

Dormer House School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	916/6047
Unique Reference Number (URN)	115803
Inspection number	344602
Inspection dates	16-17 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI

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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A¹ of the Education Act 2002, 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.

Information about the school

Dormer House School is an independent, non-selective primary day school in Moreton-in-Marsh. It is non-profit making and has charitable status. The school admits pupils from 18 months to 11 years of age and there are 150 on roll. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are under five attend part or full time in one of three classrooms. Of the 68 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, 19 receive day care and 49 receive nursery education funding. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language and none with a statement of special educational needs. The school was founded in 1875 by the Victorian educationalist Charlotte Mason and moved to its current site in the early 1960s. The school has achieved the Artsmark Gold award. Its last inspection was in June 2007. The school's aim is 'to provide children with a liberal education through a rich curriculum that ensures that each child is treated as a person of importance, able to develop their true potential and so become self-reliant grown-ups, capable of thinking for themselves and standing by their decisions'.

Evaluation of the school

Dormer House School successfully meets its stated aims and provides a good quality of education for its pupils and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, with some excellent features. Pupils make good progress overall because the teaching is consistently good and the pupils have exemplary attitudes towards learning. The good curriculum underpins pupils' excellent personal development and sense of well-being. The school has made satisfactory progress since its last inspection, and is always seeking ways in which to improve. All regulations are met, including those relating to safeguarding arrangements, and the welfare, health and safety of the pupils is now outstanding.

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 school's good quality of education overall is underpinned by a good curriculum, with outstanding provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The classrooms for the youngest children are very welcoming and attractive and excellent resources provide a broad and stimulating range of indoor learning experiences for children across all areas of learning. The opportunities for drama, music and art are excellent and make a significant contribution to children and pupils' confidence and self-esteem. For a school of this size, sporting and extra-curricular opportunities are impressive, as indeed is the programme of visits and residential experiences. Not only do these contribute to pupils' well-rounded general knowledge, but they have a positive impact on their understanding of citizenship. The school has continued to seek ways to extend and challenge gifted and talented pupils since its last inspection, particularly through providing greater challenge within topic work. This lifts the expectations of other pupils and is exemplified well in the high quality of writing noted from a scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work.

The practical and exploratory curriculum provided so well for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is only adequately maintained throughout Years 1 to 6, as there is a lack of well-planned experiences in design and technology. The curriculum is fine-tuned for those who find some aspects of their learning harder than others. Examples are the use of programmes for those experiencing difficulty learning to spell and phonic programmes for reading. There are well-planned opportunities for pupils to improve their reading and writing skills across a range of subjects and this, combined with excellent provision to develop speaking skills through drama, results in some excellent progress. There is nothing systematically planned for to develop pupils' mathematical and information and communication technology (ICT) skills beyond the subject specific lessons. As a result, pupils' progress in mathematics and pupils' ICT capability and skills are more pedestrian.

Teaching and assessment are good across the school, with some outstanding practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The regular focused and general observations of children's learning and development are recorded efficiently, evaluated by staff and used to inform very effective individual learning plans of high quality. The specialist knowledge of teachers is used effectively to match work to individual needs and to pace the learning so that pupils of different abilities learn well. Some teachers use incisive questioning that probes pupils' learning and challenges their thinking. However, this is not consistent and in some lessons opportunities are missed to engage pupils in thinking more deeply. There is increasing use of interactive whiteboards since the last inspection, to hold pupils' attention and revisit their earlier learning efficiently. Teachers know the pupils well and teachers make the most of the opportunities arising from small class sizes to give plenty of individual support. However, there is considerable variation in the quality of marking between subjects. In English, it is helpful, and frequently pinpoints improvements. In mathematics, too often, it is perfunctory and next steps are rarely identified to help pupils move forward in their learning.

The school is more effective than at the last inspection in accumulating assessment information about the attainment of children and pupils. There is a comprehensive range of tests, including standardised tests, which are checked effectively by senior teachers. Teachers supplement these with regular 'progress meetings' with the headteacher and special educational needs coordinator that ensure the efficient tracking of rates of progress and speedy implementation of additional support for those who may be falling behind. The data are not always used, however, to set specific expectations of achievement for individuals. This leads to missed opportunities at the end of lessons to evaluate how well pupils have learnt. Nonetheless, pupils' progress is good overall and all pupils make at least good progress compared to national norms, with some from lower starting points making excellent gains.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Those joining the school with lower levels of confidence and self-esteem rapidly improve within the harmonious climate the school promotes. This is recognised in parents' and carers' comments to inspectors. Pupils' attendance is broadly average. From an early age, all pupils report that they enjoy their school life and are enthusiastic about their learning. The comment by one pupil, 'I can't think of any things I don't like about my school,' summed up the views of all those responding to the pupil survey. Work is well presented and there are many bright and interesting displays around the school which exemplify pupils' good presentation in writing and art. Pupils' behaviour is good. They set high standards for themselves. They are extremely polite and in lessons keen to help each other. When lessons are less engaging, they are inclined to lose concentration. Pupils' development of their skills and knowledge in literacy, and interpersonal skills, is above average. As a result, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

The school has sustained the strengths noted in the last report in developing pupils' contributions to the school and the community at large through fund raising, performing plays, singing and playing musical instruments. The well-organised school council plays an active role in encouraging all pupils to develop enterprise skills during charities days and managing book sale events. Pupils' experiences of other cultures in religious education, history, art and music help them develop a genuine appreciation and respect for others. The school celebrates a range of religious festivals during the year and pupils say that they value the presence of those from different parts of the world. This facilitates pupils' openness to new ideas, their appreciation of cultural diversity and their readiness to challenge racism.

