

Bertrum House School

Independent School

DCSF Registration Number	2126351
Unique Reference Number	101079
Inspection number	329300
Inspection dates	7 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth

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.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focussed 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

Bertrum House School is an independent pre-preparatory and nursery school that provides for children aged two and a half to seven years of age. It opened in 1984. The school is situated in Balham in south west London. It is housed in two church-owned buildings, a few minutes walk apart. One of these is designated solely for the nursery and one of the two pre-reception classes. The other pre-reception class is situated in the main school on Balham High Road. There are currently 63 children who attend the early years provision part time, and 15 in Reception and 19 in Years 1 and 2 who attend the pre-preparatory department full time. The early years provision is inspected separately from the pre-preparatory school, and its last inspection in 2005 found the provision to be very good.

The school is deliberately small. It aims to inspire a love of learning in pupils by providing a full, enriching curriculum in which pupils all have equal opportunities for learning; a well trained staff, and close home-school partnerships.

Bertrum House has been led by an acting Principal since March 2007, during the absence of the substantive Principal.

Evaluation of the school

Bertrum House School is a good school. It provides good quality education for its pupils and makes good provision for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some features of pupils' personal development, such as behaviour, relationships and attitudes to work are outstanding. The school is successful in meeting its aims. It has made satisfactory progress since the last inspection and has effectively addressed the main recommendation to provide a suitable policy to safeguard pupils on educational visits. The school meets all but one of the regulations inspected.

Quality of education

The quality of education is good. Parents' comments and the inspection questionnaire returns show their appreciation of the school's positive impact on their children's personal and academic development. Typical comments are: 'An excellent school that encourages all the children to be the best they can' and '...most important, my son is extremely happy, has grown in confidence enormously and is reaching his potential.'

The curriculum is good. It provides a rich, interesting range of subjects that engages pupils, helps them acquire a good general knowledge and make good academic progress. Curriculum breadth is enhanced well by a range of supplementary subjects, including Mandarin and French. Specialists are employed to teach certain subjects such as sport, music and dance. Enrichment by visits, visitors and after-school clubs adds further interest and diversity. The school provides formal personal, social and health education (PSHE) that is combined with religious education. However, planning for the subject is scant, and does not reflect the range of activities that the school actually does in this area. Nevertheless, the curriculum is generally well planned. There is a strong emphasis on promoting pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. Subject content across the curriculum is often taken from schemes of work for older year groups and the pupils greatly enjoy the challenge.

Teaching is consistently good. Pupils are engaged by lively, interesting, humorous teaching. Staff are beginning to use the new interactive white boards effectively for class and group work. This is an improvement and pupils very much enjoy these sessions. Pupils use computers for Internet research and word processing, but use for other purposes is more limited. Lessons are well planned and the small classes enable pupils to receive a great deal of individual attention and allow staff to develop a good understanding of pupils' individual needs and skills. Teachers and teaching assistants work exceptionally well together. They continually review pupils' work 'on the spot', give praise and support, and extend pupils' thinking and understanding. However, at times, opportunities for pupils to work collaboratively, use their initiative and solve problems for themselves are limited.

Each teacher makes frequent assessments of pupils' developing skills. Individually, these show that pupils make good progress in all areas and build up their skills to a level above that expected for their age. By the end of Year 2 most pupils are fluent readers, some handwriting and presentation is outstanding, many spell difficult words such as *psychologist*, and most understand fractions and carry out simple long multiplication. However, assessment is not sufficiently standardised to provide a clear picture of each pupil's progress over their time in school, or to identify specific areas of strength and weakness. In practice, though, the staff's personal knowledge of individuals allows them to match work and groupings effectively to pupils' needs.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. The quality of provision has been maintained since the last inspection. Pupils' relationships with staff, their behaviour, and attitudes to work and each other are outstanding. They make close friends and are happy, rule-abiding and generously-spirited children who show growing self-esteem and confidence as they mature. They clearly enjoy school very much. Attendance is good, and pupils are very keen to be involved in activities such as performances, clubs and outings. The school's view that 'children generally skip into school with a smile and are eager to start the morning' is correct.

Pupils show respect for adults and one another, and demonstrate concern for others, whether it's a friend who has lost her mug, or the victims of the recent cyclone in Burma. They make a good contribution to the wider community, for example by raising funds for national and local charities. However, given their well-developed social and academic skills pupils have a limited involvement in the running and development of the school. The pupils understand right and wrong, and older pupils articulate this, for example by saying 'we always try to avoid bad actions.' Pupils' cultural development is good. The curriculum emphasises poetry, drama and dance, celebrates cultural diversity, and promotes respect of different beliefs. This contributes well to pupils' personal development.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school makes good provision for the care of its pupils and they are safeguarded by appropriate health and safety, staff recruitment and child protection practices. Appropriate risk assessments are made and these are very detailed for off-site visits. All the necessary checks are carried out before staff appointments are confirmed, and the details kept in a fully compliant central staff register. Staff will shortly receive training in emergency fire procedures. The school does not meet the regulations for fire safety in this one respect. This is because until recently, there has been no adequate system for the regular review of policies, practices and training needs. Some parents say that they do not understand the school's procedures for handling complaints.

The school promotes healthy lifestyles very effectively. Parents are asked to supply healthy lunches, and pupils may only drink water during the school day. Pupils enjoy outdoor play in the spacious grounds, and take part enthusiastically in sporting activities. Recent initiatives such as 'healthy Wednesdays' and 'walk on Wednesdays' support pupils' understanding of how to make healthy choices. The school helps pupils to stay safe. They turn readily to adults if in distress. Bullying is rare, and immediately dealt with if it occurs. The school has planned well to increase the accessibility of the school in compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act. It will be drawing up a new plan shortly to further improve access.

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 one listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety (standard 3) and must:

- ensure the school has a satisfactory level of fire safety, identified by its risk assessment under the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997, the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and by any report from the Fire Authority (paragraph 3(5)).

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:

- systematically and regularly review the school's policies, practices and training needs
- develop the PSHE curriculum
- consolidate and standardise the many assessment procedures and records to give a clearer picture of each pupil's progress over their time in school, and identify their strengths and weaknesses to inform planning.

School details

Name of school	Bertrum House School		
DCSF number	212/6351		
Unique reference number	101079		
Type of school	Pre-preparatory and nursery		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1984		
Age range of pupils	2-7		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 24	Girls: 10	Total: 34
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 32	Girls: 31	Total: 63
Annual fees	£3459-£9450		
Address of school	290 Balham High Road London SW17 7AL		
Telephone number	0208767 4051		
Fax number	0208767 4051		
Email address	bhmanager@googlemail.com		
Acting Principal	Mrs J Fletcher		
Principal	Mrs M Simon		
Proprietor	Ms Lindsay Badenoch		
Reporting inspector	Judith Charlesworth		
Dates of inspection	7 May 2008		