

# Merton Court School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI

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## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002,<sup>1</sup> 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.

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

Merton Court School is a family-run co-educational independent preparatory day school which opened in 1899. It is located in Sidcup in the south-east region of outer London and provides education for children aged between 3 and 11 years. It is set within 17 acres of grounds, which include woodland and a nature reserve. The school prepares pupils for entry into both maintained and independent schools. There are currently 213 children on roll with 34 children in receipt of government nursery funding in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's ethos is 'Head, Hand, Heart' and its stated aims are: 'to create a strong family ethos and an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness in a caring environment... where traditional values and a progressive environment meet to give every child the best possible start in life'. It is a designated Church of England school but children of all faiths are welcome. There is before- and after-school childcare provision for pupils from 7.30am to 8.15am and 3.00pm until 5.00pm each day and during some weeks in the school holidays. This formed part of the inspection. All aspects of the provision were last inspected in June 2007.

## Evaluation of the school

Merton Court School provides a good quality of education and meets its stated aims very successfully. The effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress in their time at the school and achieve excellent results in the national tests taken in Year 6. The quality of the curriculum and teaching is good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding, as is the provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The school provides an outstanding range of extra-curricular activities in which pupils participate enthusiastically. As a result, pupils are exceptionally confident and articulate, enjoy school and are extremely well prepared for the next steps of their education. Pupils'

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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)

welfare, health and safety are good, as these are very well promoted and are underpinned by robust safeguarding procedures. Pupils are very proud of their school and they feel safe and well cared for. Parents also hold the school in high regard. It now meets all of the regulations for the registration of independent schools and has effectively addressed the areas for improvement identified at the time of the last inspection.

## Quality of education

The overall quality of education is good, as is the curriculum. It is broad and balanced and well planned to meet almost all pupils' learning needs from when they start in the Early Years Foundation Stage till they leave at the end of Year 6. The quality of the curriculum and teaching has improved since the last inspection. The schemes of work that underpin all teaching are reviewed annually but do not sufficiently indicate how the more able pupils can be further challenged, nor do the schemes include guidance for those needing additional help. High emphasis is placed on developing pupils' skills in English and mathematics, but not to the detriment of other subjects such as humanities and science. Pupils explained how they benefit from the excellent sport facilities, which include a swimming pool and an all-weather pitch. The school has successfully enriched the curriculum with specialist teaching which includes information and communication technology, Spanish from the Reception year, French for older pupils, and swimming. However, experiences for older pupils in design and technology are less well developed.

Pupils' personal, social and health education is developed well through the life skills lessons and other subjects such as science or physical education. The curriculum is enhanced by an outstanding range of extra-curricular clubs, which include chess, cheerleading and model building as well as a wide range of sports. To supplement and extend pupils' learning in classrooms, the school organises an exceptionally wide range of exciting special events, visitors into school and visits for all ages. Visits range from local day visits to residential trips at home and abroad, including the annual visits to France and Spain. Visitors include the police, representatives of charities and parents, who may, for example, speak of their language and culture. The out-of-hours provision is supervised well and pupils are provided with a good range of interesting activities.

From the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards, teaching and assessment are good and sometimes outstanding. Consequently, all pupils make good and sometimes outstanding progress. Their above average attainment enables the large majority to gain places at local selective schools. Achievement in mathematics is exceptionally high. The school has effective and rigorous assessment strategies that plan and track pupils' progress over time. Lessons are very well planned and there are clear learning outcomes provided for each lesson, which is an improvement from the last inspection. Teachers plan a wide range of both practical and formal activities. Information about pupils' progress and learning is generally used well to plan

learning activities and to provide either targeted support for those who have additional needs or extension work for the more able. However, this lesson-by-lesson approach does not provide a longer-term cohesive approach to meeting the learning needs of such pupils. Support for pupils who have identified learning difficulties is mainly through short-term intensive additional sessions. Pupils have regular opportunities to review their own learning and set targets for improvement.

Teachers have very good subject knowledge. They use questioning effectively, although on a few occasions this does not succeed in developing pupils' thinking skills sufficiently sharply. Pupils have many opportunities to work independently in groups or on their own. However, there are some occasions when pupils are over-directed by teachers during a lesson and this slows down their progress. Pupils' books in all age groups are marked very regularly. In most instances, pupils are given helpful comments so that they know what to do to improve their work, which is an improvement from the previous inspection.

