

Orchard School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	891/6015
Unique Reference Number	122933
Inspection number	322242
Inspection dates	10–11 April 2008
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock

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 Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Orchard School is an independent day school for boys and girls between the ages of 2 to 16 years. It was established in 1984 and serves pupils from a wide area of Nottinghamshire, Yorkshire and Lincolnshire. It is registered for 215 pupils. Presently 197 pupils are on roll. No pupils speak English as an additional language or have a statement of special educational need. The nursery department, which is registered for 46 children aged 2 to 5, is located in a large Victorian house in a residential area of Retford and presently has 32 children on roll. The main school is situated five miles away, in the village of South Leverton and is based in a large period house with later additions. Grounds of over 24 acres include paved playing areas and sports fields. The school is broadly Christian in character. It aims to produce well rounded pupils who reach their personal potential in a caring, family atmosphere and who are fully equipped academically and socially, morally and spiritually, for the world of further education and work. It was last inspected in November 2003.

Evaluation of the school

This is a school in which the quality of education is good and pupils make good progress. The quality of the teaching and the curriculum is also good. The school meets its aims. Pupils are cared for well. The school has improved its provision since the last inspection, particularly in careers guidance and in its compliance with regulations, all but one of which are met.

Quality of education

The curriculum is good. This is because provision is broad and balanced in the nursery and through the school and offers a wide variety of subjects. The variety begins in the nursery where children are exposed to a range of learning experiences, including creative and practical, which promote the six areas of learning. These are often strengthened by teachers' use of children's life experiences as a catalyst for learning. The focus on language, communication, number and personal development provides a good foundation on which pupils build as they move through the school.

The school follows the National Curriculum guidelines. The curriculum policy sets out clear objectives for learning, which are supported by long and medium term planning and by schemes of work. Although learning activities are always recorded, the

schemes for only a few subjects include details of assessments and of how teachers will monitor and evaluate the impact of learning in order to inform future planning. Literacy and numeracy are the major focus throughout the school, with good coverage of other subjects enabling pupils to add to their linguistic, scientific, creative and aesthetic experiences. Younger pupils enjoy 'choosing time', which allows them to revisit and refine their skills in their favourite learning areas. All pupils have discrete weekly lessons in information and communication technology, with opportunities in other subjects to practise their skills. A number of subjects are introduced at different stages, such as statistics which adds to pupils' mathematical skills. Provision of language teaching is good. Physical education (PE) lessons and extra-curricular sports activities encourage good fitness levels. The school wishes to increase the number of activities for younger pupils although enhancement activities, such as trips abroad, are in place. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is in place for older students, broadening their range of activities.

The provision for pupils with learning difficulties is good because their individual learning needs are identified promptly and are catered for by specific support and sometimes by withdrawal from mainstream classes. The school supports those pupils with particular gifts and talents with appropriate learning opportunities.

A strong aspect of the curriculum is personal and social education, which manifests itself in differing forms as pupils move through the school and which contributes well to their all-round development. The school has improved its provision for careers guidance since the last inspection, with a well thought out programme in place from Years 9 to 11. It maintains links with sixth form tutors in the areas where students live, in order to facilitate a smooth transition to A-level studies.

There is a good mix of practical and creative learning as pupils move through the school, including in option choices. From the youngest age to the end of Year 11, expressive arts and drama lessons offer pupils many opportunities to develop skills, discover their talents and become more confident in their own abilities. However, the school is presently unable to offer vocational subjects in Years 10 and 11 because of a lack of specialist expertise. It does not have links with local colleges to overcome this weakness.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good overall and encourages pupils' good progress. Test results and GCSE examinations show above average attainment in all subjects at the end of Year 11. This is testimony to the good teaching through the school. There are, however, a small number of lessons in which teaching is not challenging enough for all ability levels. Pupils speak of their enjoyment of subjects where they can learn for themselves and be involved in lessons. This includes learning in the nursery, which is lively and offers children a good balance of teacher-directed learning and learning through play. From the time that they start school, children are encouraged and supported well so that they quickly gain confidence and enjoy learning. Small teaching groups enable pupils to be given one-to-one advice, which operates very well, for example, in mathematics. Teachers make the purpose of learning clear by regularly reminding pupils of the lesson objectives. In the best

lessons, sharp questioning encourages pupils' progress and their critical thinking skills. Resources are satisfactory. They are good in the nursery where there is a wide variety. The school is looking to provide more interactive whiteboards to aid learning.

