

Long Close School

Independent school inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk 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

Long Close School is a day school for boys and girls aged from two to sixteen years. It is situated in a residential district between Slough in Buckinghamshire and Datchet in Berkshire. The school opened in 1940 and is now part of a chain of schools owned by Cognita Limited. At present there are 293 pupils on roll including 86 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Of these 65 attend the Nursery and are in receipt of nursery education funding. The school has not applied for any exemptions. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Currently most pupils leave at the age of 11 before transferring to maintained grammar schools or independent selective day schools. A few pupils remain beyond this age. A significant minority of pupils join the school with the prospect of taking their GCSE examinations at the age of 16. The school has applied for a material change of registration to provide for pupils continuing their education beyond the age of 14. The appropriateness of this provision was evaluated as part of this inspection.

The education provided is founded on broadly Christian principles but most pupils are of other faiths. A large majority of pupils are from Asian backgrounds, with a few of African, Caribbean or White British heritage. The school has a set of core values, 'that puts the child at the centre of everything it does'. The separately registered provision for children aged two was last inspected in September 2009. The school was last inspected by the Independent Schools Inspectorate in January 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Long Close School successfully meets its stated aims and provides a good quality of education for its pupils. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good. Pupils make outstanding progress overall because the teaching is consistently good and the pupils have exemplary attitudes towards learning. The good curriculum underpins pupils' good personal development and sense of well-being; pupils are well cared for. The school has made good progress since its last inspection, and the leaders are always seeking ways in which to improve. All of the regulations are met, including those relating to safeguarding arrangements.

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 school offers a good curriculum for its pupils and for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. It is well planned across the school to provide the pupils with broad and balanced experiences and preparation for their entry into schools at 11+. There is a satisfactory range of courses at GCSE level taught by specialist teachers. The school is ambitious to offer a wider range of options for those wishing to study more than eight GCSEs and there are well-developed plans to increase this offer next year. The overwhelming majority of pupils studying for their GCSEs consider the academic courses to meet their needs. However, there is not enough choice in accredited courses in technology, other than information and communication technology, or for them to gain experiences in the world of work. This limits their view of future destinations.

The practical and exploratory curriculum provided for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is well maintained throughout Years 1 to 6. There is a good blend of activities to enhance pupils' skills in mathematics and science and the opportunity for them to use their considerable writing skills in other subjects. Good opportunities for music, performance and sport enhance the personal achievements of all pupils. There is also good enrichment for pupils to support their knowledge and understanding and further their appreciation of British culture, through termly visits.

The curriculum is fine-tuned for those who find some aspects of their learning harder than others. The school has continued to seek ways to extend and challenge gifted and talented pupils since its last inspection. This is largely provided for outside of class lessons rather than as an integral part of teachers' lesson planning. Personal and social education is good across the school but opportunities for older pupils to lead and take greater responsibility within the school and the wider community are more limited. School leaders have prioritised this area for development.

The teaching and assessment are good across the school, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The regular, focused and general observations of children's learning and development are recorded efficiently, evaluated by staff and used to inform effective individual learning plans. The incisive teaching of structured schemes for writing and reading results in outstanding progress in these areas. Since the last inspection there has been increasing use of interactive whiteboards to hold pupils' attention and revisit their earlier learning efficiently. Teachers know the pupils well and make the most of the opportunities arising from small class sizes to give plenty of individual support. They are adept at providing the support to pace the learning so that pupils of different abilities learn well.

Some elements of using assessment information to improve learning are in place. Teachers make it clear for pupils what they are going to learn at the start of the lesson and use opportunities during and at the end of the lesson to return to the lesson focus. The use of questions at these times that probe pupils' learning and

challenge their thinking is inconsistent, and in some lessons opportunities are missed to engage pupils in thinking more deeply or to help them focus on their particular targets. Teachers maintain the learning through their own enthusiasm for the subject. They anticipate problems but give answers too quickly. In some lessons the desire to move pupils on results in work that is not well enough matched to the individual and that limits the opportunity for independent learning.

The school is more effective than at the last inspection in accumulating assessment information about the attainment of its children and pupils. Assessment systems are thorough and rigorous and well matched to the ambitions of the school to nurture and develop all aspects of the individual. Marking is regular, encouraging and detailed. However, there is not enough time given to the pupils to correct their work and learn from their mistakes.

Progress is outstanding. It is underpinned by the excellent progress children make in their reading, writing and mathematical skills through the Early Years Foundation Stage and on into Years 1 to 6. These skills combine well with pupils' diligence and application. Those entering the school for their GCSE studies are ambitious for themselves and benefit from the knowledgeable staff team and small classes where one-to-one tuition is the norm.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Those joining the school with lower levels of confidence and self-esteem rapidly improve within the harmonious climate the school promotes. This is recognised in parents' and carers' comments to inspectors. From an early age, all pupils report that they enjoy their school life and are enthusiastic about their learning. Work is extremely well presented and there are many bright and interesting displays around the school which exemplify pupils' work in writing and art.