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

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school's caring and family atmosphere fosters excellent personal relationships between pupils and adults. This also helps all pupils to play and work together extremely well in a very harmonious community. Pupils have exceptionally positive attitudes towards learning and their school life. They have good opportunities to learn about other countries and cultures, both within lessons and during special events. For example, the 'Passport to the World' event enabled pupils to learn first-hand from visitors about a range of different countries. Pupils were able to speak with confidence of their learning about different religions. Pupils' attendance is high and their behaviour is exemplary both in and out of lessons. They participate in school events enthusiastically. They willingly take on a range of posts of responsibility that benefit their fellow pupils, including acting as eco-prefects, cyber-prefects and buddies. For example, the food committee organised 'Exotic Food Week' so pupils could all learn about foods from other countries. Also, the 'Junior Safety Officers' give assemblies on road safety and also wrote to the local council to voice their concern about the speed of cars on the road outside their school. As result, a speed watch alert was placed nearby. Pupils raise funds for a variety of charities in many different ways, from cake sales to sponsored events. They also learn about people in need, for example through a talk by a representative from 'Help for Heroes'. Pupils have good opportunities to learn about public institutions and services in England through lessons, visits and visitors in school. Pupils are exceptionally well prepared for their adult lives and future economic well-being because, in addition to their excellent basic skills, they have good opportunities to participate in events with other schools, work together on committees, lead assemblies and produce the school newspaper.

## Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of all pupils is good, including for those in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school pays close attention to ensuring that the procedures for safeguarding are robust and meet the current requirements for staff training for child protection. The proprietor and all staff and volunteers have the required checks in place, new appointments are tracked rigorously, and details are recorded efficiently in the single central register. The school's leaders have put in place systems, policies and procedures to promote a high quality of health and safety arrangements for pupils. However, while these policies and procedures are regularly reviewed and updated, links between some policies are not made and their effectiveness is not always monitored and evaluated. Bullying is extremely rare and pupils told inspectors and recorded in their questionnaires that they felt safe and that they were confident staff would deal with any incidents. They have a good awareness of how to live healthy lifestyles through sensible diet and exercise, although they do not always put this into practice for their breaktime snacks. Risk assessments to promote pupils' health and safety are thorough and effective for all activities and events, both on and off the school premises. The school has a well-considered development plan to support the regulatory requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

## Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall provision, outcomes and effectiveness of the setting are outstanding, so that children make a flying start to their education. Excellent induction arrangements help children settle happily into school. The skills and abilities of children when they enter the nursery are broadly in line with those expected for this age. Outstanding care and welfare ensure that the children are able to learn in a safe, healthy and caring setting. Teaching is good and often outstanding and makes very effective use of assessment information from observing children, to plan work that matches their needs and different abilities. As a result, they make rapid gains and by the end of the Reception Year, they are well above the expected level for their age. The exciting and well-planned curriculum is regularly reviewed and enhanced to provide stimulating learning experiences. There is a very good mix of child-initiated and teacher-led activities, supporting children's independence. Excellent use of the outdoor areas extends the children's play and learning, and exciting resources both in and outdoors stimulate their initiative and imagination. High emphasis is given to the development of communication, language, literacy and mathematical skills but, within this, children's writing and calculation skills are not quite so strongly developed. Excellent relationships between adults and children enhance children's social skills and each is valued as an individual. Effective links with parents help involve them in their children's education and keep them well informed of progress. The leadership and management of the setting are outstanding and demonstrate a secure and accurate understanding of its strengths and areas for development.

## 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.

- Provide medium-term individualised planning to meet the needs of pupils who may require additional support or more challenge in their learning.
- Develop a sharper focus in the Early Years Foundation Stage on the quality of children's writing, particularly that of boys, and on children's calculation skills.

## 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	Merton Court School
DCSF number	303/6053
Unique Reference Number (URN)	101482
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	513791
Type of school	Preparatory
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1899
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 109      Girls: 94      Total: 203
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 4      Girls: 6      Total: 10
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 0      Girls: 0      Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0      Girls: 0      Total: 0
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0      Girls: 0      Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Early Years: 5 mornings (3 and 4 year-olds) £6,420 Early Years: full time (3 and 4 year-olds) £8,775 Junior preparatory: (Reception to Year 2) £8,775 Senior preparatory: (Years 3 to 6) £9,315
Address of school	38 Knoll Road Sidcup DA14 4QU
Telephone number	020 8300 2112
Fax number	020 8300 1324
Email address	office@mertoncourtprep.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Dominic Price
Proprietor	Mrs Elizabeth & Mr Christopher Price
Reporting inspector	Angela Corbett HMI
Dates of inspection	16 March 2010