

Bryony School

Independent School

Inspection report

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| DfES Registration Number | 887/6001 |
| Unique Reference Number | 118979 |
| Inspection number | 307201 |
| Inspection dates | 27-28 March 2007 |
| Reporting inspector | Greg Sorrell AI |

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

Bryony School was founded in 1949 and first registered as a school in 1956. It is based on two sites approximately two miles apart located in Rainham, Kent. The Marshall Road accommodation is an extensively extended former family home in a residential area and provides education for Nursery aged children and pupils in Reception and Key Stage 1 classes. The Meresborough Road site is set in a rural location and accommodates Key Stage 2 pupils in what was a country farmhouse, some parts of which date back to the eighteenth century. The school is non-selective. There are 195 pupils aged between 2 and 11 years. Boys slightly outnumber girls. There are 40 children who have funded Nursery places. The school strives to create a friendly nurturing environment where each child is seen as an individual. There are 14 classes with up to 17 pupils in a class. The aim is to give pupils a sound education and enable them to gain entry to a number of local grammar schools.

Evaluation of the school

Bryony is a good school. It provides a good quality education where the pupils progress well in their learning as a result of effective teaching. The pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good and their behaviour is outstanding. The majority of parents have very positive views of what the school provides for their children. The attention given to the pupils' welfare health and safety is satisfactory, overall. The school does not meet all the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. The curriculum is good and is effective in meeting the school's aims. There is a strong focus on examination preparation for Year 6 pupils in order to secure places in local grammar schools: last year 100% of pupils passed selection tests to enter local grammar schools. The curriculum enables pupils to make good progress, particularly in English, mathematics and science, where most reach levels which are beyond the expectation for their age. An appropriate emphasis is given to encouraging pupils' independence and social skills throughout their time at the school. The programme for Nursery and Reception classes

addresses all the required areas of learning. Good attention is given to enabling the young learners to make choices within well planned lessons. The curriculum for older pupils is informed by the National Curriculum and enriched by the study of French.

The shortcomings highlighted at the time of the last Early Years inspection, relating to planning, monitoring and assessment have been dealt with satisfactorily.

Curriculum planning is good in English, mathematics and science. The resources for these subjects are good as they are for information and communication technology (ICT), although the lack of regular internet access for pupils other than in Year 6 is a weakness. Personal, social and health education is addressed satisfactorily through topics in science.

There is a limited amount of time afforded to physical exercise and sport in the school day and beyond. A small number of parents expressed concerns about the lack of physical activity. Competitive sport is occasionally promoted within the school house system but not with other schools. The school has satisfactory links with the community, including visitors, which promote awareness and participation in their local community. Pupils take advantage of the narrow range of lunch-time club activities and music tuition whenever offered. One third of parents who returned questionnaires indicated unhappiness with the range of trips and visits organised.

The quality of teaching is good overall and it enables the pupils to make good progress. More often than not, teachers are working in their area of particular expertise and this contributes significantly to the above average levels which pupils often reach. The good progress across all areas of learning required in Nursery and Reception years is underpinned by teachers' secure understanding of how young children learn. In the juniors, the positive benefits of teachers' specialist knowledge in, for example, English, mathematics and art, contribute to driving pupils' enthusiasm and to the high levels of attainment evident in those areas of work. In most lessons, the content is pitched at the right level, in the light of pupils' ages and abilities. Where teaching is particularly effective, there is a high level of challenge, ensuring that pupils are fully engaged by and focused on their work. Pupils with special educational needs receive good support from staff with experience and expertise.

Parents give the teachers strong support and they are pleased with the progress their children make and how happy they are to attend. Additional comments included, 'The teachers are fantastic!' 'I particularly like the way all teachers are genuinely concerned in my child's progress.'

