



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION
MERTON COURT SCHOOL**

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Merton Court School

Full Name of School	Merton Court School
DfE Number	303/6053
Address	Merton Court School 38 Knoll Road Sidcup Kent DA14 4QU England
Telephone Number	020 83002112
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Email Address	office@mertoncourtprep.co.uk
Head	Mr Dominic Price
Main Proprietor	Mr Christopher Price
Age Range	3 to 11
Total Number of Pupils	303
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (167 boys; 136 girls) 3-5 (EYFS): 73 5-11: 230
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Tessa Langton
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	18 Nov 2014 to 21 Nov 2014

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*, which occupies a period of four continuous days in the school. This was the first inspection by ISI. The previous Ofsted inspection was in March 2010

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended. The range of these Regulations, which replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003, can be viewed on the website www.legislation.gov.uk. Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Education (DfE) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is 'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade.** Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for pupils aged under three), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

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 one of the proprietors, 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

Mr William Ibbetson-Price

Mr Malcolm Gough

Mr Ian Raybould

Mrs Lynn Maggs-Wellings

Mrs Debbie Buckenham

Reporting Inspector

Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)

Team Inspector (Head, IAPS school)

Team Inspector (Head, ISA school)

Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Merton Court School was founded in 1899 and is a co-educational day school for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years of age. The school is set within a 17-acre site near the centre of Sidcup which includes woodland, outdoor classrooms and playing fields. It is based around its original Victorian buildings with several recent additions which provide facilities such as an indoor swimming pool and sports hall. Since the previous inspection, a classroom block has been built which, as well as providing 12 new classrooms, has released space within the original building for additional teaching rooms. The Nursery is housed within its own purpose-built suite a short walk from the main school and it has direct access to outdoor play and learning areas. The school is owned and governed by members of the family who purchased it in 1979 and who also make up the senior management team.
- 1.2 The school's ethos is 'Head, Hand, Heart' and it aims to create a strong family ethos and an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness in a caring environment where traditional values and a progressive environment meet, to give every child the best possible start in life. It seeks to provide a broad and balanced curriculum alongside a wide range of extra-curricular activities with the aim of developing confident and independent pupils who have respect for themselves and others.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school is above the national average, with over a third having well above average ability. Pupils come predominantly from business and professional families who live within a few miles of the school. The majority of the pupils are British with a range of ethnic minorities also represented, reflecting the multi-cultural population of Sidcup.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection there were 303 pupils on roll, 167 boys and 136 girls. There are 73 pupils in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). 39 pupils attend Reception full time. Pupils up to the age of 4 attend on a sessional basis. The school has identified 17 pupils with special educational needs/disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional learning support. No pupils have a statement of special educational needs or English as an additional language (EAL).
- 1.5 National Curriculum (NC) nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum equivalence are shown in the following tables.

Early Years Foundation Stage Setting

School	NC name
Early Years	Nursery
J1	Reception

Pre-preparatory and Preparatory

School	NC name
J2	Year 1
J3	Year 2
S1	Year 3
S2	Year 4
S3	Year 5
S4	Year 6

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The school successfully achieves its aims of enabling pupils to reach their potential by providing a good education with a varied and balanced curriculum within a caring environment, with a strong family ethos and an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness.
- 2.2 The quality of the pupils' achievements is good and within the EYFS, progress is excellent. All pupils have excellent attitudes towards learning. Pupils are articulate, well organised and work well, both individually and in co-operation with others. In the EYFS, children's learning is excellent and in Years 1 to 6 pupils of all abilities make good progress. Almost all pupils successfully obtain places at their first choice of senior school, mostly schools with very competitive entry requirements, with a number of pupils achieving academic awards. The broad curriculum offers pupils of all abilities good opportunities to develop skills across a range of subjects and this is supported by an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities. Since the previous inspection, systems to identify and support pupils with SEND have been improved and are now good. Able, gifted and talented pupils are identified and extension activities are provided through a variety of clubs but provision within the classroom for these pupils offers limited additional challenge. Teaching is good and uses a range of methods to maintain the pupils' interests and involvement. Assessment systems are effective and are used to track the pupils' progress and to plan lessons to meet their needs, although observational note taking within the EYFS is infrequent.
- 2.3 The spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of the pupils, including those in EYFS, is excellent. Within the caring and supportive family ethos of the school, pupils develop into confident and considerate young people who are extremely well prepared for the next stage in life, whether it be transition from Reception to Year 1 or for life in senior school. Pastoral care is excellent and ensures that all pupils flourish. Relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent and are characterised by warmth, genuine care and respect, and are in line with the school's active promotion of kindness, courtesy and consideration. Pupils are very well behaved and show consideration and courtesy to each other, staff and visitors. The school council enables all pupils to express their opinions and allows the senior pupils to have an input into the running of the school. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and recruitment procedures are robust; arrangements for health and safety are good, ensuring that pupils are safe. All staff receive training in child protection and the school has appropriate links with local agencies.
- 2.4 Governance is sound. One of the proprietors has a visible daily presence in school which ensures that good general oversight of the school is maintained, including the EYFS. However, there are no formal meetings held between those with governance responsibilities and senior leaders, written records are not kept of decisions and discussions, and policies and procedures have not been formally checked and signed off. Leadership and management are good, but also informal. Staff appraisal happens irregularly and monitoring of the standards of teaching and learning lacks rigour. Links with parents and carers are excellent.

