

Heathside Preparatory 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 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

Heathside is a co-educational independent preparatory school providing for 176 pupils from three to 11 years old. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage who are under five attend part or full time in one of the two Nursery classes, and full time in the Reception class. Of the 47 children in the Early Years Foundation Stage, 43 receive nursery education funding.

The school opened in 1993 and is situated in Hampstead, in north-west London. It occupies two buildings, one of which is leased from a church, which it adjoins. Pupils aged seven and under attend this site, although older pupils also use its hall and specialist rooms for various activities. The older pupils' school is located in an early 19th century building a few minutes walk away. The school aims to maintain a friendly and informal atmosphere while fostering a high level of individual responsibility and self-motivation. It seeks to encourage the development of the whole person, so that pupils achieve high academic and personal standards. The school was last inspected in March 2007.

Evaluation of the school

Heathside Preparatory School successfully meets its stated aims and provides a good quality of education with some excellent features for its pupils. Pupils make outstanding progress overall and reach high standards because the teaching is consistently good and the pupils have exemplary attitudes towards learning. The outstanding curriculum underpins pupils' excellent personal development and sense of well-being. The school has made good progress since its last inspection, and is always seeking ways in which to excel. All regulations are met, including those relating to safeguarding arrangements, and the provision for the children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is now outstanding.

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's good quality of education overall is underpinned by an outstanding curriculum, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The range of opportunities appears limitless, from Yoga to Shakespearean productions. The school has continued to seek ways to extend and challenge pupils since its last inspection. The depth of study is also impressive and is exemplified well by the high quality of writing and problem solving noted from a scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work. The practical and exploratory curriculum provided so well for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage is maintained throughout Years 1 to 6. This contributes to pupils' extremely positive attitudes to learning and ensures that they all develop as well-rounded individuals. The curriculum is fine tuned for those who find some aspects of their learning harder than others. Examples are the use of dyslexia programmes for those experiencing difficulty learning to spell and phonic programmes for reading. All pupils are given the opportunity to excel at something. The provision for those who are talented or more able is incorporated successfully in day-to-day planning and lifts the expectations of other pupils. There is good provision of sporting opportunities for a school of this size and this makes a highly valued contribution to pupils' development of healthy lifestyles. A wide variety of excursions and visitors helps to broaden pupils' experiences and supports their learning well.

The teaching is good across the school, with some outstanding practice in the Early Years Foundation Stage and main school that leads to excellent rates of progress. The specialist knowledge of teachers is used effectively to match work to individual needs and to pace the learning so that pupils of different abilities learn well. There is increasing use of new technologies, since the last inspection, to hold pupils' attention and revisit their earlier learning efficiently. Where the teaching is especially good, there is first-rate planning to give a challenging pace to the lesson and some incisive questioning that probes pupils' learning and challenges their thinking. This quality of planning is not consistent and in some lessons opportunities are missed to engage pupils in thinking more deeply. Teachers make the most of the opportunities arising from small class sizes to give plenty of individual support. Pupils report that they appreciate the regular guidance on how they can improve their work through the informative marking but not all are clear about their next steps.

The school is more effective than at the last inspection in accumulating assessment and test information about the attainment of pupils. There is a comprehensive range of tests, including standardised tests, which are checked effectively by senior teachers. Teachers supplement these with regular 'progress meetings' with the headteacher that ensure the efficient tracking of rates of progress and speedy implementation of additional support for those who may be falling behind. The data are not used, however, to set specific expectations of achievement for individuals. This leads to occasional imprecision in lesson planning. Nonetheless, pupils' progress

is outstanding overall and all pupils make at least good progress compared to national norms, with some from lower starting points making excellent gains.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development continues to be outstanding, 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' comments to inspectors. From an early age, all pupils report that they enjoy their school life and their high attendance reflects this. Pupils are enthusiastic about their learning. The comment by one pupil that 'the school helps me find my strengths' summed up the views of all those responding to the pupil survey. Work is well presented and there are many bright and interesting displays around the school which exemplify pupils' good presentation in writing and art. Pupils' behaviour is good. They set high standards for themselves and are suitably critical of those whose occasional lapses let them down. Their keenness and enthusiasm to learn in lessons is genuine. They are extremely polite and in lessons ask probing good questions. When lessons are less engaging they are inclined to lose concentration. Pupils' development of their skills and knowledge in literacy, numeracy and interpersonal skills is above average. As a result, they are well prepared for their future economic well-being.

