

Merlin School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	212/6144
Unique Reference Number (URN)	101065
Inspection number	344613
Inspection dates	18 March 2010
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes

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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

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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

Merlin is a co-educational, non-selective independent day school for children aged four to eight years. The school, which opened in 1986, is located in a large detached period building close to Putney station. There are 175 children and pupils on roll including 50 in the Early Years Foundation Stage. There are a small number of pupils who are bilingual. There are a few children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, none of whom has a statement of special education needs. All classes are organised in single-age groups. Since the last inspection, the school has been subject to much renovation and its facilities have been significantly extended. The school aims to 'give a broad and creative education, developing a thirst to learn within a supportive and inspiring environment, to encourage the individual to become independent and to have a go'. The school was last inspected in May 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Merlin School provides an outstanding quality of education and is highly successful in meeting its aims. An outstanding curriculum and consistently good, and sometimes outstanding, teaching throughout the school ensure that pupils, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities or who are bilingual, make outstanding progress academically and in their personal development. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and, as a result, children make good, and sometimes outstanding, progress. Parents and carers are overwhelmingly supportive of the school. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress in meeting all the regulations that were previously not met and now meets all the regulations. It now benefits from improved facilities for pupils who are ill, an outstanding range of new specialist rooms including an information and communication technology (ICT) suite, an art, design and technology studio, a specialist music room and a science room. It has rigorous procedures in place to

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

ensure that safeguarding arrangements are very effective, providing outstanding welfare, health and safety for its children and pupils.

Quality of education

The outstanding quality of education provided is underpinned by an outstanding curriculum which has been maintained since the last inspection. The school is further developing its good Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum to ensure an appropriate balance of outdoor learning opportunities as well as activities which promote children's self-selection of activities and learning experiences.

There is a strong focus on English and mathematics throughout the school, and the promotion of language and communication skills is a strength. The topic-based curriculum is enhanced throughout the school by an excellent range of specialist provision for music, drama, art and design, sport, science and French. The installation of a new ICT suite has ensured improvements in the teaching and learning of ICT since last inspection. Planned opportunities for the enrichment of the curriculum through visits out of school, for example to the Globe theatre, and for visitors to school, also play an important part in school life. The school makes special provision within the curriculum as well as in extended after-school activities to ensure pupils who are deemed to be gifted and talented pupils have opportunities to develop and extend their skills.

Teaching and assessment are good, and sometimes outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. As a result, children in the small Reception classes make good progress towards their early learning goals. Children and pupils say they enjoy learning. As one pupil said, 'Lessons are magic at Merlin!' There are very well-presented displays of high-quality art and topic work around the school. Teachers are confident in what they teach and most are well prepared. Staff aim to make learning fun, as seen in an outstanding lesson in a Reception class where role play was used to excite children's imagination as they greeted the self-proclaimed King John wearing a gold crown discovered in a mystery treasure chest. In a very few lessons, the pace of learning is too slow because activities do not flow as well and there are occasionally missed opportunities for pupils to engage in collaborative work. Throughout the school, staff provide very effective individual support. Relationships are excellent between adults and pupils. Staff provide exemplary role models and forge very good partnerships with parents and carers.

The assessment of pupils' achievements is good and has improved since the last inspection. Teachers regularly mark pupils' work. Formal assessments are carried out so that staff have a clear record of reading ages, spelling, writing and mathematical skills. This provides good information about pupils' progress which is carefully recorded in order to inform planning. The best evaluation of learning clearly shows what pupils with different abilities have achieved and what needs to be done next to aid their learning. This is a regular, although not completely consistent, feature of practice in the school. In addition, the recording of pupils' work is effective and provides strong evidence, alongside the Early Years Foundation Stage Profiles, of the outstanding progress that pupils, including those with special educational needs

and/or disabilities or those who are bilingual, make overall from their different starting points.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong, along with their excellent social skills, which pervades the ethos of the school. Staff have high expectations of pupils to behave very well and to be respectful and considerate of others. As a result, their behaviour is outstanding. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and pupils throughout the school enjoy school very much and this is reflected in their good attendance. As one pupil commented, 'This is a lovely school and you just want to be here.'

