

The Dominie

Independent school standard inspection report

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Piccadilly Gate
Store Street
Manchester
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 1231
Textphone: 0161 618 8524
E: enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
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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, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.^{1, 2}

Information about the school

The Dominie is an independent co-educational school, which specialises in teaching and supporting pupils with specific learning difficulties, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, perceptual and language difficulties and manipulative and fine motor problems. Occasionally, pupils are admitted who have a statement of special educational needs. These pupils may be funded wholly or in part by local authorities. The Dominie's aim is 'to enable each child to achieve their personal best through high-quality teaching, specialist support and a relevant curriculum that meets their needs'. The school is situated in a modern business complex close to Battersea Park and was opened in 1987 and registered for up to 32 pupils between the ages of six and 13 years of age. There are currently 28 pupils on roll and boys outnumber girls by nearly two to one. The school is registered with the Council for the Registration of Schools Teaching Dyslexia, Crested and is also a member of the British Dyslexia Association. Pupils are admitted throughout the school year. The last inspection of the school by Ofsted was in May 2008 when it met all the regulations for registration.

Evaluation of the school

The school provides a good quality of education and meets its stated aims. The school's curriculum and teaching are good and as a result, pupils make good progress. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good and they display good behaviour. The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school fulfils all safeguarding requirements. The school has made good progress in its use of pupils' progress data since its previous inspection and meets almost all regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The school's curriculum is good and has a highly appropriate focus on the pupils' specific learning difficulties, including those with a statement of special educational needs. A strength of the curriculum is the specialist intervention programmes of support the pupils receive for reading, writing and spelling. These programmes, within pupils' individual education plans, contain individualised targets based on

¹ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents.

² www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents.

speech and language and physiotherapist assessments. The curriculum is supported by a relevant policy and schemes of work drawn from National Curriculum guidance. There is a strong focus on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy. Each morning the pupils have a series of lessons, each with a specific focus for development. These areas include reading, writing and spelling and numeracy. Social skills lessons promote the pupils' speaking and listening skills alongside building confidence in their ability to communicate. Afternoon lessons provide opportunities for practical and creative studies, including art, drama and swimming. Other subjects, including geography, history and religious education, are taught through topics appropriate to each year group. Information and communication technology (ICT) is identified within the topics although its use is limited to word processing and the creation of spreadsheets. The pupils also receive a weekly lesson of touch-typing to aid their studies. The small class sizes allow for close support in all lessons and additionally, pupils may also receive one-to-one teaching or work in small groups, for example, in sessions of speech and language therapy. There is also a suitable focus on the pupils' fine and gross motor skills to aid their physical and perceptual development. There is a good range of after-school clubs, for example for homework, guitar and craft options that are well attended.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good which results in pupils making good progress. Typically, lessons are enjoyed by pupils who respond well. Teachers are well prepared, make reference to pupils' individual education plans and know their subjects well. The strongest lessons contain a variety of teaching and learning styles, for example whole-class teaching interwoven with opportunities for pupils to work in pairs and then as individuals. Teachers make good use of open-ended questions to encourage pupils to share what they know. In most cases, planning contains sufficient challenge for all abilities in the class. Good attention is also given to the 'right conditions for writing', which includes guidance on posture and pen grip. Occasionally, the pace of pupils' learning flags and pupils lose focus but staff are readily on-hand to enliven the lesson and ensure learning resumes with minimal delay. Teachers take into account the advice of the speech and language therapist who creates relevant targets and programmes for pupils to follow. Therapists also work alongside teaching staff in classrooms. This practice provides the health professionals with accurate feedback about the effectiveness of their interventions. The school makes very good use of specialist teaching on- and off-site for physical education although opportunities are missed to recognise achievements in swimming.

The school has made good improvement since the previous inspection in relation to its use and analysis of progress data. Recent analysis of data highlighted the need to have an increased focus on writing by having additional lessons every morning as opposed to only twice a week. This intervention is already bearing fruit and staff acknowledge the need to maintain this emphasis across the curriculum, particularly in afternoon topic work. The school now uses national guidance for assessing pupils' progress and data analysis. This information plus the well-established literacy assessments, help to ensure that the pupils make good progress. Pupils' work is

marked regularly. Information from termly assessments is written into pupils' individual education plans to inform the teachers' future planning. Pupils are increasingly involved in reviewing how well they are doing, for example 'two stars and wish' is understood to be two things that went well and one they wish to improve next time.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. They enjoy being at school as evidenced from cheery morning greetings and good attitudes to the staff, their peers and their studies. Their behaviour and attendance are good although a few pupils arrive late, which adversely affects their learning and that of others. Within the school, all pupils arrive at their lessons on time and prepared for learning.

The pupils say they feel safe and they understand the school's rewards and sanctions policy. Asked what they like about the school, several answered 'everything'. Other views included a feeling of belonging and an appreciation of the small scale of the school. There were few improvements suggested other than 'more space, more computers and an interactive whiteboard'. Lessons in personal, social and health education and in social and emotional aspects of learning enable the pupils to consider themselves and their strengths. These thoughts are displayed attractively as 'what's good about me'. Their spiritual awareness is fostered routinely through assemblies. Classroom responsibilities for equipment and membership of the school council enable them to make a positive contribution to school life.

