

Dormer House School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number	916/ 6047
Unique Reference Number	115803
Inspection number	301512
Inspection dates	12 -13 June 2007
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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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, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Dormer House School is an independent, non-selective primary school in Moreton-in-Marsh. It is non-profit making and has charitable status. A board of trustees oversees the school's work under the guidance of the headteacher who runs the school on a day-to-day basis. The school admits pupils from 18 months to 11 years and there are 164 on roll: 100 attend full-time and the rest part-time. The school provides government funded nursery places in the nursery and reception (Foundation Stage) classes and the day care provision. This provision was inspected by a child-care inspector (CCI) in May 2006. There are no pupils who speak English as an additional language and none with a statement of special educational need. The school was founded in 1875 by the Victorian educationalist Charlotte Mason and moved to its current site in the early 1960's.

The school's aim is: *'to provide children with a liberal education through a rich curriculum that ensures that each child is treated as a person of importance, able to develop their true potential and so become self-reliant grown-ups, capable of thinking for themselves and standing by their decisions'*.

Evaluation of the school

Dormer House is a good school with some outstanding features. Pupils are happy, enjoy coming to school and have excellent attitudes to learning. Their behaviour is exemplary. Effective teaching and a rich curriculum enable pupils to reach high standards and make good progress academically and in their personal development. Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and this leads to a great atmosphere in classrooms. The school is effectively led and managed and the headteacher has moved the school forward in the two years that she has been in post. There are a few areas where the school does not fully meet regulatory requirements.

Quality of education

A good curriculum effectively meets the needs of all pupils and enables them to make good progress as they move through each phase. The school successfully

meets its aim to provide a stimulating and enjoyable curriculum which encourages critical thinking and builds on pupils varying talents.

A broad range of worthwhile activities are provided for children in the nursery and reception classes. In the nursery the curriculum is planned through topics and themes that link learning across a number of areas to make it more meaningful. The children love experiences such as designing and making postcards, writing and sending letters and using computers to produce driving licenses and passports in the 'Post Office'. Generally there is a good balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities, but the mix between the two, is better in the nursery than in reception, where opportunities for children to initiate their own learning is more limited. In reception the curriculum is based on subjects but is equally effective. However, there is an over use of worksheets for phonic and grammatical tasks which restricts children's ability to record things for themselves.

In Years 1 to 6 effective schemes of work are securely based on national guidance or commercial materials. Curriculum plans pay good attention to the core skills of literacy and numeracy with a very strong emphasis on the creative arts and the teaching of other languages, such as Latin, Spanish, French and Greek. Effective provision for personal development enables pupils to become mature, self-confident and thoughtful individuals. Extra-curricular provision is good. Pupils thoroughly enjoy participating in musical productions like 'Bugsy Malone'. Regular performances help develop pupils' singing, dance and drama skills. Trips and visitors successfully enrich the curriculum and widen pupils' understanding of the world at large. For example, the oldest pupils have just returned from London where they visited the Houses of Parliament. The experience helped them gain an understanding of civic duties and the responsibilities of adult life.

Provision for pupils who find learning more difficult is good and the targets set in individual education plans are used well to support and guide pupils' learning. Additional activities for pupils with particular gifts or talents increase their enjoyment and ensure they are challenged.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good across the school. Foundation Stage staff observe children closely and use their knowledge to pitch tasks at an appropriate level so all children make good progress. Teaching is stimulating and activities capture children's imagination. There is a strong emphasis on developing children's personal, emotional and social skills alongside their language and creative skills. Excellent relationships between adults and children lead to a great atmosphere in class. Planning is sound but nursery planning does not always specify what children are expected to learn from activities.

In the rest of the school teaching is good. The inclusion of specialist teaching in many areas including Latin, French, Spanish, drama, music, art and physical education is a particular strength. In the most effective lessons teachers have

high expectations and work is demanding so that all pupils are consistently challenged. Teaching is stimulating; pupils have fun and make rapid gains in their learning. Good use of open-ended questioning further develops pupils' thinking. In the few less effective lessons activities lacked sufficient challenge so pupils consolidated their learning rather than being stretched. There was insufficient intervention by staff to further refine pupils' skills and techniques. Literacy and information and communication skills (ICT) are taught effectively in other subjects. For example, in history the oldest pupils have written some excellent diaries about life during the war, and have used ICT to enhance the presentation of their work.

