

The Dharma School

Independent school inspection report

DCSF registration number	845/6005
Unique Reference Number (URN)	114673
Inspection number	345371
Inspection dates	12 February 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

The Dharma School is a small Buddhist primary school which opened in 1994 and is located on the outskirts of Brighton in the residential area of Patcham village. It is a non-selective independent day school for children aged between three and 11 years. There are 63 full-time and ten part-time pupils on roll in the main school and 20 in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Twelve children in the Early Years Foundation Stage receive nursery funding. There is a small number of pupils who have special educational needs, although none has a statement of special educational needs. All pupils speak English as a first language. The school's Early Years Foundation Stage consists of two single-age classes: one in the Nursery and one in Reception. All other classes are organised in mixed-aged groups. The school aims to promote 'mindfulness, wisdom and compassion as key virtues to enable children to develop sound ethical values with a good heart'. It endeavours to promote a love of learning underpinned by a positive approach to life. The last inspection was conducted by Ofsted in June 2007.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education and meets its aims. Children are well cared for in a safe and stimulating environment. The school is a very supportive community with a regular and distinctive focus on meditation which helps the school to provide an outstanding quality of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Pupils attend regularly; they enjoy school and value the small classes and individual attention they receive. They are courteous to one another and, in this nurturing environment, grow in confidence. As a result of good teaching and a well-planned curriculum, pupils make good academic progress throughout the school. The school meets all of the regulations. At the time of the last inspection in June 2007, the school was judged to be good overall and complied with nearly all the regulations. It

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

was asked to improve facilities for sick children, provide enough washrooms for staff, improve the outside space to enable pupils to play safely and to provide an independent panel member for the school's complaints panel. These regulations are now met. Since the last inspection the school has been subject to much renovation and has been extended. The school now benefits from fire doors throughout the school building, a dedicated medical room, new larger nursery and reception classrooms with an improved outdoor play area, improved information, communication and technology facilities and a dedicated Buddhist shrine room providing greater space for the whole school to meet for the weekly 'puja'. The school takes good steps to ensure pupils feel safe through its high regard for pupils' health, welfare and safety and its good arrangements for safeguarding and child protection.

Quality of education

The quality of education overall is good, as is the curriculum, enabling pupils to make good and sometimes outstanding progress. The curriculum policy is supported by detailed schemes of work based on a two-yearly cycle of topics which are informed by the National Curriculum. This ensures that pupils study a broad and balanced range of subjects which include all the required areas of experience. The well-selected topics cover and link a wide range of subject areas and enable pupils to acquire good skills in writing, creative work and speaking and listening as seen in the plethora of well-written poetry, creative pictures and carefully crafted model animals displayed around the school. The curriculum is enriched by the opportunity to learn French and a good range of visits and visitors. The curriculum in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. It is based on the early learning goals and caters well for the needs of children, enabling them to make good and sometimes outstanding progress.

Teaching and assessment across the school and in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Teachers know their pupils' needs well using assessment information effectively to plan appropriate tasks. Pupils are given the right level of challenge to ensure the most able can achieve their best, and the less confident or those with special educational needs are given appropriate support. However the school does not use a consistent daily lesson planning format. As a result, not all pupils are clear about the purpose and focus of some lessons. The planning and teaching of some lessons, particularly mathematics, relies too heavily on the use of worksheets. This sometimes limits opportunities for pupils' to develop practical and investigational skills. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision has improved since the last inspection. Specialist ICT teaching and a significant investment in laptops ensure good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills across the curriculum. Good personal, social and health education helps pupils enjoy their time at school and develop into reliable, confident and enthusiastic learners. The school's system for assessing and recording the attainments of all the pupils enables their progress to be tracked effectively. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make