2.(b) Action points**(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

2.5 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement.

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure governance is systematic and provides thorough oversight of all regulatory policies and procedures, including through keeping formal, written records.
2. Introduce a formal, rigorous and regular system to monitor the quality of teaching and learning across the school linked to staff appraisal and professional development.
3. Ensure that lesson planning and teaching provides appropriate and consistent challenge for more able, gifted and talented pupils.
4. Increase the frequency of observational note taking for all children across the EYFS.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning is good.
- 3.2 The school aims are well met in enabling pupils to become extremely articulate, enthusiastic and engaged learners. Children in the EYFS, including those with SEND, make excellent progress in relation to their starting points and capabilities, with the majority reaching, and often exceeding, expected levels of attainment by the end of Reception. They make especially good progress with their phonic sounds and reading and development of cursive writing. Progress in mathematics is equally good. Children hold confident conversations with adults. In the woodland learning environment, Reception children used their imagination and language skills looking out for the Gruffalo as they crept through the trees. Children have excellent listening skills. They can follow a story with keen interest and anticipate what will happen next.
- 3.3 Pupils throughout the school acquire the knowledge and understanding to become highly competent in the application of a broad range of mathematical and scientific skills, which they use confidently to carry out investigatory and experimental work. In the pupils' writing, highly developed literacy skills in speaking and listening, reading and grammatical knowledge are evident. The pupils' excellent ability to communicate coherently is evident in all curriculum areas.
- 3.4 Creativity is particularly evident in the high standard of art work on display around the school and in dance lessons. Older pupils portrayed 'attitude' in dance using both movement and facial expression highly effectively. Pupils enjoy their information and communication technology (ICT) lessons and are able to use ICT to carry out research to further their knowledge of historical study. This is often shared in whole school assemblies on topics such as the Ancient Greeks. The annual school poppy project provides an opportunity each year for individual pupils to be presented with awards by the local British Legion. Every year a number of pupils pass a variety of drama and music examinations and various sporting activities are undertaken both within and outside school with particular success being achieved in local swimming competitions.
- 3.5 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2011 to 2013. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Attainment in national tests is well above the national average for maintained primary schools. Work seen in the pupils' books and in lessons confirms this. Pupils are consistently awarded places at their first choice maintained selective or independent senior school, with a number winning scholarships every year. This level of attainment indicates that pupils make progress which is good in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Pupils with SEND make equally good progress in response to suitable support both within the classroom and elsewhere. More able pupils' progress is limited because they are not given sufficient opportunity to expand their thinking skills.
- 3.6 The pupils' attitudes to their learning are excellent and their behaviour is exemplary, both in the classroom and in all areas of school life. They work well together in pairs and groups and are able to work independently from a young age. Pupils enjoy their lessons and the opportunities to practise other skills in the wide variety of extra-curricular activities on offer. The high quality of relations they share with their

teachers and each other has a positive effect on their achievement, learning and the progress they make.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision

