

# Bryony School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	George Logan

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under Section 162A<sup>1</sup> of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005<sup>2</sup>, 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

Bryony School was founded in 1949 and first registered as a school in 1956. It is based at two sites, around two miles apart, in Rainham, Kent. The Marshall Road accommodation is an extended former family home in a residential area, which provides education for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the pupils in the Year 1 and Year 2 classes. There are 39 children who have publicly funded nursery places. The Meresborough Road site has a rural location and accommodates pupils in Years 3 to 6 in a former farmhouse and ancillary buildings. The school is non-selective. There are 180 pupils aged between 2 and 11 years, of whom 15 are part time. There are slightly more boys than girls. The number of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities is very low. One of these has a statement of special educational needs. The school aims to create a friendly, nurturing environment where each child is seen as an individual. There are seventeen classes, with the number of pupils per class ranging between seven and sixteen. The school aims to give pupils a sound education and to enable them to gain entry to grammar schools in Medway or Kent. The school was last inspected in 2007.

## Evaluation of the school

Bryony School has successfully tackled all the issues raised at the last inspection and now meets all of the regulations. It meets its aims successfully and continues to provide a good quality of education for its pupils, promoting some aspects, including pupils' personal development and behaviour, outstandingly well. The teaching, pupils' learning and their progress are good overall and pupils of all abilities are challenged rigorously to improve their learning. The few pupils identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities are supported effectively and make good progress. Safeguarding procedures are documented robustly and meet current requirements. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good.

## Quality of education

The quality of education and the curriculum are good and prepare pupils effectively for the next stage of their education. The curriculum is closely aligned to the

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<sup>1</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga\\_20020032\\_en\\_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162)

<sup>2</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga\\_20050018\\_en\\_15#sch8](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8)

requirements of the National Curriculum, although schemes of work vary in style and depth of detail from year to year. Most staff are well established in their current roles, so that, while lesson-planning is seldom detailed, staff have clear objectives and a good understanding of how to engage pupils' interest, motivate them well and take their learning forward. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good, but adults do not intervene sufficiently often in outdoor activities to promote more rapid learning. The range of clubs for pupils in Years 3 to 6, and the occasional outings and visits, are satisfactory. However, several parents and carers would like to see more opportunities for pupils beyond the classroom.

The use of specialist teachers for all subjects from Year 3 to Year 6 is a significant strength and supports strong outcomes in a number of areas, including English, mathematics and art, and pupils benefit from the very good subject knowledge of the staff. In mathematics, pupils are constantly challenged by open-ended investigations and activities which significantly extend their understanding. As a result, standards in mathematics are high. Information and communication technology is taught successfully, although, other than in Year 6, the only year group to have internet access, it is not used as effectively as it might be to secure progress across the whole curriculum.

The personal, social and health education and citizenship programme incorporates a variety of activities, including relationships, the adoption of healthy lifestyles, avoidance of some substances and a focus on the importance of public institutions. This work promotes pupils' personal development well. Pupils enjoy the opportunities they have to take part in sporting and musical activities. Pupils in Years 3 to 6 attain highly in art and have gained prizes nationally.

Teaching and assessment are good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, so that pupils of all ages make good progress and attain standards that are almost always above average, but with some variability between subjects from year to year. There is a well-established assessment regime, using regular tests in class, standardised tests and end of key stage tests. While the information from testing is, to an extent, used well to identify pupils who need extra support, the school is not tracking gains in learning closely enough to identify where progress is most rapid. As a result, pupils make better progress in some subjects than in others. For example, Year 6 pupils in 2009 attained exceptional standards in English, although attainment in science was much closer to the national average. Ultimately, however, a very high proportion of pupils achieve entry to grammar schools at 11+.

The good teaching has a number of strengths which are evident throughout the school. Lessons have a brisk pace and pupils waste no time in getting down to work. Teachers use questioning with skill, targeting particular pupils in order to test their understanding. Pupils are given a clear understanding of what it is they are to learn. In a Year 5 English lesson, pupils evaluated the author's use of vocabulary and sentence structure in a ghost story. Their grasp of the nuances of language and of the subtleties of phrasing, in order to achieve particular effects, was impressive, as

was their motivation and enthusiasm in tackling a writing task in a similar style. Given pupils' excellent attitudes towards learning, there are missed opportunities to develop a stronger culture of independent learning, through undertaking research activities and analysis of information. Such opportunities are constrained to a significant extent by limited library facilities at Meresborough Road.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

From the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is outstanding and their cultural development is good. They love their school, value the challenges they are given and enjoy their education very much. Pupils are confident and talk enthusiastically about school. As one pupil remarked, 'We have excellent education, because teachers make learning fun.' Another said, 'I feel as if the sky is the limit of what I can achieve as long as I keep working hard.' Staff establish clear routines and firm boundaries and this is reflected in pupils' high attendance, outstanding behaviour in lessons and around the school, and positive attitudes to learning.

Pupils show great respect for each other. They establish very strong friendships. Relationships between pupils and with staff are excellent. They feel that the school has no tolerance of bullying, that they are very safe in this community and that there is always someone to talk to. Pupils are helped to gain an insight into themselves through the curriculum and religious education. They regularly think of others less fortunate than themselves and help raise funds for various charities and local organisations. They learn to become responsible citizens through the PSHE programme and develop a good understanding of public services and institutions. Although there is no school council, pupils do feel at ease discussing their ideas about the school with individual teachers.