Pupils' behaviour is good. They set high standards for themselves and are critical of those who do not match up to this. They are extremely polite and keen to help each other in lessons. Their respect for each others' values and religious beliefs are sincere and well understood. Pupils say that they value the presence of those from different parts of the world. This facilitates pupils' openness to new ideas, their appreciation of cultural diversity and their readiness to challenge racism.

Attendance is below the national average for all schools, due to the school authorising absence for pupils to attend family events. The school is aware of these absences but does not adequately monitor them through its present systems. Pupils' development of their skills and knowledge in literacy, and of their interpersonal skills, is strong. As a result, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

Pupils' contributions to the school and the wider community are satisfactory. The school council plays an important role in offering suggestions on how the school can

improve: for example encouraging the setting up of a pasta bar and water fountains. Older pupils in particular are keen to play an active role in developing their responsibilities by managing aspects of the school community. They show an appropriate awareness of local and national public services and institutions.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

This aspect of the school's work is good. Children's well-being in the Early Years Foundation Stage is significantly enhanced by excellent organisation and risk assessments and by an outstanding partnership with parents and carers, who feel very well informed and involved through comprehensive notice boards and the school's useful website.

The requirements to safeguard children and pupils are met. All staff are aware of procedures, including the designated person, who is trained to a standard set by the local safeguarding children's board.

Pupils report that they feel safe and that there are always members of staff they can go to if they have worries or concerns. Younger pupils reported that they are anxious about the behaviour of some older students, and complain that they use bad language towards them. School records show that matters or concerns over pupils' welfare are treated seriously, explored fully and dealt with swiftly. Pupils say that they like coming to a small school where everybody knows them well. Many pupils wrote to inspectors about how much they enjoy school and how well they were cared for. The vast majority of parents and carers agree and appreciate the family atmosphere.

The school places excellent focus on healthy eating, which is valued by the pupils. They take regular exercise and have a very good programme of lessons with a specialist teacher for physical education. There is a clear policy for first aid which is implemented effectively and staff have received appropriate training. Risk assessments are managed appropriately.

The school has an appropriate statement of intent to improve access as required by the Disability Discrimination Act 2002, as amended. However, there was no written plan available for inspectors to evaluate how well intentions are being met.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school conducts rigorous Criminal Records Bureau checks on the proprietor, staff and other adults prior to their appointment and staff have been trained in safer recruitment. The school maintains all the required information on a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory, being safe and conducive to effective learning. Sensible adaptations have been made to classrooms to provide suitable accommodation for the increased numbers of students joining the school to take their GCSEs. The school provides adequate space indoors and outside for the numbers currently on roll. The school makes good use of the adjacent public playing fields and local schools for competitive sporting events. The school is in good decorative order and is clean and tidy.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and carers, prospective parents and carers and others are provided with a comprehensive range of information through the school's prospectus and website. The school has good systems for informing parents, carers and others about updates to policies and the progress of pupils. Particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions and exclusions now meet regulations.

Procedures for handling complaints

Procedures fully meet the requirements. There have been two formal complaints in the last year, both of which were managed appropriately in accordance with school policy.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness and provision of the Early Years Foundation Stage are good. Children learn well in a very safe environment, with highly effective induction procedures to ensure they separate happily from their parents and carers. Staff in the under-fours day care are excellent play partners as they clearly enjoy being with very young children. They seize every opportunity to engage with the children and to successfully promote their social and language development.

Outcomes are good, as children make good progress from whatever their starting points, in all the areas of learning, both academically and in their personal development, as a result of good teaching and high quality care. On entry to Year 1, the vast majority have attained the levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age. More able children exceed the expected levels and are already competent readers and mathematicians.

Children enjoy numerous practical activities such as hand painting, building boats and going on treasure hunts. Resources to support learning indoors and out are satisfactory but are not always on hand to ensure that during child-initiated activity children can make the best gains in learning, and do not always match the particular expectations for groups of children.

The setting's leadership and management are good, having high aspirations and clear plans for future development. The team works well together, sets high standards and monitors the provision well. A good programme of staff training and development has significantly improved the adults' expertise in tracking children's learning and development.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 as amended the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.⁴

What the school could do to improve further

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

- Provide more opportunity for pupils to learn for themselves through discussion and high quality questions.
- Make better use of assessment information to focus work more precisely on pupils' needs.
- Ensure that resources to support learning indoors and out are on hand so that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage can make the best gains in learning during child-initiated activity.
- Provide more opportunity for older pupils to develop their responsibility within school and the wider community.

³ www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2003/20031910.htm

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts1995/ukpga_19950050_en_1

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	Long Close School		
DCSF number	871/6001		
Unique reference number (URN)	110162		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY388239		
Type of school	Non-selective day school		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1940		
Age range of pupils	2–16		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 178	Girls: 115	Total: 293
Number of pupils aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 5	Girls: 7	Total: 12
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,825–£10,485		
Annual fees (childcare)	£5,955		
Address of school	Long Court School Upton Court Road Slough Berkshire SL3 7LU		
Telephone number	01753 520095		
Fax number	01753 821463		
Email address	info@longcloseschool.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mr David Brazier		
Proprietor	Cognita Limited		
Reporting inspector	Mr Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	26–27 May 2010		