- 3.7 The contribution of the curriculum is good.
- 3.8 The curriculum is successful in fulfilling the school's aims. Pupils follow a broad and creative curriculum, including in the EYFS, that covers the requisite areas of learning and is suitable for all ages and abilities. Pupils and parents are appreciative of the quality of the curriculum provided. The school encourages its pupils, through the school council, to make suggestions about the curriculum and extra-curricular programme. Children in the EYFS benefit from a variety of other activities including, a woodland learning environment, swimming, music, Spanish and taster French sessions.
- 3.9 Throughout the school, priority is placed on English and mathematics, though all other areas are covered, including music, art and drama. Linguistic skills are enhanced by the provision of French and Spanish. History and geography are studied on a rotational basis throughout the years and religious education forms part of the life skills course. This is successful in enhancing children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The use of ICT across the subjects is variable. When it is well used, pupils become adept at individual research at school or at home; older pupils researched famous Tudor figures successfully in history. Throughout the school, including EYFS, there is a strong focus on reading and literacy. Phonics sessions in the EYFS promote early writing skills and particularly good progress in writing.
- 3.10 The school has responded well to the recommendation in the previous report to improve individual plans to meet the needs of pupils who may require additional guidance. Systems to identify and support pupils throughout the school with SEND are good. Their needs are identified in individual education plans which are used effectively for planning lessons. Thus they receive support both in and out of the classroom. The school has partly addressed the recommendation in the previous inspection report to increase the challenge for more able pupils by providing clubs such as Latin, chess and creative writing. A register of able, gifted and talented pupils is kept but these pupils are not always offered sufficient challenge within the classroom.
- 3.11 The academic curriculum is significantly enhanced by an excellent programme of extra-curricular clubs which provides high quality opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in a wide variety of ways. These cover artistic and technological skills, linguistic development, cultural awareness and physical pursuits. There are various dance clubs and opportunities for particular interests, such as model making, science club, needlework, chess and ICT. The range of activities offered is very wide, the number extensive and the provision well co-ordinated, ensuring that all pupils are able to improve themselves in a stimulating way outside the school day should they wish. Pupils may take part in fixtures and musical and dramatic productions on a regular basis.
- 3.12 The school arranges a significant number of trips, carefully planned to ensure good provision for each age group, to places such as national and local museums and places of local interest. The latter include regular visits to the local library, shops and the local park. There are also good quality residential trips to France and Spain

for cultural and linguistic development. Pupils in their final year embark on a leadership and challenge programme which develops a wider set of life skills to prepare them for life beyond their current school.

- 3.13 Links with the local community are especially strong, not least because of the school's long association with the area. School involvement in many local events is conspicuous, such as engagement with the local church, the local British Legion, an assisted living establishment and singing Christmas carols at the turning on of the town Christmas lights.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.14 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.15 Teaching supports the school's aims of encouraging pupils to fulfil their potential both in the classroom and elsewhere. Throughout the school, including in the EYFS, planning is thorough and takes into account the pupils' needs and interests. Within the EYFS, planning and assessment enable a child's next steps to be identified, ensuring that all children including those with SEND, are extremely well supported.
- 3.16 In the EYFS, the learning and care provided for all children enable them to enjoy every opportunity to become happy, safe and secure learners. Emphasis is placed on developing independence through the three characteristics of learning; for example, children tried to work out how to use tweezers to move pasta shapes from one box to another. Children enjoy the challenge of learning ICT skills either at the class computer or in weekly computer lessons, with guidance from additional staff for those who need further support. Teaching shows high expectations and motivates the children through an excellent range of imaginative tasks, such as using play foam to build an underwater adventure area for pirates. Children with SEND are extremely well supported and extension activities are provided for more able children, who flourish as a result.
- 3.17 Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and skilful questioning techniques encourage pupils to think and reason for themselves. In the most successful teaching, pupils make good progress because teaching is lively and motivating and engages all pupils by offering a variety of activities and approaches. Some teaching is over directed and restricts the pace of learning and the involvement of pupils. Teaching makes good use of the resources available. In particular, the use of interactive whiteboards in each classroom is highly effective.
- 3.18 Teaching creates stimulating learning environments in which pupils are encouraged to do their best. Displays throughout the school are vibrant and inspiring and include excellent artwork which helps to showcase the pupils' work and promote creativity. Pupils with SEND are supported well. Provision for the most able within teaching is limited.
- 3.19 All work is marked promptly and thoroughly. Helpful comments provide positive feedback on areas of strength but also insightful comments on how pupils might improve their work or extend their understanding further. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for identifying areas for improvement within their own work and they set themselves challenging targets. Standardised assessments in Years 1 to 5 are used to measure progress and to help identify any pupils who may benefit from additional support. In Year 6 there is a focus on preparing pupils for successful entry to senior schools and for national standardised tests. In-house assessments