The marking of pupils' work is satisfactory. However, the quality varies. Occasionally, there are few diagnostic comments to help pupils to understand what they need to do to recognise their strengths and identify areas for improvement. Some of this information is communicated orally within lessons, given the small numbers of pupils in most classes. Staff's informal, personal knowledge of pupils is strong. In some

subjects, for example English, the quality of teaching in Key Stage 2 is strengthened by team-teaching and strong guidance from the subject leader. In most subjects there is little communication between teachers on the two sites which reduces the extent to which they can share good practice.

The assessment of pupils' progress is satisfactory. Pupils undertake a series of standardised tests and national tests at the end of Years 2 and 6. In the Nursery and Reception, the quality of assessment is a strength. Elsewhere there is less emphasis on recording individuals' progress or identified needs on an on-going basis. The management of the school does not always make the best use of the data it already has, to identify either current needs of individuals or to measure the impact of current teaching.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are good. Their social development is excellent and one result of this is that their behaviour is outstanding. Pupils are keen to come to school and their attendance is good. Pupils are very courteous and enthusiastic in their response to visitors. The relationships in class and across the school are a significant strength and pupils feel confident and secure in offering their opinions. They are articulate and are encouraged to express their views. This is a particular strength in the Nursery and Reception classes where considerable emphasis is placed on the development of good oral communication. Pupils are eager learners and their well developed skills in literacy and numeracy are successfully underpinning their future economic well-being. Pupils show sensitivity to the needs of others and they work well together. The small class sizes contribute significantly to their self-confidence and sense of their own worth. However, pupils' views are not collected formally and there is no school council. Pupils do have good opportunities to contribute to the school community through a range of posts of responsibility, which is a strong feature in Year 2. They have a satisfactory level of contact with the wider community through links with local churches and helping the elderly, together with the various charitable activities in which the school is involved. Pupils' cultural development is satisfactory. Their understanding and appreciation of multi-cultural dimensions is the best promoted aspect as a result of the attention given to other faiths in religious education in particular.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is satisfactory. The small numbers in each class and the regard for individuals means that the pupils receive good levels of attention and supervision from staff. The school has gained a healthy schools award from the local authority.

However, the school lacks a small number of relevant policies and the implementation of existing policy is inconsistent. The proprietors are in the process of reviewing their policies and procedures. At present, some do not meet requirements. Though there is one nominated person for child protection matters for the Key Stage 1 site. Another has yet to be appointed for the upper school where relevant training has yet to be completed. The school's policies for the promotion of good behaviour and administering first aid are satisfactory.

The supervision of pupils in school is appropriate and trips out of school are supported by a recently written policy. Attention to fire safety is good and checks on portable electrical equipment were completed recently. Nevertheless, procedures for health and safety are inconsistently implemented and are not closely monitored. Registers of attendance are maintained regularly although the school's computerised admissions register does not include all the required information. The school has yet to draw up an appropriate plan to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school has suitably qualified and experienced teachers and assistants. The school ensures that appointments are confirmed only after thorough checks of adults' suitability to work with children. The school takes up references on all the people it employs and confirms their identity and professional qualifications. However, the school does not check candidates' medical fitness prior to confirming their appointment.

School's premises and accommodation

Both school buildings are adequate. However, there are some shortcomings in the accommodation and a small number of parents have concerns about the quality of this. The teaching areas on both sites are located on two floors and comprise classrooms and ICT suites. The Meresborough Road site also has a small hall for indoor activities and assemblies. Bryony's administration is located at the Marshall Road site.

The rooms on both sites are of varying size and are typically close to the minimum recommended area per pupil in each class. Teachers make good use of this space in most classrooms. The number of toilets for pupils is inadequate on both sites and current arrangements for boys and girls are unsuitable at Meresborough Road. In addition, there are no suitable facilities on this site for older pupils who fall ill during the school day.

The outdoor play areas are adequate for safe play and are also well used to support physical education and games lessons. Good use is made of the local community facilities for swimming.

