

Park School

Independent school inspection report

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Unique Reference Number (URN)	113617
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Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath 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

Park School is an independent primary school for boys and girls aged between three and eleven. It is located on the Dartington Hall Estate, near Totnes in Devon, and occupies part of a former residential school built in the 1930s. Currently 65 pupils are on roll, including 15 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, 14 of whom have their places funded under the nursery grant scheme. The school was established in 1986 and is in the ownership of the Council of Management which includes elected parents. It was last inspected in November 2007.

The school aims to provide education 'at a human scale and geared to the holistic development of all its pupils', in an environment where 'learning is fun, relevant and lifelong and children grow to be self-aware and confident individuals.' It seeks to use the school grounds to promote learning and to help children understand and respect nature.

Evaluation of the school

Park School provides a good quality of education and is successful in meeting its central aims. Parents hold extremely positive views of the school; in the words of one: 'Park is a wonderful place to send my child. Staff are deeply respectful of him as a person and sensitive to his needs and abilities.' The good quality of teaching and excellent use of the outdoor environment help pupils to grow in confidence and to make good progress; their behaviour is outstanding. The outstanding Early Years Foundation Stage provision ensures that children make an excellent start to their education. Procedures for the recruitment of staff and arrangements for safeguarding pupils have been strengthened and are now good. The school has made significant improvement since the last inspection and now meets all except one of the regulations. It is aware that some areas of the curriculum need strengthening and it is developing plans to improve them.

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 quality of the curriculum is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage and satisfactory overall. It is supported by a very clear set of aims and covers all the required areas of learning. The outdoor environment is at the heart of the curriculum and is used extensively to support a broad range of topics. 'Forest School' sessions include environmental science, growing vegetables and woodland crafts. The creative arts feature strongly, with weekly art and singing lessons. Physical education is provided through frequent games and outdoor pursuits activities in the school grounds and by visits to a local swimming pool. Discrete numeracy and literacy lessons ensure that there is sufficient balance in the curriculum. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) topics which promote leading fulfilling and healthy lifestyles are embedded across the curriculum. The school is rightly updating its PSHE curriculum to ensure that all areas are covered fully as pupils move up the school. Pupils have access to computers, but the use of information and communication technology (ICT) to support the curriculum is underdeveloped.

Suitable schemes of work are in place for all subjects, although planning in some subjects is brief and relies too heavily on the use of worksheets, particularly in mathematics. The school is aware that aspects of the curriculum need further development and is currently reviewing its planning. The curriculum is enriched by close links with the local community, for example the Dartington College of Arts and the Schumacher College. This results in pupils attending theatre productions and artists visiting the school.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall and is outstanding in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Interesting topics, which often include practical activities, ensure that pupils enjoy their learning. As one pupil commented, 'It is exciting. Park School is the best because they make work fun.' Teachers listen patiently to pupils and are adept at encouraging them to explore and develop their own ideas. An example was observed in a science lesson when pupils discussed with enthusiasm an experiment to test suitable conditions for seeds to germinate. Additionally, in an art lesson, pupils' emotional development and their reaction to making mistakes were carefully considered when introducing a new topic on sketching portraits of each other. The respectful and understanding approach of teachers fosters pupils' confidence in their ability to learn.

Resources to support teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge is satisfactory and is enhanced by the skills of part-time specialists. All staff support the school's aims and values and exemplify them throughout their work. Staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage have an excellent understanding of the developmental needs of young children.

The school makes satisfactory use of assessment. Each pupil has a 'Park Journey' folder, containing samples of work, which records their progress as they move up through the school. The school is currently extending the use of assessment information and linking it more closely to pupils' next steps in learning. Overall,

pupils make good progress. Children get off to an excellent start in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Throughout the school, pupils are particularly successful in developing their speaking and listening skills and in learning to work collaboratively. They also develop a high level of skill in the creative arts. Pupils' progress in literacy is less marked, especially in developing their writing skills. In part, this is due to the absence of a clear whole-school policy on the teaching of writing. The use of marking varies between classes. Teachers write positive comments, although suggestions for improvement are not always clear and are not followed up.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good from the Early Years Foundation Stage onwards. The school is particularly successful in raising pupils' self-esteem and developing their self-confidence from an early age. Much of this occurs through pupils' exploration of the school grounds where they play games and have fun. Pupils' spiritual awareness is very evident when they wonder at nature or reflect during 'candle time'. Pupils are extremely happy; one commented: 'I think my school is fabulous.' They enjoy coming to school very much and have good attitudes to learning; the absence through sickness of a few makes attendance merely satisfactory overall.

A strong feature of the school is the way in which the social and emotional aspects of learning feature throughout the school day. Pupils learn to consider the consequences of their actions and the feelings of others. Because of this, pupils' behaviour is outstanding. They work very well together and behave in an extremely mature way, needing little prompting to follow the school rules. Pupils routinely take responsibility in lessons and around the school, for example by organising equipment and helping to manage the vegetable garden. They are fully involved in decisions about school life through weekly meetings. As a result, they understand and accept decisions.

