



Rupert House School

Standard Inspection 2011

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

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“The school meets its aim to encourage pupils to match their performance to their potential and to meet all their challenges with enthusiasm and determination”

“The welfare, health and safety of the pupils are excellent”

THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

Main findings

From the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) onwards, most pupils are successful in their learning, and their personal development is excellent. The school meets its aim to encourage pupils to match their performance to their potential and to meet all their challenges with enthusiasm and determination. Pupils make good progress towards this ambitious aim. They are given numerous opportunities to gain in confidence and, as a result, their self-esteem is high, fulfilling one of the school's main aims of 'giving pupils the confidence to fly'. They develop high standards of numeracy and literacy as they move through the school. Results in standardised testing over the last three years show that pupils' attainment is good in relation to the national average for maintained primary schools. As a result pupils make good progress and a significant number make exceptional progress over time in relation to their ability profile, which is above the national average. At the age of eleven pupils gain entrance to their choice of selective senior school both within the independent and maintained sector with some pupils gaining academic or other awards. The pupils' overall success is promoted by good teaching, by their own positive attitudes to learning, and by the well-planned curricular and extra-curricular experiences. Nearly all pupils make good progress, although some less able pupils are not sufficiently supported in teaching groups. The school has identified the need for changes to the curriculum to provide increased opportunities for creative and independent learning and communication on entry to Year 1.

The pupils' personal qualities are outstanding as is their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; these are fostered by the friendly atmosphere of the school. The high quality of pastoral care and the excellent role models set by the staff effectively promotes the ethos of a happy and caring school. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils are excellent. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility, for example the older pupils take turns as prefects and pupils are actively engaged in raising money for charity.

The ethos of the school is clearly overseen by the governors and senior management team. There were no recommendations in the previous report and the school has maintained the high standards. Close parental contact helps to foster a family atmosphere. Parents' replies to the pre-inspection questionnaires were generally favourable, with some minor criticism of the transition into Year 1; a small number of parents reported that they do not consider support for their children's learning difficulties to be sufficient, with which inspectors agreed.

“ Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary and they enjoy extremely good relationships among themselves and with the teachers and other staff. Pupils’ positive attitudes ensure that they remain very motivated to learn ”

“ The curriculum is good with some excellent features; it has been designed with thought for the needs, age and range of the pupils and with the school’s aims and ethos in mind ”

THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

The quality of the pupils’ achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills.

From the EYFS onwards, most pupils are successful in their learning, and the school is making good progress towards their ambitious aim of pupils fulfilling their potential to the full. Pupils increase their knowledge, understanding and skills during lessons and demonstrate this through the good quality of their written, creative and oral work. Their study skills, ability to handle numbers, language development, listening skills and creative understanding are good. Pupils use opportunities for investigation in science well and apply ICT in support of their studies. They work well together in lessons and take pride in presenting their work. The foundation for this all-round competence lies in the EYFS and is built on strongly throughout the school. It is supported effectively by the well-developed curriculum.

Up to 2008, pupils were entered for national tests. Their results over the two years 2007 and 2008 were excellent in relation to the national average for maintained primary schools. This level of attainment indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability. Results in standardised testing over the last three years show that pupils’ attainment is good in relation to the national average for maintained primary schools. This indicates that pupils make good progress, with a significant number making exceptional progress over time in relation to their ability profile, which is above the national average.

At the age of eleven pupils gain entrance to their choice of selective senior school both within the independent and maintained sector. Pupils have had considerable success in music, speech and drama examinations. Sporting success is well established in netball, cross country running and hockey in local competitions.

Pupils’ behaviour is exemplary and they enjoy extremely good relationships among themselves and with the teachers and other staff. Pupils’ positive attitudes ensure that they remain very motivated to learn, even on the few occasions when the teaching is not engaging them fully. Their success in academic work, sport and creative arts owes much to these attitudes, the opportunities provided by the curriculum and the quality of the teaching they receive.