The school uses national assessments to measure pupils' attainment in Years 3 to 6 but the tracking of pupils' progress across different years is insufficiently developed. The school recognises it does not yet have robust enough procedures to judge attainment in Years 1 and 2 and to use performance data to make year-on-year comparisons with confidence. Effective procedures are in place to assess the progress made by three- to five-year-olds against national expectations.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils are happy, very courteous and friendly. They enjoy school a great deal as shown in their exceptionally positive attitudes to learning and their good attendance. Pupils' behaviour is excellent and they are very respectful to their teachers, each other and visitors. The school turns out pupils that are mature, self-confident and well rounded individuals who have a very positive outlook on life. Their self-confidence is demonstrated in their willingness to show initiative and make a positive contribution to the school and the wider community. A 'buddy system' exists which allows Year 2 and 6 pupils to reward good behaviour at playtimes. The initiative has a positive impact on discipline and enables pupils to show concern for each other. There is a school council and pupils' views are sought and valued. Pupils have made a real difference by raising money to improve playground equipment in school and a local park. They have also raised substantial sums of money for local, national and international charities. Pupils are keen to care for the environment by recycling paper. The very youngest children also play their part in caring for their environment by clearing up and putting away equipment at the end of sessions. Through religious education, art and picture study pupils are gaining a good understanding and appreciation of other cultures and lifestyles. For example, work on slavery and the Holocaust has provided pupils with a good opportunity to explore their own cultural assumptions and values. The youngest children celebrate a variety of festivals which increase their understanding of customs that are different from their own.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Welfare, health and safety are good because the school takes this area of their work very seriously. The welfare of children in the nursery and the day care is outstanding. Pupils have a good understanding about how to keep healthy. They know that sports activities such as swimming, floor ball and netball keeps them fit and that regular exercise is a lifestyle choice that improves people's health. Pupils say that they feel safe and secure and there is always someone to turn to if they have a problem.

The health and safety policy is comprehensive and it is effectively implemented. For example, robust risk assessments are carried out for classroom and out-of-school activities. Parents regularly use their own cars to transport pupils to outside events but the school has not checked if parents' car insurance covers them to do so. First aid procedures are effective and any accidents are appropriately recorded. Provision for fire safety is good with regular fire drills and sound fire risk assessments conducted annually. All of the recommendations identified in the fire officer's report from December 2006 have been appropriately addressed. The school has a written child protection policy but it is not comprehensive enough. The procedure does not clearly specify the procedures to be followed in the event that a member of staff is accused of abuse. All staff, including the designated person, have undergone recent and relevant training to fulfil their child protection responsibilities. The school has drawn up a suitable action plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff and trustees have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) to ensure their suitability to work with children. However, the school recognises that it has not suitably vetted the very small number of parental volunteers who transport pupils to various places without staff accompaniment. The school has effective procedures for the appointment of staff. This means that all of the necessary checks are carried out before their appointment is confirmed.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are satisfactory. The school site is fairly small but the best use is made of the space available. The school is in good decorative order and is clean and tidy. Classrooms vary in size and many are quite compact. Care is taken when allocating pupils to rooms to ensure they are of an appropriate size to allow effective teaching. Classroom walls and corridors are made attractive by well-presented displays of pupils' work. Furniture and fittings are suitably designed for the age and needs of the pupils. The kitchen

has just been awarded 4* 'Scores on the doors' status by Gloucestershire Food Safety Office. The quality mark means the kitchen is hygienic and safety procedures are good.

There is adequate outdoor play space for the current number on roll. The school compensates for the lack of green space by making good use of facilities in the nearby park and the playing fields at the local Fire College. The school does not have appropriate facilities for the care of sick or injured pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and prospective parents get a good range of information about the school's provision, its philosophy and how it is put into practice. The details supplied meet all but one of the regulations. Particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions and exclusions are not routinely provided. The school collects, records and submits to the appropriate authority all of the necessary information about individual children under-five. Parents of pupils joining the school receive a well produced DVD for their child to watch. It provides a real flavour of school life as seen through a child's eyes. The contents will answer many of the questions a child might have before they start school. Annual reports are informative and of good quality. They provide a clear picture of pupils' progress in the main subjects taught.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's written procedure for handling complaints fully meets regulatory requirements. Parents of the youngest pupils are appropriately informed that if they have a concern they can make a complaint to Ofsted as well as to the school. A small number of parents do not understand the complaints procedure or know that one exists. The school has received one formal complaint in the past year.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- improve the quality of the child protection policy to better safeguard the welfare of pupils (paragraph 3(2)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of suitability of proprietor and staff (standard 4) and must:

- ensure that all volunteers who have regular unsupervised contact with children have been CRB checked (paragraph 4 (b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l)).

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

- provide particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions and exclusions (paragraph 6(2)(e)).

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:

- further improve the quality of planning in the nursery
- create more opportunities for children to initiate their own learning in the reception class and restrict the use of worksheets for phonic and grammatical work
- improve the tracking of pupils' progress over time and ensure judgements made about attainment in Years 1 and 2 are suitably moderated.

School details

Name of school	Dormer House School		
DfES number	916/6047		
Unique reference number	115803		
Type of school	Primary		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1875		
Age range of pupils	18 months to 11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 45	Girls: 63	Total: 108
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 28	Girls: 28	Total: 56
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,929		
Address of school	High Street Moreton-in-Marsh Gloucestershire GL56 0AD		
Telephone number	01608 650758		
Fax number	01608 652238		
Email address	office@dormerhouse.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Alison Thomas		
Proprietor	Dormer House (Moreton-in-Marsh)		
Reporting inspector	David Rzeznik HMI		
Dates of inspection	12 – 13 June 2007		