Pupils contribute positively towards helping others settle into school. The older pupils take on a range of responsibilities, including running their own clubs, which they carry out diligently. A group of pupils from across all the classes have recently taken the initiative on a number of environmental themes including a recycling campaign.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This aspect of the school's work is outstanding, including for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The requirements to safeguard children are fully met. All staff are trained, including the designated person, to a standard set by the local children's safeguarding board.

Pupils report that they feel safe and there are always members of staff they can go to if they have worries or concerns. Any matters or concerns over pupils' welfare are treated seriously, explored fully and dealt with swiftly. Pupils say that they like coming to a small school where everybody knows them well. One pupil who had recently joined the school was effusive in his praise, telling the inspector of the 'friendliness of all the staff and children'. Another pupil wrote to inspectors: 'I love my school, it is like a little family.' The large majority of parents and carers agree and appreciate the family atmosphere.

There is a clear policy for first aid which is implemented effectively and staff have received appropriate training. The school places an excellent focus on healthy lifestyles and pupils eat healthily. They take regular exercise and have a good programme of lessons with a specialist teacher for physical education. Children's well-being in the Early Years Foundation Stage is significantly enhanced by excellent organisation and risk assessments and by an outstanding partnership with parents and carers who feel very informed and involved through comprehensive notice boards and the school's useful website.

The school has an appropriate plan to improve access as required by the Disability Discrimination Act. Good quality risk assessments are in place, including those for fire safety and activities out of school. Pupils respond well to the high expectations on them to move around the numerous stairways safely.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Criminal Records Bureau checks are taken seriously and staff have been trained in safer recruitment. The school has improved its systems for vetting the suitability of volunteers, which fully meet requirements. The school maintains all the required information on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The school site is fairly small but the best use is made of the space available. The school is in good decorative order and is clean and tidy. There is adequate outdoor play space for the current number on roll. The school compensates for the lack of green space by making good use of

facilities in the nearby park and the playing fields at the local Fire College. Improvements to the buildings have ensured that the school now fully meets the regulations regarding arrangements for looking after pupils who become ill at school.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers, prospective parents and others are provided with a comprehensive range of information through the school's prospectus and website. The school has good systems for informing parents, carers and others about updates to policies and the progress of pupils. Particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions and exclusions now meet regulations.

Procedures for handling complaints

Procedures fully meet the requirements. There have been two formal complaints in the last year both of which were managed appropriately in accordance with school policy.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children learn well in a very safe and secure environment. Children under three settle extremely quickly as there are highly effective induction procedures to ensure they separate happily from their parents and carers. Staff in the under-threes day care, Caterpillars, are excellent play partners as they clearly enjoy being with very young children and have endless patience and enthusiasm. They seize every opportunity to engage with the children and to successfully promote their social and language development.

Children make excellent progress, from whatever their starting points, in all the areas of learning, both academically and in their personal development, as a result of good teaching and high quality care. Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities receive sensitive support at all times so they too achieve well and enjoy their learning. By the time children enter Year 1, the vast majority have attained the levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age. More able children exceed the expected levels and are already competent readers and mathematicians.

Children are encouraged to become independent from an early age. They enjoy numerous practical activities such as hand painting with shaving foam, going on a shapes walk around the school and making colourful Easter cards. Adults use regular assessments well to plan the next steps in children's learning. Children are regularly involved in planning these activities. The outdoor area provides improved opportunities for physical and creative development but does not yet ensure all the areas of learning are available at all times.

The Early Years Foundation Stage leader has high aspirations and clear plans for future development. The team work well together and the manager sets high standards and monitors the provision in her age range well. However, there is insufficient routine monitoring of all aspects of the planning to ensure clear progression of learning and development across the whole stage.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

What the school could do to improve further

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

- incorporate more opportunities for pupils to use and apply their mathematical and ICT skills and knowledge across a range of subjects
- provide pupils with regular planned opportunities to learn design and technology skills
- improve the quality of teaching by using well-targeted questioning to assess how well pupils are progressing
- further develop the school's management systems to improve monitoring of the provision across the Early Years Foundation Stage.

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	Dormer House School		
DCSF number	916/6047		
Unique reference number (URN)	115803		
Type of school	Primary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1875		
Age range of pupils	18 months-11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 39	Girls: 68	Total: 107
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 19	Girls: 24	Total: 43
Number of pupils aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys:5	Girls:14	Total:19
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,212		
Annual fees (childcare)	Fees are negotiated		
Address of school	High Street Moreton-in-Marsh Gloucestershire GL56 0AD		
Telephone number	01608 650758		
Fax number	01608 652238		
Email address	office@dormerhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Thomas		
Proprietor	Dormer House (Moreton-in-Marsh) School Trust Ltd		
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	16-17 March 2010		