“ Learning support, where needed, is given good attention ”

“ The extra-curricular programme is extensive with team games, sports and choir ”

“ Parents report that their children very much enjoy the clubs ”

The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

The curriculum is good with some excellent features; it has been designed with thought for the needs, age and range of the pupils and with the school's aims and ethos in mind. All the necessary areas of learning are included and are well resourced. All pupils, including the youngest, have some lessons with specialists. They are deployed effectively from the EYFS upwards teaching music, art and design technology, textiles, physical education (PE), French, Spanish, dance, drama and music in a way that is appropriate to pupils' ages and abilities. This enables pupils to relate well to individual subject teachers and helps prepare them for the next stage of their education. Physical education and swimming are taught in addition to games afternoons. The planned use of the outdoor environment to promote learning is used as part of the curriculum for pupils. ICT is taught from Reception. The creative arts are given a high profile. Pupils learn individual instruments with the support of specialist staff. There are regular productions throughout the year, including the summer production, the carol service at the local church and Christmas productions for the lower school. Pupils benefit from a well-developed personal, social and health education programme (PSHE) and circle times.

The curriculum is carefully planned across the age range and regular co-ordination meetings take place. The senior management have identified the need to ensure a smoother transition as pupils move into Year 1.

Learning support, where needed, is given good attention. Regular consultation meetings take place between the special education needs co-ordinator, class and subject teachers. Generally, pupils receive good support from class teachers, who follow the individual education plans drawn up by the special educational needs co-ordinator. However, as some parents felt, this support is not always consistent. Provision for pupils with a statement of educational needs and those with EAL is also good. Highly able pupils are identified and well supported.

The extra-curricular programme is extensive with team games, sports and choir. The lunchtime and after-school clubs currently include gardening, eco club, Latin, sports, games, drama, board games, yoga and dance. There are inter-team sports where the school competes against other independent and state schools in netball, hockey and football. Parents report that their children very much enjoy the clubs. Pupils' cultural education is extended by visits to local places of historical and artistic interest, and drama, art and music are combined in school productions. Pupils in the lower school concentrate on local visits, while older pupils have recently visited the Victorian Museum in Reading and Sulgrave Manor. Older pupils take part in residential visits to The Isle of Wight, Dorset and Norfolk. Pupils benefit from links with the local and wider community and they participate in many local activities. They are currently preparing a tapestry as part of the Thames Heritage Tapestry project.

“The pupils’ achievements are strongly promoted by the good quality of teaching”

“Teaching fosters the pupils’ enjoyment”

“Well-focussed questioning by teachers during lessons develops pupils’ knowledge and understanding”

The contribution of teaching

The pupils’ achievements are strongly promoted by the good quality of teaching, some of which is excellent. This promotes pupils’ progress and supports the aims of the school well. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching, and the teachers’ extensive subject knowledge ensures that the pupils are interested and engaged in lessons. Teachers are well organised and their planning shows comprehensive knowledge of the pupils’ prior attainment. Basic skills are strongly emphasised in English and mathematics from Year 1 onwards. Teaching fosters the pupils’ enjoyment. Lesson preparation is thorough and the most successful lessons include extension activities that are planned carefully to ensure that the more able pupils are sufficiently challenged. Pupils are grouped in ability sets in Years 5 and 6 for English, mathematics, science and verbal reasoning, which helps to support their individual needs.

Well-focussed questioning by teachers during lessons develops pupils’ knowledge and understanding. Their individual abilities are generally well known and their needs specifically met. However, in a number of lessons, some weaker pupils are given insufficient focused work to ensure they make appropriate progress. Teachers give regular and informative feedback to pupils who say they know how well they are doing as a result. Teachers use a wide variety of teaching methods and make effective use of interactive whiteboards and the good range of other teaching resources. ICT is being used increasingly to support teaching and learning for all pupils. Teachers manage time well, so that lessons nearly always engage and interest the enthusiastic and motivated pupils. Teachers stimulate paired and independent learning, which encourages pupils to work co-operatively.

In general, lessons meet the needs of pupils with LDD well. Planning in individual support lessons is thorough, so that effective learning is targeted accurately to the needs of the pupil. However, in class, some pupils are not given sufficient targeted support.

Marking is consistent with the school’s policy, helpful to the pupils and includes very good use of target setting in some books. The teaching is well informed by standardised assessment procedures. The school is currently changing its procedures for tracking individual pupils’ progress. Pupils’ progress is measured carefully and monitored by teachers and the senior management team. Suitable amounts and levels of homework are set regularly and contribute to pupils’ learning, achievement and progress.

