



Downsend School, Leatherhead Lodge

Independent School

**Better
education
and care**

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number 936/6435
Unique Reference Number 125405
Inspection number 296800
Inspection dates 23-24 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mrs Jane Wotherspoon 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).

Age group 2-6	Published 16 February 2007	Reference no. 296800
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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

Downsend School, Leatherhead Lodge is a pre-preparatory school for boys and girls aged between two and six years. Originally called The Rowans, and founded in 1952, it became part of the Downsend group of schools located in the Leatherhead area in 1988. It is now owned by Cognita. The school is registered with Ofsted's Early Years Directorate to provide an extended day during term time and care for children under three. This provision was inspected in 2006 together with the provision for three and four-year-olds in receipt of nursery funding. There are 132 pupils on roll, of whom 50 attend part time.

The school aims to *'create a rich, colourful and stimulating environment where a child can experience success and develop a love of learning'*.

Evaluation of the school

Downsend School, Leatherhead Lodge gives pupils a good quality education. A broad range of interesting activities, taught well, enable pupils to make good progress, particularly in basic literacy and numeracy skills. Provision for pupils' personal development is strong, and encourages positive attitudes to learning that will stand them in good stead for their future. The school meets most regulations for independent schools.

Quality of education

The good curriculum is enriched effectively by French, a good number of after school clubs, and a wide range of visits and visitors. These add much to pupils' interest and enjoyment of learning. The linguistic and mathematical areas of learning are especially strong and lead to pupils achieving high standards in reading, writing and mathematics. Pupils are also articulate and confident speakers for their age. At present, pupils have limited opportunities to use computers and the school has rightly identified the need to increase resources for information and communication technology (ICT).

A good amount of time devoted to physical activities helps pupils to learn about being healthy. Activities for personal, social and health education are integrated effectively into termly themes. They are a strong aspect of the Foundation

Stage (Kindergarten and Transition) classes that contribute much to pupils' personal development. The activities for these classes are soundly based on curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage although the Kindergarten classes do not make enough use of opportunities for continuous outdoor play. Such opportunities are restricted for Transition classes by their location in the first floor classrooms.

Teaching is mostly good and ensures that pupils make good progress to reach high standards by the time they leave the school. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and pupils benefit from teaching by subject specialists in French, dance, drama, music and swimming. Good teaching of phonics and word-building strategies through Transition and Y1 classes is helping to produce confident readers and writers. Classrooms are pleasant, purposeful places for learning, underpinned by warm relationships which promote positive attitudes. High expectations of behaviour are set and met. Pupils work hard. Teachers know their pupils well and the small size of class means that they are able to respond quickly, and often intuitively, to their individual needs. In most cases, support staff are not just an 'extra pair of hands' but make a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Occasionally, they could be better deployed in whole-class sessions.

The school is currently working to improve systems for assessment and teachers are trialling different ways of recording what pupils know, understand, and can do. In the best examples, this information is used effectively to vary planned activities and to challenge all pupils at an appropriate level. Weekly and daily planning is detailed in Transition and Year 1 classes but more general in Kindergarten where systems for assessment and record-keeping are more limited. Here, staff make few observations of pupils and so miss opportunities to capture key moments in their learning to build on in the future. Information passed on from year to year is not always in a format that makes it useful for the next teacher.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The school places a high priority on pupils' personal development and provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Daily assemblies reinforce positive messages about relationships and responsibilities as well as celebrating pupils' achievements to boost their self-esteem. Assemblies celebrate major world festivals and so pupils begin to learn about the wider world. Their cultural development is supported effectively through art, music, and visits to places of interest.