The school has sustained the strengths noted in the last report in developing pupils' contributions to the school and the community at large through fund raising, performing plays and singing in the choir. A good range of visits helps secure pupils' good understanding of public services and institutions. There are well-established links with a Ugandan school for autistic children and a school in Soweto. Such contacts, combined with experiences of other cultures in religious education, art and music, helps them develop a genuine appreciation and respect for others. The school celebrates a range of religious festivals during the year and 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.

Pupils contribute positively towards helping others settle into school. They have taken the initiative on a number of environmental themes including a very successful walking to school campaign. While most consider that their views are known and responded to by the headteacher and proprietors, they feel that they would benefit from greater responsibility through the school council.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

This aspect of the school's work is good, including for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The requirements to safeguard children are met, although the requirement to record the date of the review of the policy and to note changes made is missing. All staff are trained, including the designated person, to a standard set by

the local children's safeguarding board, although not all named certificates were available to inspectors despite the best efforts of the school to retrieve these from the training agency.

The school cares well for all its pupils. Pupils report that they feel safe and there are always members of staff they can go to if they have worries or concerns. They say that they like coming to a small school where everybody knows them well. One pupil who had recently joined the school was effusive in her praise telling inspectors of the 'amazing changes to my life because of the support I have received'. Parents agree and appreciate the family atmosphere. One parent wrote to inspectors, 'The atmosphere is nurturing and caring, the activities make the school a very special place.' A few commented on how the personal attention given their children by the headteacher had a positive impact on their children's confidence. The school has a very detailed plan to improve access as required by the Disability Discrimination Act. Improvements to both buildings have ensured that the school now fully meets the regulations regarding sufficiency of toilets and arrangements for looking after pupils who become ill at school. Suitable risk assessments are in place, including those for fire safety and activities out of school. Pupils respond well to the high expectations on them to move around the numerous stairways and corridors safely.

The school has good systems for informing parents, carers and others about its policies and the progress of pupils. Criminal Records Bureau checks are taken seriously and staff have been trained in safer recruitment. There is a clear policy for first aid which is implemented effectively and staff have received appropriate training. The school places an excellent focus on healthy lifestyles and pupils eat healthily. They take regular exercise and have a good programme of lessons with specialist teachers for physical education.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision, the outcomes and the overall effectiveness of the setting are all outstanding, fully meeting the children's needs. As a result of consistently good teaching, underpinned by significant recent improvements in planning and assessment, children make excellent progress across all areas of learning. From the evidence available, the majority are working at levels above those expected by the time they leave the Early Years Foundation Stage.

The classrooms are very welcoming and attractive and excellent resources provide a broad and stimulating range of learning experiences for children across all areas of learning. A relative weakness is the limited provision for learning and play outside the classroom. Appropriate arrangements are made within the confines of the premises. The planning for a new development is well advanced to greatly improve outdoor learning opportunities. The regular focused and general observations of children's learning and development are recorded efficiently, evaluated by staff and

used to inform very effective individual learning plans of high quality. Planning is very thorough and regularly reviewed in whole-staff sessions so that changes and amendments are fed through to class, as well as individual children's, learning plans.

Leadership and management are outstanding and have gained the full commitment of all staff, who work as a united and ambitious team. The partnership with parents has been strengthened and augmented to include a parent forum, regular and very detailed feedback to parents based on focused monitoring and the children's profile and work, and also regular updating letters and emails for all parents.

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:

- improve lesson planning by incorporating clear expectations for pupils of differing abilities based on assessment information
- plan carefully to ensure the successful implementation of outdoor learning opportunities once the facilities become available.

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	Heathside Preparatory School		
DCSF number	202/6360		
Unique reference number	100078		
Type of school	Preparatory School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	September 1993		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 72	Girls: 62	Total: 134
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 21	Girls: 21	Total: 42
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,450-£9,300		
Address of school	16 New End Hampstead London NW3 1JA		
Telephone number	020 7794 5857		
Fax number	020 7435 6434		
Email address	info@heathside.net		
Headteacher	Melissa Remus Elliot and Jill White		
Proprietor	Melissa Remus Elliot and Jill White		
Reporting inspector	Jonathan Palk HMI		
Dates of inspection	14 January 2010		