“Pupils of all ages, including the children in the EYFS, have outstandingly well-developed personal qualities and are friendly and confident”

“Pupils’ moral awareness is extremely strong”

“Pupils develop excellent social skills. This is a small but sociable community where all the pupils mix well with each other and with staff. Relationships are very positive at all levels”

THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS’ PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils of all ages, including the children in the EYFS, have outstandingly well-developed personal qualities and are friendly and confident. The school is most successful in its aim to promote strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is excellent. Pupils appreciate the opportunities they have in the school, as they indicated in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire.

They develop strong spiritual awareness through the curriculum, assemblies and charity work, reflecting the school’s Christian foundation. Pupils show their capacity for personal reflection through the many opportunities they have for creative activities which enhance their spiritual awareness, both through lessons such as art, music, and drama but also through the planned use of the outdoor natural environment, moth walks, scientific activity and gardening.

Pupils’ moral awareness is extremely strong. They are encouraged to behave very well, which they do, and have made up their own set of rules, which include behaviour. The older pupils have a strong sense of responsibility with all taking turns at being prefects, head girl and house captains. The head girls take their responsibility very seriously and believe their main task is to set an example. Pupils are considerate to each other and, in response to some pupils’ concerns about behaviour in the dining room, they wrote a short play exemplifying how they would like to improve behaviour. PSHE and circle time are a valuable part of the pupils’ moral development and helps to increase their awareness of moral and ethical issues.

Pupils develop excellent social skills. This is a small but sociable community where all the pupils mix well with each other and with staff. Relationships are very positive at all levels. The four school houses and the school council help pupils to feel a valued part of the school, and they feel that their voices are heard. For example the council planned many fun activities to raise money for Comic Relief. Pupils are active in local events such as the Henley-on-Thames Youth Festival and sporting activities.

Pupils’ cultural awareness is greatly enriched through the comprehensive arts programme, where different countries are studied through art, music, dance and drama. Pupils of all faiths and cultures are welcomed and well-integrated into the school, and racial harmony is effectively promoted. Some parents come into school to share their religious practices, and festivals from around the world are celebrated regularly. Pupils have a tolerant attitude towards those from different cultural backgrounds both among their fellow pupils and through meeting visitors from other faiths. Some pupils visit the local church, a mosque, a synagogue and Gurdwara, which help them develop an understanding of world religions.

“ The pastoral care for pupils and for children in the EYFS is excellent and helps fulfil the school’s aims. An atmosphere of trust and encouragement permeates the school....staff are excellent role models ”

“ Through PSHE lessons pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and the nutritious school lunches are a social occasion ”

The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

The pastoral care for pupils and for children in the EYFS is excellent and helps fulfil the school’s aims. An atmosphere of trust and encouragement permeates the school. The strong pastoral structure provides effective support for the pupils, who are very well cared for by the staff who, in turn, are excellent role models. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils were overwhelmingly positive in response to the questions.

The school has excellent welfare, health and safety procedures. Safeguarding is thorough, with key staff trained to a high level, all staff trained appropriately and the detailed policy implemented effectively. The procedures to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying are also effective; the pupils state that bullying is rare and that any minor incidents are dealt with very quickly. The procedures for fire prevention are very thorough, with a detailed fire risk assessment undertaken, regular fire drills held, and all fire appliances checked annually. Detailed risk assessments are carried out on activities both within school and on visits and activities elsewhere; the associated health and safety policy is implemented effectively. Accidents are carefully recorded and all staff are qualified first aiders. The pupils are very well supervised throughout the day. The attendance and admission registers are maintained and kept as required. The school has devised an appropriate three-year plan to provide accessibility to the school.

Through PSHE lessons pupils are encouraged to eat healthily and the nutritious school lunches are a social occasion. The school council recently suggested more choice of food and this has been adopted with a wider range now available. Regular planned exercise and well-supervised school play times help to promote the pupils’ health and well-being effectively.