Pupils' knowledge of different cultures is satisfactory. The school is a very tolerant community, accepting and celebrating individual differences. Pupils develop an awareness of other cultures, for example when they complete cookery projects on food from around the world or celebrate Chinese New Year. However, the school lacks a planned programme to ensure comprehensive coverage of the main faiths and cultures in the United Kingdom. Pupils learn about community services through a range of topics and develop a good understanding of democracy through direct participation in the school meetings. They are involved closely in the local community through festivals and raise funds for various charities. Pupils' preparation for their future economic well-being is satisfactory. They are confident in discussion and work very effectively in teams, although their literacy and ICT skills are less well developed.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The quality of the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of pupils across the school is good and in the Early Years Foundation Stage it is outstanding. Teachers form respectful relationships with pupils and ensure that they feel valued members of the school community. As a result, pupils report that they feel safe, bullying is not an issue and any difficulties are resolved through discussion. As one pupil commented, 'I feel really safe at my school and I feel the teachers are really nice and they care about you.'

Appropriate health and safety policies and procedures cover all aspects of the school's work. Good arrangements stem from its policy to safeguard pupils. Staff have received appropriate recent training in child protection and any concerns about a pupil's welfare are followed up quickly. Fire drills are held regularly and fire-fighting equipment checked by a specialist company. Several staff have received training in first aid and a suitable policy is in place. The large outdoor area contains some potential hazards, such as a pond and adventurous play equipment. The school regularly reviews its use of the outdoor space and includes pupils in discussions about the need for safety. Pupils take regular exercise by participating in games and outdoor pursuits. They also develop a very good understanding of healthy eating through eating the school dinners and growing vegetables. No unhealthy food is consumed on the premises, a policy which pupils understand and support.

The school has a plan for increasing access to the site which meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Thorough procedures are in place for the recruitment and appointment of staff. Members of the Council of Management and staff have all been subject to appropriate checks, including clearance at an enhanced level with the Criminal Records Bureau, to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. All checks are recorded as required in a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable for safe and effective learning. The accommodation comprises an Early Years Foundation Stage area, and three classes with additional music, art and craft rooms. Classrooms offer sufficient space for the number of pupils using them. The learning environment is enhanced by some attractive displays, especially of pupils' models and artwork. The condition of the premises and accommodation is adequate, although some areas are worn and the school is currently implementing a programme of redecoration. The youngest children and all other pupils benefit from excellent facilities for outdoor play and exploration, which include a vegetable garden, pond, playing fields, climbing apparatus, yurt and a woodland trail.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school has recently updated the information provided to parents and others to include almost all the required information. A parent handbook gives parents a good range of clear information about the aims and organisation of the school. Parents are kept informed through regular newsletters and the allocation of a 'pigeon hole' for each family. Formal meetings take place with parents twice each year to discuss the progress of each pupil and a detailed annual report is provided on each pupil's educational development. The school does not collate academic performance of pupils during the previous school year and make this information available. A small number of parents would value more information about how pupils are prepared for transition to secondary school.

Procedures for handling complaints

The complaints policy meets all the regulations. The policy sets out how informal and formal complaints may be made to the school and parents are made aware that they can receive a copy on request. There have been no formal complaints since the last inspection.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Provision is outstanding, as are the outcomes for children. The nurturing environment means that children settle well and are eager to get involved in the highly stimulating range of activities. Teaching is founded on expert knowledge and full understanding of how young children learn and develop. Assessment is supported by high quality observations and the effective use of photographs, which are compiled in an attractive 'first story' for each child. Children have the freedom to offer their own ideas and respond to the learning challenges with enthusiasm. They develop a very good understanding of healthy living, supported by the wholesome vegetarian lunch and frequent outdoor activity which aids their physical development. Adults are outstanding role models, setting clear boundaries, so that children feel safe. Relationships are extremely positive at all levels.

There is an excellent range of resources and children have extensive opportunities to explore the natural world through the outdoor play area, which includes gardens and challenging physical equipment. An excellent balance of child-initiated and adult-led learning uses focused activities very well to enable children to make significant gains. They learn to count, sort, match and make patterns. Older children develop reading skills and share these with the younger ones. Children are able to concentrate for extended periods. Their imagination and creativity are reflected in the attractive work displayed.

Leadership and management are outstanding, as is the overall effectiveness of the setting, reflecting high aspirations and close partnership with parents to meet the needs of each child.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended ('the Regulations'), with the exception of the one listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- ensure that parents are aware that they can request particulars of pupils' academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(3)(e)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- extend the curriculum to include more opportunities for pupils to develop their ICT skills
- improve the quality of teaching and learning through developing whole-school policies on writing and on the marking of pupils' work
- extend pupils' knowledge and understanding of the different cultural and religious traditions in the United Kingdom.

³ 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?	✓			

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

Evaluation of boarding provision				
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School details

Name of school	Park School		
DCSF number	878/6040		
Unique reference number (URN)	113617		
Type of school	Primary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1986		
Age range of pupils	3–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 30	Girls: 21	Total: 51
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 11	Girls: 3	Total: 14
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	Annual fees £3759-£5607		
Address of school	Park Road		
	Dartington		
	Totnes		
	Devon		
	TQ9 6EQ		
Telephone number	01803 864588		
Fax number	01803 864588		
Email address	park@parkschoolonline.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Amanda Bellamy		
Proprietor	The Council of Management of Park School		
Reporting inspector	Andrew Redpath HMI		
Dates of inspection	11–12 May 2010		