Friendships across cultures are strong. Pupils of all backgrounds work together harmoniously. Through the curriculum and special events, pupils learn about various religious festivals. They learn about other cultures through National Costume Day, taste food from various countries and listen to music from other traditions. Good resources and specialist teaching in music and art enhance pupils' cultural development well. However, while they learn about religions other than their own within the religious education curriculum, they do not visit other places of worship. Overall, although there are strengths, pupils still have limited opportunities to engage with the diversity of cultures which characterise contemporary Britain.

### Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety, including children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, is good. Procedures are robust. Policies are carefully written and aim to minimise risk. The school has implemented the latest guidance on safeguarding pupils and there are effective procedures to ensure that they are kept safe. Safeguarding training for key staff is up to date. Guidance is shared effectively

with all staff. Teachers know the children very well and both relationships and day-to-day care are excellent. Risk assessments are carried out for outdoor activities and visits and pupils are supervised well when off-site and around the school. Younger pupils, for example, cope very well with the narrow corridors and stairs at Marshall Road. As a result of the school's efforts, and the high ratio of staff to pupils, parents appreciate the safe, caring family environment provided by the school. Generally, pupils receive good guidance on staying safe and healthy living, mostly through the PSHE programme. Older pupils report that this work has not included guidance on drug awareness. Pupils have regular opportunities for physical exercise. Not all parents or pupils feel that school meals are as good or nutritious as they could be. They consider that the food provided at lunchtimes does not always allow pupils to make healthy choices.

The school complies with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. It has drawn upon specialist external advice and has devised a three-year plan to improve accessibility for those with disabilities.

### Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The systems and procedures for appointing staff, proprietor and other personnel, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau, and for confirming their backgrounds and identity, previous employment and medical history, are now securely in place and meet the regulations. Such checks are kept as required on a single central register.

### School's premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation enable pupils to learn effectively and safely. Both buildings have inherent disadvantages, given the small size of the rooms, constraints around the reconfiguration of available space and the ongoing need for maintenance and repair. Overall, however, the rooms are of satisfactory dimensions for the numbers of pupils in each class. The buildings are in a reasonable state of repair. Recent renovations at Meresborough Road have ensured that toilets are now designated for either boys or girls, and are of adequate number, as the regulations require. There has been some improvement in facilities at Marshall Road and plans exist to provide an additional fully-accessible lavatory. The school is about to undertake further redecoration and refurbishment of existing toilets at both sites. Heating is adequate, overall. The temperature in corridors, hall and in the washroom areas at Meresborough Road is not as high as in the classrooms and the proprietors are seeking to improve this.

### Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school prospectus and supplementary guidance issued when pupils are registered for entry now provide parents with all the information required by the regulations. The school is making increasing use of its upgraded website as an

easily-accessible source of all key documents. Termly newsletters celebrate pupils' achievements and give information about recent events in the school. A few parents would like to have more frequent newsletters.

## Procedures for handling complaints

There are good procedures for handling complaints and parents are made aware of these through the school website or through a summary of available policies provided when parents first register their child. All regulations are now met.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision and outcomes for children in the setting are good. The curriculum provides a good range of activities and experiences which promote the six areas of learning effectively, including visits to local parks and farms. As a result, children enjoy learning, make good progress and attain standards that are well above expectations by the end of Reception. Children settle quickly, develop confidence rapidly, feel safe and enjoy their first experiences of school. Staff involve parents effectively in their children's learning through workshops, home-school diaries, meetings and regular written reports.

Teaching is good. Staff create a welcoming environment in which the balance between teacher-led and child-initiated learning is good. Small class numbers help staff to match work to children's needs effectively. They extend children's language and ideas by getting involved in and talking about activities that the children choose. Children's speaking, listening and reasoning skills are highly developed because staff use good questioning skills and frequent praise. Planning, assessment and tracking are effective in ensuring that children make good progress from Nursery to Reception. The outdoor environment is easily accessible but is not always used effectively to extend children's learning as sometimes staff supervise rather than intervene.

Children's personal development is good. They show high levels of mutual caring, work and play harmoniously together, and are also keen to work independently. Staff ensure their effective safeguarding, welfare and day-to-day care. Recruitment procedures fully meet requirements. Children eat healthily and have plenty of exercise.

Leadership and management and the overall effectiveness of the setting are good, reflecting a clear understanding of the requirements of the Early Years curriculum, but as yet lacking set procedures to monitor teaching to improve achievement further.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations').<sup>3</sup>

## What the school could do to improve further

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

- Implement more rigorous monitoring of teaching to ensure consistency of progress from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards.
- Implement a systematic approach to recording children's and pupils' learning and attainment throughout the school so that teachers can track their progress more effectively.
- Provide more opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills in lessons.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm)



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	Bryony School		
DCSF number	887/6001		
Unique reference number (URN)	118979		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1949		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 90	Girls: 75	Total: 165
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 7	Total: 15
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,500		
Address of school	Marshall Road Rainham Gillingham Kent ME8 0AJ		
Telephone number	01634 231511		
Email address	bryonyschool@googlemail.com		
Headteacher	Mr David Edmunds		
Proprietor	Mr and Mrs D Edmunds		
Reporting inspector	George Logan		
Dates of inspection	2–3 February 2010		