“ The quality of governance is good and the governing body provides effective oversight of the school, in line with its aims ”

“ The governors have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school’s operation on a daily basis ”

“ The governing body has clear vision and direction ”

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The quality of governance

The quality of governance is good and the governing body provides effective oversight of the school, in line with its aims; it discharges its responsibilities for educational standards, financial planning and investment in staff, accommodation and resources efficiently. It is very supportive and provides strong business expertise and a comprehensive range of skills and experience. Recent changes to the governing body have brought valuable additional experience in marketing, legal matters, educational, medical and business skills. The governors meet as one body with a separate finance committee. If needed, additional sub-committees are formed for specific purposes. The current structure is suitable and effective.

The governors have a detailed knowledge and understanding of the school’s operation on a daily basis; the chairman visits regularly and the rest of the governors visit when they are able. They are effective in exercising their monitoring role and appraise the headmistress. Governors are well informed about educational standards and pastoral matters. They are kept up to date through the termly headmistress’s report.

The governing body has clear vision and direction. It is proactive in helping the school move forward and provides appropriate challenge and stimulus for growth and improvement through the well-thought-out long-term strategic plan for the school’s future. They work closely with the headmistress, bursar and members of the senior management team. The governing body is effective in discharging their responsibilities for child protection, welfare, health and safety throughout the school. A governor is trained in safeguarding. Governors ensure that staff appointment procedures are properly followed.

“ The quality of leadership and management is excellent ”

“ The leadership is proving effective in supporting, developing and motivating staff ”

“ This is a school where all staff work together for the good of the pupils ”

The quality of leadership and management

The quality of leadership and management is excellent and there is effective liaison between the senior management team (SMT) and other staff. New initiatives and responsibilities have been embraced and staff have adapted well to changes in personnel. The senior management team is appropriately composed of the headmistress, deputy head teacher, head of EYFS, who is also head of lower school, and bursar, who all work very well together to give the school clear educational direction, and maintain excellent pastoral care for the pupils. They have devised and implemented a comprehensive three-year development plan. Monitoring of teaching and planning is carried out regularly by senior staff.

The leadership is proving effective in supporting, developing and motivating staff. The school's recruitment policy ensures safe recruitment of staff and is implemented well. New staff have good induction into the school, this is underpinned by the school appraisal systems. All staff have been checked for their suitability to work with children and the information is held on the required single central register of staff appointment. The procedures are efficient, robust and supported by diligent staff, who are trained in welfare, health and safety.

The school benefits from friendly and helpful support staff who help to ensure that the teachers are able to carry out their roles effectively. This is a school where all staff work together for the good of the pupils.

“The school has a good relationship with parents, carers and guardians”

“An impressive range of subjects and study skills...an appropriate amount of work to do and it is varied and challenging...my son skips into school every day”

“Through the Friends of Rupert House, parents have many opportunities to become involved in the life of the school”

The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

The school has a good relationship with parents, carers and guardians, who were supportive of the school through the pre-inspection questionnaire. Some made comments such as: 'An impressive range of subjects and study skills...an appropriate amount of work to do and it is varied and challenging...my son skips into school every day.' The inspection team agreed with these views.

Parents are kept well informed through the website, newsletters and informative prospectus and receive all the required information. They receive regular and informative reports on their children's work and progress and have the opportunity to meet staff at consultation evenings. Most confirmed that they felt well informed about their child's progress through these reports and meetings. However, a small number believe that communication could be improved between staff and parents when their children transfer into Year 1 and their child's specific needs could be better supported. The school has already begun to address these concerns.

Through the Friends of Rupert House, parents have many opportunities to become involved in the life of the school. Friends of Rupert House are welcoming to new parents and hold a drinks party. Class representatives are part of the Friends committee. Parents are invited to several curriculum evenings. They take part in charity fund raising and social events and attend productions, concerts and sporting fixtures.

The school handles the concerns of parents with care and follows its published procedures diligently. There have been no formal complaints since the previous inspection.