Religious education lessons and assemblies provide moments for reflection. Participation in high-quality activities such as music and drama, art and design, and sport successfully promote pupils' spiritual development. The school is active in the community through links with the local hospice and involvement in fund-raising. In the wider context, the school supports national and international charities raising an impressive sum for the recent Haiti Disaster Appeal. Pupils make positive contributions to the school community participating in regular performance arts weeks. Pupils are enthusiastic about these events frequently producing high quality dramatic productions such as Year 1's performance of Roald Dahl's Revolting Rhymes. Many say how much they enjoy being members of a sports team, or school choir, and are provided with opportunities to support younger pupils, particularly new arrivals, or take charge of playground equipment. Pupils help in the school community by being independent, helping each other to tidy up in class and clearing away their own plates and cutlery at the end of lunchtime.

Pupils' understanding of different cultures and faiths is well developed through the curriculum and in assemblies. Class topics provide frequent opportunities for pupils to learn about the language and traditions of others, as seen in a Year 3 lesson where pupils were finding out about the traditions and lifestyle of those living in Mexico by learning to use Spanish phrases. Pupils learn about the wider community and people who help them such as the police, fire and ambulance services, through visitors to the school and visits to the local church, mosque or synagogue.

Pupils are very well prepared for the next steps in their education. This is aided by the outstanding progress they make in their basic skills, their developing independence and ability to work with others, and their growing self-esteem and self-confidence.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school makes outstanding provision for safeguarding and the welfare, health and safety of the children and pupils. It is paramount; nothing is left to chance. Since the last inspection, provision has improved. The school has developed appropriate

medical facilities for pupils who may feel unwell at school. Recruitment procedures now fully comply with statutory requirements on safeguarding. Robust procedures for child protection are supported very well by exemplary policies, procedures and frequent staff training. The school has rigorous fire precautions and trained and designated staff act as fire marshals. Rigorous risk assessments are carried out regularly to ensure children and pupils are able to learn and play in a very secure and safe environment. The Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator has ensured that the quality of provision in Reception classes is enhanced by detailed risk assessments, regularly monitored to ensure that welfare requirements are well met. Staff are trained in first aid. The curriculum includes elements which ensure that pupils learn of the importance of keeping healthy. Pupils enjoy healthy snacks as well as a healthy school meal at lunchtime. They learn about the importance of taking care of themselves and of taking regular exercise. They know they must keep safe and work hard to do so, as one pupil said, 'by taking care to make sure there is always enough space when running around outside'. The curriculum ensures pupils are well-informed about the need to keep safe from hazards, as seen in an outstanding science lesson where pupils investigated the benefits as well as the dangers of electricity. The school meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Children enter Reception classes with a range of skills and abilities generally in line with, and some above, what might be expected for their age. They settle quickly into school, benefiting from the nurturing and caring environment and the quality partnerships established with parents and carers. As a result, their confidence, independence and self-esteem are developed well. This is underpinned by good provision for the Early Years Foundation Stage. However, opportunities for outdoor learning are limited by access to the playground. By contrast, an exciting range of indoor activities engage pupils well, as seen by the high level of excitement amongst expectant children as they discovered a mystery box placed in their classroom labelled 'Not to be opened until 11 o'clock'.

Most teachers make effective use of questioning to establish children's understanding, taking every opportunity to improve their communication skills. However, on a few occasions, pupils are required to listen to teachers for too long or complete mundane worksheets, at such times interest is less keen. Children generally learn to read and spell through the effective teaching of phonics. Well-planned learning opportunities, combined with effective assessment, underpin children's good outcomes. As a result, most children make good, and some outstanding, progress towards their early learning goals.

The outstanding leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage coordinator is enabling this setting to make strong and continuous improvements to

its provision. Through rigorous and regular monitoring and moderation of assessments, the staff form a good and improving team

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:

School

- Ensure that staff consistently evaluate pupils' learning to show what those with different levels of ability have achieved.

Early Years Foundation Stage

- Strengthen the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum by:
 - improving the opportunities for outdoor learning
 - ensuring the balance of child-initiated and adult-directed activities.

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?		✓		

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

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	Merlin School		
DCSF number	212/6144		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	101065		
Type of school	Pre-Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1986		
Age range of pupils	4–8		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 126	Girls: 46	Total: 175
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£10,380		
Address of school	4 Carlton Drive, Putney, London SW15 2BZ		
Telephone number	0208 788 2769		
Fax number	0208 789 5227		
Email address	secretary@merlinschool.net		
Headteacher	Katherine Prest		
Proprietor	Sir Alford Houston-Boswall		
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes		
Dates of inspection	18 March 2010		