Pupils' social and moral development are especially strong. The large display in the hall reminds pupils of what they agreed at the start of the year. 'This year

we are going to try to be....helpful, kind, happy, smiley, polite'. Pupils themselves suggested these positive qualities as important and, on the evidence of the inspection, they are succeeding in living up to them. Despite their young age they are very aware of the needs of their friends and willingly help one another, although there is scope to develop opportunities to take on responsibilities in school. They are learning to widen their understanding of the needs of others through charity appeals, the collection of food for the homeless and singing to the elderly. Pupils know that there have to be rules so that everyone can play safely and fairly and they have helped to devise these. Their behaviour is outstanding. Pupils enjoy excellent relationships with their teachers and with other pupils, to whom they are kind. Their good attendance exemplifies their love of school and very positive attitudes to learning. As one five-year-old told inspectors, *'I like everything here'*.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

Overall, procedures for ensuring pupils welfare, health and safety are satisfactory. Although many aspects of practice are good, such as the many risk assessments carried out on all parts of the building, activities, events and visits, the school does not comply fully with regulations. First aid cover is good and all accidents are recorded thoroughly. All staff have had basic training in child protection but the headteacher, as the designated adult with responsibility for safeguarding pupils, has not had refresher training for this important role. Attendance registers are not taken promptly at the start of the day in compliance with regulations.

Consistently good supervision and management of pupils allied with high expectations of their behaviour lead to an orderly, safe environment for learning. Policies emphasise a positive approach to behaviour management and even minor misdemeanours are rare. Pupils are confident that children are kind to each other, but they know how to seek help from adults to sort out any problems, if necessary. They learn how to keep themselves safe through their talks from the police and road safety officer. Pupils have a good level of awareness of how to stay healthy from their work on 'people who help us' which brings them into contact with members of the health services. Healthy eating is encouraged at snack times and pupils get plenty of regular exercise.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

All staff have been checked with the Criminal Records Bureau to ensure their suitability to work with children. The school follows thorough recruitment procedures to undertake a range of checks on staff before their appointment is confirmed.

School's premises and accommodation

The premises are suitable with a good outdoor space, both hard and grass, that is well equipped with toys and climbing equipment. Classrooms in the main house, spread over three floors, are compact but well organised to maximise the available space. The three small kindergarten rooms are adequate for the number of pupils but pose a challenge for staff to organise equipment for all areas of learning. The hall, used for daily assembly, physical education, dance and drama activities, a library and a room for French, enhance the provision. There are plans to develop an ICT suite. However, there is no designated facility for pupils who may be ill during the day. The buildings are well maintained and decorated; interesting displays of pupils' work reinforce high expectations and celebrate their efforts.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Parents and prospective parents get a good deal of information about the school. The colourful prospectus for the Downsend group is supplemented effectively with a helpful information pack specifically about Leatherhead Lodge. The parents' handbook, provided when their children start school, gives plenty of practical information on the curriculum and guidance on helping their children. Weekly newsletters update parents on what their children are learning and events in the life of the school. End-of-year reports are generally well written, tell parents about the progress their children are making, and give some measure of how they could improve.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's written procedures for handling complaints meet regulations fully.

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:

- comply fully with guidance to safeguard and promote the welfare of children by ensuring that the member of staff designated to take responsibility for child protection issues has up to date training for this role (paragraph 3(2)(b)).
- maintain attendance registers in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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 in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l)).

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:

- strengthen assessment systems and develop existing good practice to ensure a consistent and coherent approach from year to year so that information can be shared and used effectively in planning the next steps in pupils' learning
- improve provision for ICT so that pupils have greater opportunity to develop their skills.

School details

Name of school	Downsend School, Leatherhead Lodge		
DfES number	936/6435		
Unique reference number	125405		
Type of school	Nursery/Pre-preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1952		
Age range of pupils	2-6		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 42	Girls: 40	Total: 82
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 29	Girls: 21	Total: 50
Annual fees (day pupils)	£1,830 - £7,170		
Address of school	Downsend School, Leatherhead Lodge 13 Epsom Road Leatherhead Surrey KT22 8ST		
Telephone number	01372 372123		
Fax number	01372 376574		
Email address	leatherheadlodge@downsend.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Gill Brooks		
Proprietor	Cognita Group of Schools		
Reporting inspector	Mrs Jane Wotherspoon HMI		
Dates of inspection	23-24 January 2007		