks on most days of the week.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is inadequate. This is because the quality of provision and the effectiveness of the leadership and management are inadequate. One adult does not have the required CRB clearance required to work with children. Children settle quickly and are familiar with daily routines. They currently learn alongside older Year 1 and 2 pupils, who provide good role models about how to behave. However, the setting's approach is overly directed for young children and they spend a disproportionate amount of time copying numbers, text or colouring. They do not choose when to learn and play outdoors. Opportunities to learn outdoors are limited and formal playtimes lack purpose for young children. Children join in with practical activities such as role play and persevere well when, for example, exploring in the home corner. They enjoy the weekly swimming sessions.

There are appropriate levels of supervision at all times and the teacher has suitable academic qualifications. However, no member of staff has a current paediatric first aid certificate. Staff have not been trained in the learning, development and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Very brief planning does not identify clear objectives for activities. Staff do not regularly assess and monitor what children know, understand and can do. Nonetheless, the clear priority on developing children's literacy, numeracy and social skills means that by the end of Reception, children are working at above expected standards in all areas of learning. Although the school does not record children's initial skills, evidence indicates that they make satisfactory progress from their starting points. Parents report that they and their children are happy with the provision.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

- ensure that the designated member of staff for child protection undertakes the required two-yearly training on safeguarding children as a matter of urgency in compliance with DCSF guidance Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- prepare a policy on fire prevention, a fire- safety risk assessment and ensure that at least one member of staff is trained in fire prevention (paragraph 3(5))
- ensure that the members staff responsible for first aid undertakes the required refresher training (paragraph 3(6)).

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 references relating to medical checks are completed (paragraph 4 2(a))
- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure that a criminal records bureau check is carried out (paragraph 4 (2)(b))
- ensure that all members of staff are included on the single central register (paragraph 4C (2) and(3)).

In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure that adults looking after children, or those having unsupervised access to them, are suitable to do so
- ensure that at least one person with a current paediatric first aid certificate is on the premises at all times when children are present and that there is at least one person on outings who has a current paediatric first aid certificate.

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

- ensure that there is a balance of adult-led and freely-chosen or child-initiated activities, delivered through indoor and outdoor play
- undertake sensitive observational assessment in order to plan to meet young children's individual needs
- plan and provide experiences which are appropriate to each child's stage of development as they progress towards the early learning goals.

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 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 Early Years Foundation Stage?				✓

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

Evaluation of boarding provision				
----------------------------------	--	--	--	--

School details

Name of school	Sycamore Hall Preparatory School		
DCSF number	371/6010		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	106816		
Type of school	Primary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1978		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 14	Girls: 14	Total: 28
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,752.00		
Address of school	1 Hall Flat Lane Balby Doncaster South Yorkshire DN4 8PT		
Telephone number	01302 856800		
Email address	sycamorehall@tiscali.co.uk		
Headteacher	Miss J Spencer		
Proprietor	Miss J Spencer		
Reporting inspector	Amraz Ali HMI		
Dates of inspection	11 March 2010		