Pupils learn about different cultures in their topics. Some topics also promote ethical debates where, for example, the pupils discuss the moral issues involved where rainforest tribes in Latin America are threatened with extinction amid forest clearances and the economic demands of loggers. Fund raising for others less fortunate, including a school in Tanzania, is a well-established feature of school life. Regular visits are made to a wide range of galleries and museums. The community is also used effectively to support the pupils' health, for example the local swimming pool and a leisure complex. One weakness, however, is that few visitors from the community come to the school to talk about their role in British life, for example local police officers or religious figures.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Required policies and procedures are in place, implemented effectively and reviewed in a timely manner. Policies include safeguarding, safer recruitment and child protection. All staff, including the school's designated child protection officer, are trained at appropriate levels and intervals in child protection.

The school adheres to the latest national guidance to inform their policies and practice in relation to: health and safety; behaviour; anti-bullying; discipline; and risk assessments for off-site visits. There is a first-aid policy and first-aid officers are trained at the required level. The school's fire procedures included a recent risk assessment that resulted in a room, previously used on a part-time basis, no longer being used until adequate fire exits are installed. All fire-fighting equipment is regularly tested and regular fire drills are conducted.

The school enables pupils to understand the importance of exercise and provides regular access to healthy pursuits through its physical education programme that includes a weekly swimming session for all pupils at a local pool. In school the pupils show a keen awareness of safety on staircases and observe the clearly displayed rules of conduct. The school maintains attendance and admission registers which meet the regulations. The school has not created a three-year plan to meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has undertaken all the required checks to ensure that its staff and the proprietor are suitable to work with children. The school maintains a single central register which meets the regulations.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school's premises and accommodation are suitable to ensure safe and effective learning. All areas of the school are adequately maintained and although the classrooms vary in size, astute room allocation ensures that they are of a suitable size for numbers of pupils in each class. Outside space is limited and the school has recently stopped using an adjacent facility due to fire safety concerns. In order to address the limitations of the site, very good use is made of the local environment for safe play and physical activities, for example, a local park and residential sports centres. Regular access is also provided to London galleries, theatres and museums in support of the curriculum.

Provision of information

The school meets all requirements except one. It provides clear, accurate and up to date information to parents, carers and others through its recently updated prospectus, parental handbook and website. The parental view was one of overwhelming support for the school's work. One wrote, 'Our child has not learned to read anywhere else.' A minority suggested that they would like to see homework issued more often. The school has an effective policy of reporting to parents and carers termly and reports are of good quality. However, the school does not provide an annual statement of income and expenditure for pupils who are funded by local authorities.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school has a complaints policy and set of procedures, which meet all of the regulations.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 (the Regulations), with the exception of those listed below.³

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- submit an annual account to local authorities, and on request to the Secretary of State, of income received and expenditure incurred in respect of pupils funded or part funded by those local authorities (paragraph 24(1)(h)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, 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:

- promote further progress in writing by extending the emphasis on pupils' written work during topics
- work with parents, carers and their children to further improve punctuality
- seek to increase visits to the school by members of the local community, including those who represent public institutions
- provide more opportunities for pupils to have a broader experience in the use of ICT.

³ www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2010/1997/contents/made.

⁴ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents.

Inspection judgements

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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School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties		
Date school opened	1987		
Age range of pupils	6–13 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 18	Girls: 10	Total: 28
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£23,400		
Address of school	55, Warriner Gardens Battersea London SW11 4DX		
Telephone number	020 7720 8783		
Email address	aodoherty@thedominie.co.uk		
Headteacher	Anne O'Doherty		
Proprietor	Anne O'Doherty		

This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.



11 November 2011

Dear Pupils

Inspection of The Dominie, Battersea, London SW11 4DX

You may remember my recent visit to your school. Thank you for the warm welcome you gave me. It is clear that you enjoy school, get on well with your teachers and make good progress with your studies. The reasons you are doing well are several and you play your part too.

Your teachers and all the staff who help you with your learning do a good job. They look at how well you do in lessons and at how you can improve further. I was pleased to see you know about 'two stars and a wish' and using the 'traffic lights' to think for yourselves about how well you are doing. You told me that you feel more confident at this school and it feels 'like a family'. It is good to see you supporting children in Tanzania too. I did notice the calm and friendly atmosphere at the school which helps you to learn. You told me that you feel safe and know that you can talk to the staff if you have any worries. I was impressed by your swimming and have asked the school to see if you can receive some awards for your achievements. I enjoyed watching your early rehearsals of 'Peter Pan' and wish you a successful performance.

Your school needs to do a few things to make it even better. It needs to send some finance information to a local authority and also write a plan of how the school will improve your access to learning. I am also asking the school to develop your writing skills further, especially when you study topics, to invite visitors from the community into school and to make more use of information and communication technology (ICT). I also suggest that the school works with you and your parents and carers to ensure that all of you get to school on time – so you can really play your part in improving this aspect.

I enjoyed meeting you and wish you every success for the future.

Yours sincerely

Greg Sorrell
Lead inspector