are undertaken throughout the school, including in the EYFS, and the resulting data informs future planning of teaching well.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is extremely successful in meeting its aims. The school promotes positive behaviour, attitudes and values from the EYFS onwards, and celebrates the pupils' success at all levels. EYFS children readily co-operate and share and are able to make appropriate choices, for example when deciding what clothes to wear when going outside. Throughout the school pupils are appropriately confident, pleasant and well-mannered. This is clear from the articulate way in which they express themselves, both to their peers and to adults, and was frequently seen in lessons. Much high quality consideration is given by the pupils to non-material aspects of life in a wide variety of contexts. This was seen for example, in conversations the pupils had about the sacrifices made in World War One, how and why charities are selected for support by the school and in decisions made by the school council for the good of the community.
- 4.3 Pupils are appropriately mature for their ages, positive, and very well prepared to cope with the demands of life at and beyond their school. The Nursery and Reception children mix regularly together, sharing each other's playground areas and as a result Nursery pupils are well prepared for transition into Reception. They interact well with older pupils and staff further up the school. Year 1 teachers take the Reception classes for a weekly session in the summer term, ensuring they are well prepared for transition.
- 4.4 A clear appreciation of what is right and wrong is borne out by the pupils' excellent behaviour and their demonstration of moral and ethical values. Pupils discussed how the happiness of all children is important to the school and the responsibility of all with great seriousness. The very well-developed school council has a clear and widely understood purpose of serving the pupil body in relation to many issues, and includes pastoral matters such as bullying and cyber-bullying.
- 4.5 Pupils embrace responsibility and take every opportunity to contribute to the life of the school in a most productive and helpful way. They enjoy being involved in a very wide range of charitable ventures which take place throughout the year, largely decided by a sub-committee of the school council. Pupils are given many opportunities to learn to lead, such as being prefects, monitors, eco-prefects, and house captains. They take these roles very seriously and understand the need to be fair and consistent. They develop a strong ethos of caring for each other, particularly older pupils in their dealings with younger. For example, Year 6 pupils take turns to play with the EYFS children and assist them at sports day.
- 4.6 The pupils' development and awareness are greatly enhanced by a high quality personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme, embedded in life skills, a timetabled lesson which embraces religious education. The study of the world's major religions enables pupils to develop good respect and understanding of differing beliefs and practices. Festivals of other cultures are studied, such as Diwali, Ramadan and Chinese New Year, alongside high profile observance of the Christian calendar. Pupils develop awareness of political and social institutions combined with a willingness to engage, such as when Year 3 pupils wrote a letter to the Queen. The school successfully guides its pupil bodies with a view to enhancing

skills of negotiation, the understanding of democracy and the importance of representation.

- 4.7 Pupils engage in much reflection on what it takes to be positive and contributing citizens. By the time they leave the school, pupils are well prepared personally to face the challenges of the next stages of their lives.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care

- 4.8 The arrangements for pastoral care are excellent.
- 4.9 Dedicated staff are highly effective in fulfilling the school's aim to create an atmosphere of warmth and friendliness. Staff know the pupils extremely well and individual pastoral needs are effectively identified and met by the strong pastoral structure which is both caring and nurturing. In the EYFS, children settle quickly, supported by the established key person system, which ensures that all children, including those who require additional support, develop close relationships with the adults who care for them. In the parental questionnaire, parents throughout the school were unanimous in saying that their children are happy and feel safe at school.
- 4.10 Throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves are excellent. Children in the EYFS play co-operatively together and understand the importance of sharing and taking turns, for example when playing with toys. Behaviour throughout the school is consistently excellent. A small minority of pupils in the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that staff are not always fair with the distribution of rewards. However, scrutiny of records and discussions with pupils show that there is a clear behaviour policy, and that both sanctions and rewards are issued fairly.
- 4.11 School meals are well-balanced and nutritious and pupils, including those in the EYFS, are aware of the importance of healthy eating through topics covered in science and PSHE. The food sub-committee of the school council and snacks committee ensure that posters are placed at strategic points around school which help to reinforce this message. Pupils from EYFS upwards benefit from regular exercise through swimming, dance and the many games opportunities on offer. In the EYFS, children develop independent hygiene routines and understand the importance of washing hands at appropriate times. Water bottles are provided by school for the Nursery and a water station for the children to access in Reception, supplementing their own bottles brought from home.
- 4.12 School rules are well known and the code of conduct respected. Throughout the school, effective anti-bullying strategies are successfully implemented and understood by all pupils. A very small minority of pupils and parents in the questionnaire felt that bullying is not handled well by the school. Inspection evidence shows that there is very little bullying and that anti-bullying systems are effective. Pupils confirmed that, on the rare occasions when there are bullying concerns, the school deals with them immediately. Pupils also know who they can turn to if they need support and feel safe and well cared for.
- 4.13 The school has a suitable plan to improve educational access for pupils with SEND.
- 4.14 The pupils' views are actively sought through the school council, which includes every pupil in Year 6. Council members report directly to the senior leadership team which helps to ensure that they feel genuinely heard and that their ideas are acted