“ The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding in all areas, and the aims of the school are met exceedingly well ”

“ The curriculum is rich and diverse with opportunities for imaginative and investigative experiences ”

“ Leadership and management are outstanding ”

“ Teaching is based on excellent knowledge of how children learn and progress ”

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

The overall effectiveness of the early years provision - how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding in all areas, and the aims of the school are met exceedingly well. All children are very well supported by the staff, who create a welcoming and caring learning environment where children and families are highly valued. High expectations and a clear understanding of the uniqueness of each child, and their differing needs and abilities, explain the significant progress made by all the children in their learning and development. The planning for improvement, the self-evaluation process and the capacity for continuous development are outstanding. The setting has made excellent progress since the last Ofsted inspection and the outside area has been imaginatively developed to support learning

The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Leadership and management are outstanding. Those concerned have a clear vision and have identified priorities for improvement. All relevant policies, procedures and risk assessments meet the EYFS requirements, so that children are very well safeguarded. The teaching staff and assistants are well qualified, trained in safeguarding and staff to pupil ratios are excellent. Relationships in all areas of the department are excellent and communication with the parents is strong. All parents who were questioned were extremely happy with the provision, commenting particularly favourably about the speed with which issues were addressed and the amount of information they receive about the routines of the school, as well as their child's progress. Excellent use is made of resources for indoor and outdoor learning. They are plentiful, varied and of good quality.

The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision is outstanding. The curriculum is rich and diverse with opportunities for imaginative and investigative experiences. Planned outdoor experiences, where children are able to explore the natural environment, is of particular note and children were seen using natural materials safely and competently to build imaginative homes for animals and fairies and exploring what makes a good mud pie. There is a good balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, with planned sessions for purposeful play both inside and outdoors. Teaching is based on excellent knowledge of how children learn and progress, and it provides extremely well for a range of abilities. There are opportunities for the use of ICT on interactive whiteboards and computers in each classroom. Assessment through observation is rigorous, and the information gained is used effectively to guide planning and target next steps. The lunch menu is varied and of good quality. High expectations of good behaviour are well met, creating a calm and purposeful atmosphere, where welfare is given very high priority.

“ The outcomes for the children in the EYFS are outstanding. They make excellent progress in their learning ”

“ Many are developing excellent ICT skills ”

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

The outcomes for the children in the EYFS are outstanding. They make excellent progress in their learning with nearly all attaining the Early Learning Goals in all areas and many working beyond them. They think critically and solve problems, as well as confidently sharing their thoughts and ideas. The children are articulate and many display a high degree of maturity. They are enthusiastic learners and demonstrate well-developed concentration. They listen eagerly and respond well to instructions. They work well independently and in groups. They are aware of the need for good hygiene, healthy eating choices and physical activity to keep healthy. They know how to keep safe. Many are developing excellent ICT skills and show awareness of the wider world through their role-play and at playtime.

“ Pupils are encouraged to match their performance to their ability and to meet all the challenges they face with enthusiasm and determination ”

“ The school is most successful in its aim to promote strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, which is excellent ”

“ The outcomes for the children in the EYFS are outstanding ”

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Rupert House School is an independent day school for 228 pupils from the age of four to the age of eleven. It was founded in 1930 and occupies a large town house, with later additions, close to the centre of Henley-on-Thames. It is governed by a board of governors. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) is in purpose-built accommodation at the rear of the school. There are 50 children in Nursery and Reception, and 178 in Years 1 to 6. Both boys and girls attend up to the end of Year 2 and then girls only from the age of seven years.

The school's main aim is to offer the best in educational practice taking into consideration the requirements of each child. Pupils are encouraged to match their performance to their ability and to meet all the challenges they face with enthusiasm and determination. The school is committed to a high standard of pastoral care and to strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural values, and it regards close co-operation with parents as essential. Since its last inspection in March 2005, the accommodation has undergone improvement and new staff, including the headmistress, have been appointed.

Although pupils are admitted without academic selection, a wide range of abilities is represented; pupils' average ability is above the national average. The school has identified seventeen pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) who need additional support. The school supports a very small number of pupils with special educational needs statements and those for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Pupils reflect the ethnic mix of the local area. The majority belong to families in professional or business occupations and live within a few miles of the school.

National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

ACTION POINTS

Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

Recommendations for further improvement

The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Implement the planned improvements to the curriculum to provide increased opportunities for creative and independent learning and increase communication with all interested parties on pupils' entry to Year 1.
- Improve the support given by class teachers to the less able pupils in teaching groups.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

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