good progress as they are well integrated and supported by staff. Pupils enjoy an increasing range of after-school clubs, including chess, sewing, drama, film club, netball and football, which many attend. Learning is made fun, practical and meaningful. The school prepares pupils well for their future life.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils enjoy their time at school. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. A Buddhist philosophy permeates the school, with regular opportunities for meditation. There is a daily 'puja' when children experience silence as a means of promoting reflection. Pupils are enthusiastic about this special time particularly enjoying the weekly whole school 'puja', which also provides opportunities for pupils to share in the celebration of their work. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage were seen enjoying such an opportunity, exhibiting their hand-made robots constructed as part of their Toy topic. Pupils study different faiths through their religious education lessons and are provided with further opportunities for spiritual development through topic and art work. Pupils are enthusiastic learners and get on well with each other. They feel valued and most are respectful of each other. They learn to take responsibility for their actions through learning about one of the 'noble truths of Buddha'. Behaviour is good and sometimes outstanding. Excellent relationships between pupils and teachers are based on mutual respect. Although there is no official mechanism for the sharing of views, pupils are confident that they can offer ideas and opinions in a context of mutual support. Pupils appreciate the provision of a 'worry box' in some classes, which provides a helpful mechanism through which their worries or concerns can be shared confidentially. They have excellent moral awareness of what is right, and a clear understanding of those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils' involvement in fund-raising promotes their exceptional understanding of others' needs all over the world. Links forged with a range of communities, such as a monastery in Nepal, promote this outstanding cultural awareness. Visits, such as those to museums and libraries, and visitors to the school enhance their cultural awareness.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

Staff are highly committed to promoting pupils' welfare, health and safety. All the required policies are in place and are implemented consistently. As a result, provision for pupils' welfare and safety is good throughout the school, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Pupils are very well cared for and have a clear understanding of the importance of staying healthy. Parents state that the school is excellent in every way and that their children are happy because of the efforts of staff. Comments such as, 'My child adores school and is excited about learning new things,' are typical of the remarks made by parents. Pupils say they feel safe at school, that bullying rarely occurs and that there are always adults around to ask for help. Parents confirm that the environment of the school and grounds is safe. The use of the well-supervised small play areas has been improved since the last inspection. The school now limits the number of pupils allowed access to the play

areas at any one time. All staff have undertaken paediatric first-aid training and child protection training and these qualifications are regularly updated. The school has established suitable procedures for ensuring that, prior to taking up their responsibilities, all teaching and non-teaching staff, volunteers and the proprietorial body are checked for their suitability to work with children. The required checks have been completed and are recorded in a single central register as prescribed. Fire checks are carried out and the school tests the fire escape procedures regularly. The school fulfils its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. The needs of children are well met. Children start school with skills and knowledge above those levels expected for their age. Good induction arrangements help children settle happily. Parents appreciate this; as one said '...the school is like one large family where children are made to feel special'. Stimulating displays and a welcoming environment help children to develop confidence. Behaviour is good. Children know how to stay safe and understand the importance of healthy lifestyles. Because of consistently good teaching, effective leadership and management and a well-planned curriculum, children make good progress in their learning. Detailed assessments are used effectively to ensure that staff are certain that children are making the best progress of which they are capable. Provision is good. There is a good balance of teacher-led and children's own chosen activities which provide valuable opportunities to develop independent learning skills. Children happily share equipment, concentrate and work cooperatively because of the thoughtful way staff have organised resources. Learning is fun. Giggles of joy could be heard as children printed pictures in paint and investigated different media such as glue, glitter, sand and water. Activities are well chosen to stimulate high levels of interest and interaction. However there are some missed opportunities for adults to talk to children about what they are doing. As a result not all children are clear about what they might be learning while playing. Teaching assistants are effectively deployed to support children's learning. The outdoor area is used effectively but has yet to complement the good indoor activities to full effect. Health and safety are seen as having paramount importance. Risk assessments are rigorous. Adults ensure that the welfare and well-being of each child are well supported. All staff have appropriate first-aid training.

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:

- Ensure consistency in short-term planning by developing a template which shows clearly the purpose and objective of each lesson to be shared with pupils.
- Evaluate the effectiveness and use of worksheets to ensure that those used enhance pupils' learning.

Early Years Foundation Stage:

- Help children to understand what they are learning while playing, by providing more opportunities for adults to talk to them about what they are doing.

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	The Dharma School		
DCSF number	846/6005		
Unique Reference Number (URN)	114673		
Type of school	Buddhist Primary School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1994		
Age range of pupils	3–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 39	Girls: 24	Total: 63
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 8	Girls: 2	Total: 10
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,982		
Address of school	The White House Ladies Mile Road Patcham Brighton BN1 8TB		
Telephone number	01273 502055		
Fax number	01273 556580		
Email address	office@dharmaschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Peter Murdock		
Proprietor	Dharma School Charitable Trust		
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes		
Dates of inspection	12 February 2010		