upon. The school council includes a number of sub-committees which cover all aspects of school life, including cyber-bullying. The road safety sub-committee successfully suggested a school crossing patrol officer which has helped to make the journey to school safer for all pupils. A suggestions box enables all pupils to put forward ideas, all of which are carefully considered and outcomes fed back to the pupils concerned.

4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.15 The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety is good.
- 4.16 The safeguarding of all pupils is given effective attention. The safeguarding policy published on the school website has not always reflected the latest regulatory changes. The school rectified this before the end of the inspection and its policy now follows published guidance. Procedures are successfully implemented and support the school's aim to promote a caring and positive environment. Pupils, including those in the EYFS, are kept safe. Child protection training for all staff is robust and reporting procedures are understood. Records related to concerns about pupils' welfare are carefully kept and designated staff, who have had appropriate specialist training, maintain good inter-agency links. Annual review by proprietors is now effective. Safer recruitment procedures for new staff are followed rigorously.
- 4.17 Effective systems are in place to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. Fire procedures are clear, regular fire drills are carried out to ensure the safety of pupils, staff and visitors, and detailed records kept. Members of staff receive appropriate fire awareness training, with specialist training for designated staff.
- 4.18 The first aid policy is clear and appropriate and staff training, including for those with paediatric qualifications, is regularly updated. The medical room has appropriate facilities for pupils who fall ill during the school day and procedures are in place to ensure the health and safety of pupils with SEND. A record of accidents is kept and the pupils' individual medical needs are well known by all staff.
- 4.19 Health and safety policy and practice is fully comprehensive and discussed by the senior leadership team twice termly but there are currently no formal, written records to confirm that health and safety concerns have been discussed or that all necessary checks have been rigorously carried out. Other records are meticulously kept but are not currently signed off by the proprietors. All staff are aware of their responsibility to inform senior staff of any hazards and they sign to acknowledge that they have read the policy documentation. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for different areas of the school, although the review process of these is not in writing or kept up to date. EYFS staff are particularly vigilant in risk assessing the woodland area immediately before a session. Off-site trips and visits are carefully assessed and appropriate measures put in place to mitigate risk.
- 4.20 The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and correctly stored for the previous three years. Appropriate efficient action is taken to follow up any pupil absences.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is sound.
- 5.2 The proprietors maintain sound oversight of all aspects of the school, including the EYFS setting, although this oversight is informal and few written records are kept. Prudent financial planning ensures considerable investment in the school, including, recently, a woodland area for the EYFS, new classroom accommodation, and interactive whiteboards throughout the school. The school is appropriately staffed and the buildings and grounds are very well maintained.
- 5.3 One of the proprietors lives on site and is in the school on a day-to-day basis. This ensures governance has very good insight into the working of the school and embodies its values, aims and ethos. This proprietor is well known to the school community and through presence in the school and interaction with the pupils, including through teaching, emphasises the family feel of the school.
- 5.4 Arrangements for health and safety are good. However, the informal nature of oversight means that the monitoring of some policies is ineffective. No arrangements exist for the appraisal of the headmaster, and there is no formal monitoring of standards in the school. Not enough attention has been given in the past to understanding fully the current legal requirements relating to safeguarding although the annual review of safeguarding and child protection arrangements is now effective. The single central register of appointments is suitably maintained, with a few minor omissions in the recording of checks corrected at the time of the inspection.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management is good.
- 5.6 Leadership and management at all levels is successful in ensuring that the school fulfils its aim of providing a caring, family environment in which pupils can thrive and achieve well. The pupils' safety and welfare and the safeguarding of pupils are at the heart of the school's aims although some aspects of monitoring in these areas are too informal.
- 5.7 Clear educational direction is provided by the leadership team. This is reflected in the excellent standards of pastoral care and of the pupils' personal development.
- 5.8 The leadership team have a clear vision for the development of the school and are effective in self-evaluation, identifying areas where the school can improve and formulating plans for this. In the EYFS regular meetings provide effective opportunities for self-evaluation enabling a clear vision for the future. The setting has demonstrated its capacity for improvement by implementing the recommendation from the previous inspection that children's writing skills should be developed and a new mathematics scheme be introduced to support number skills. Further achievements since then include the introduction in Reception of rotated activities, such as a new cooking area, which provide further challenge for the children. This demonstrates the capacity of the staff to evaluate practice and