Regular testing and assessments, including the use of past national examination papers ensure that teachers know the standards at which pupils are working. Pupils are beginning to assess their own work and that of their peers. The use of targets to promote progress is developing well. Marking is variable in its effectiveness. It is sometimes cursory and does not often inform pupils of their achievements or how to make further progress. In a Year 11 English lesson, however, it offered specific guidance on how students could improve the quality of their work.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils are reflective and show a genuine concern for the well-being of others. This is demonstrated in their readiness to organise fund-raising activities for a wide range of local, national and international charities, as diverse as those for the local homeless and sponsoring children in Gambia. Pupils show good levels of respect to staff and each other and have a good awareness of Britain as a culturally diverse society. They learn about the law and public institutions as they move through the school.

Pupils enjoy school and attendance rates and behaviour are good. They are consistently polite and courteous. Discussions with them indicate that bullying is not an issue at the school and they are adamant that should it occur it would be dealt with swiftly and sensitively. Pupils are more than willing to make positive contributions to the school community through the school council and carrying out various tasks and responsibilities such as older pupils listening to younger ones read or running clubs. Although opportunities for pupils to develop as independent learners are not always capitalised on, and many pupils would appreciate greater involvement in school decision making, there is little doubt that the skills and qualities pupils acquire during their time at the school equip them well for their future lives.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. Careful attention is given to ensuring that they are well cared for and the well-being of pupils is given a high priority by staff. Appropriate child protection procedures are in place and staff are suitably trained. The school complies with its duties under the Disability Discrimination Act (2002).

The school has appropriate strategies and policies in place to manage pupils' behaviour and to ensure that bullying is not a frequent occurrence. Pupils are well aware of the sanctions that are imposed for anti-social or racist behaviour. These procedures play an important role in helping pupils to feel safe and secure in school. Health and safety assessments are frequently carried out, including for off-site visits.

Pupils have a good understanding of how to manage risks in their lives and what is needed to follow a healthy lifestyle. This is helped by the emphasis that the curriculum places on PE, the importance and impact of regular exercise and pupils' growing understanding of a healthy diet.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school meets the requirements. All necessary checks are carried out on new staff to confirm their suitability to work with children. The required information is collated in a single central register.

School's premises and accommodation

The school provides a safe and healthy working and playing environment. Attractive displays enhance the accommodation. Specialist rooms such as those for drama, music, design and technology and a computer suite meet pupils' learning needs although the music room is a little on the small size. Although there are ample books in classrooms, the school does not have a designated library. Work is nearing completion on the laying of tennis courts to add to sports provision.

The nursery is appropriately maintained and although the house is quite small the staff make very good use of available space in creating an attractive and stimulating learning environment. Many displays are a riot of colour and the outside space is used well to add to pupils' enjoyment of learning.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

Many parents appreciate the range of information that is made available to them about the school's work and policies and procedures. These are up-to-date and comprehensive. However, parents have not been informed that they can request information that tells them the number of complaints that were registered under the formal procedure during the previous school year.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school's procedures meet the regulations. This includes the way the school has dealt with complaints received previously. Whilst the vast majority of parents are very happy with the school's provision and care, a few parents have several concerns which are not yet resolved.

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 that listed below.

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

- ensure that parents are aware they can request details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)).

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:

- ensure that the marking of pupils' work tells them what they have achieved and how to make further progress
- make sure that schemes of work include guidance on the monitoring and evaluation of lessons, in order to inform future planning
- renew efforts to provide vocational subjects for students in years 10 and 11
- review lesson planning to ensure that all pupils are challenged well in the tasks that they are given.

School details

Name of school	Orchard School
DCSF number	891/6015
Unique reference number	122933
Type of school	All-age school
Status	Independent
Date school opened	1984
Age range of pupils	2–16 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 95 Girls: 102 Total: 197
Annual fees (day pupils)	£3,465 - £5,685
Address of school	South Leverton Retford Nottinghamshire DN22 0DJ
Telephone number	01427 880395
Fax number	01427 884707
Email address	sandramfox@hotmail.com; pc18@orchardsc.com
Headteacher	Mrs Sandra Fox
Proprietor	Mrs Sandra Fox
Reporting inspector	Lynne Blakelock
Dates of inspection	10–11 April 2008