The premises are generally well maintained, although some exterior woodwork and glazing requires attention. The proprietors have identified the need to refurbish and decorate some parts of the upper school accommodation. A small number of health and safety issues were brought to the attention of the proprietors.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The prospectus is brief and contains limited information about the school's curriculum and ethos. There are a considerable number of omissions of information parents, carers and others require, as listed at the end of this report. A new prospectus is in preparation with the intention of supplying all necessary information and the school website is in an advanced state of development.

The school provides three reports per year on pupils' progress. These are of a satisfactory quality containing very brief comments alongside grades for effort and attainment. Occasionally, test scores are included but with no explanatory guidance for readers. Similarly, there is no space for parental feedback or pupils' comment about their progress or future targets. These reports are supplemented by open evenings to discuss individual pupils.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures for handling complaints are inadequate and have largely been based on informal meetings with parents with no official records being kept. Parental responses in the questionnaire indicated a lack of awareness of the school's systems. The proprietors have recently received appropriate guidance to support the development of suitable procedures as required by the regulations.

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:

- prepare and implement written policies to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are pupils at the school in compliance with DfES guidance *Safeguarding children and safer recruitment in education* (2007) (paragraph 3(2)(b))
- have regard to the DfES guidance *Health and safety: responsibilities and powers* (DfES 0803/2001) (paragraph 3(4))
- maintain an admission register in accordance with the Education (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2006 (paragraph 3(9)).

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

- prior to the confirmation of the appointment of all staff ensure appropriate checks been carried out on their medical fitness in determining whether their appointment will be confirmed (paragraph 4(c)).

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

- ensure that all areas of the school do not compromise health or safety (paragraph 5(j))
- provide sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils, including facilities for pupils with special needs, which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k))
- provide appropriate facilities for pupils who are ill, in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (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, discipline and exclusions. (paragraph 6(2)(e))
- provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of SEN (paragraph 6(2)(f)).
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of policies relating to bullying, child protection, health and safety, the promotion of good behaviour, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request particulars of academic performance during the preceding school year, including the results of any public examinations (paragraph 6(2)(i))
- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)) and,

- ensure that parents are aware they can request the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- make the complaints procedure available on request to parents of pupils and prospective pupils (paragraph 7(b))
- ensure that the complaints procedure sets out clear timescales for the management of the complaint (paragraph 7(c))
- ensure that the complaints procedure allows for complaints to be made and considered initially on an informal basis (paragraph 7(d))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for a formal complaint to be made in writing if parents are not satisfied with the response to an informal complaint (paragraph 7(e))
- ensure that if the parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint there is provision for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f))
- ensure that where there is a panel hearing of a complaint there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school (paragraph 7(g))
- ensure that the procedure allows for parents to attend the panel hearing, and, if they wish, to be accompanied (paragraph 7(h))
- ensure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and the procedure stipulates that the complainant, proprietors and headteachers and, where relevant, the person complained about, should be given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i))
- ensure that the procedure provides for written records to be kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing (paragraph 7(j)) and,
- ensure that the procedure provides that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential. (paragraph 7(k)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

School details

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| Name of school | Bryony School | | |
| DfES number | 887/6001 | | |
| Unique reference number | 118979 | | |
| Type of school | Preparatory | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | 1949 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 2 - 11 | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 105 | Girls: 85 | Total: 190 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 2 | Girls: 3 | Total: 5 |
| Number of boarders | Boys: | Girls: | Total: |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 1 | Girls: 0 | Total: 1 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £ 3,492.00 – £3,882.00 | | |
| Address of school | Marshall Road Rainham Gillingham Kent ME8 0AJ | | |
| Telephone number | 01634 231511 | | |
| Fax number | | | |
| Email address | bryony.deempe@blueyonder.co.uk | | |
| Headteacher | Mr Edmunds | | |
| Proprietor | Mr and Mrs Edmunds | | |
| Reporting inspector | Greg Sorrell AI | | |
| Dates of inspection | 27-28 March 2007 | | |