- implement continuous improvement. Staff in the EYFS appreciate and benefit from the regular supervision meetings and informal appraisal.
- 5.9 Systems for the leadership team and subject co-ordinators to monitor teaching throughout the school are not yet robust enough to ensure regular monitoring of standards of teaching and learning or to confirm that policies are universally implemented. There are frequent informal discussions among the leadership team but there is little evidence that the outcomes of such discussions are noted down or the results of any consequent, planned actions monitored. Thus priorities identified by the leadership team, such as procedures for providing challenge to able, gifted and talented pupils, are not always achieved.
- 5.10 Throughout the school, the recruitment of staff is well managed, and procedures for checking staff prior to their appointment are secure. A small handbook gives staff basic guidance, and there is an induction process for new staff, which ensures that new appointees are well informed of school routines and safeguarding arrangements; this is informal, reflecting the family nature of the school, but includes all required elements. New appointees feel well supported by management and staff and quickly feel part of the close-knit school community. However, the absence of a formal system of staff appraisal means that professional development and training are not closely linked to identified needs. The school has highly committed and hard-working staff, who work together well for the benefit of the pupils. Teaching assistants and support staff are highly valued and make a significant contribution to the school. All staff are appropriately trained in child protection, first aid, and health & safety so that they meet the needs of the pupils whose welfare, health and safety is a priority.
- 5.11 Links with parents, carers and guardians are excellent. The overwhelming majority of parents expressed great satisfaction in the pre-inspection questionnaires with the education and support their children receive. They appreciate the emphasis which the school places on high standards of behaviour, awareness of others and the wide programme of extra-curricular activities. They feel well supported when pupils join the school through receiving comprehensive information. Parents appreciate the lengths staff go to help their children settle quickly into the school, and note that their children feel happy and safe.
- 5.12 The school places great emphasis upon developing and maintaining a constructive relationship with parents. The school's leadership promotes an accessible culture where parents feel welcome and staff visibility and accessibility are a vital feature in the success of the partnership. A few parents indicated that they are unhappy with the way in which their concerns are handled. Inspectors do not agree. The school has a suitable complaints procedure which is followed closely. Records show that the school handles any concerns with sensitivity.
- 5.13 Throughout the school, parents have many opportunities to be actively involved in the life and work of the school. For example, parents may come in and watch their children in the early morning swimming club; they are invited to class assemblies, coffee mornings, question and answer session, and plays. There is a strong parents association, which organises fundraising and social events which raise funds for charities and items for the school. Parents are also invited in to help with events such as cooking for Chinese New Year and Diwali celebrations.
- 5.14 Parents and prospective parents are very well informed about the life and work of the school through the website where the requisite policies and documents are

readily available. Regular newsletters celebrate the success of the school and its pupils' many achievements. Early in September, parents are invited in to meet the new class teacher and advice is offered as to the suitability of senior schools from year 4 upwards. Parents receive half termly letters from the headmaster, as well as regular newsletters via parent emails, containing curriculum information, news and events. The views of parents are regularly sought, for example, questionnaires are sent out when parents leave school to seek their opinions on school life.

- 5.15 A very small minority of parents felt they do not receive sufficient information about the progress of their child. From the EYFS upwards, parents are kept well informed through notice boards, email, home school diaries and reading records as well as termly reports, parents' events and coffee mornings. Reception class parents receive information about how to help and encourage their child to read. From Year 1, parents receive a full written report in the autumn and summer terms, with a form teacher's report about their child's progress in the spring term. Consultation meetings are also held termly, supported by the school's open door policy.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.