



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

SHERBORNE PREPARATORY SCHOOL INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Sherborne Preparatory School

Full Name of School	Sherborne Preparatory School		
DfE Number	835/6026		
Registered Charity Number	1071494		
Address	Sherborne Preparatory School Acreman Street Sherborne Dorset DT9 3NY		
Telephone Number	01935 812 097		
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Email Address	df@sherborneprep.org		
Headmaster	Mr Peter S Tait		
Chairman of Governors	Mr Phil Jones		
Age Range	3 to 13		
Total Number of Pupils	233		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (152 boys; 81 girls)		
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS):	16	5-11: 145
	11-13:	72	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	203	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 30
Number of Boarders	Total:	30	
	Full:	30	Weekly: 0
Head of EYFS Setting	Ms Heidi Berry		
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection dates	23 Nov 2010 to 24 Nov 2010		

PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections*. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in November 2006

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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 31st 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 Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

A specific inspection of boarding was not carried out and the report does not contain judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. Any comments on boarding arising from this inspection are in the context of the school as a whole. The existing report on boarding was produced in January 2010 by the Children's Directorate of the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and can be found at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will 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.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Sherborne Preparatory School was established in the 1860s, and moved to its present site in 1885, as a fully independent boys' day and boarding school. It is located in eleven acres of grounds and gardens on the west side of Sherborne in Dorset, close to the town centre. In 1976 girls were admitted for the first time, and the school is now fully co-educational. The pre-prep department was established in 1993, and the nursery in 2002. In 1998 the school became a charitable trust with a board of twelve governors. Since the previous inspection, academic Saturday morning school has been discontinued. In its place a programme of optional activities has been introduced which a large proportion of the pupils attend. These activities are open to the local community and also to parents.
- 1.2 At the time of the inspection there were 233 pupils on roll, 152 boys and 81 girls, of whom 16 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Fifteen pupils are funded by the Ministry of Defence or the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Thirty pupils are boarders. The school aims to foster a good work ethic, to ensure that pupils are well grounded in knowledge and skills and understand their responsibilities in the wider world and to encourage curiosity and initiative. Forty-seven pupils have been identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), and of these 32 receive specialist support at school. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. Judged by standardised tests, the ability profile of the school is above the national average. However, the range of abilities is fairly wide, with significant numbers of pupils who are below and far above average ability. Most pupils gain places at their first choice of independent senior schools.
- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. The school enjoys a rich cultural mix although the majority of pupils are from white British families. Seven pupils do not speak English as their principal language and receive support for both speaking and writing.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 The pupils' overall achievement is good. They are well educated in accordance with the school's aim to encourage pupils to see their education as a staging post to lifelong learning, discovery and achievement. When they leave the school, pupils successfully gain places in competitive entry to a range of senior schools. Many receive academic and non-academic awards. This maintains the findings of the previous inspection. They demonstrate suitable knowledge, understanding and skills in both curricular and extra-curricular activities. They speak with confidence and listen attentively in lessons. Pupils take part in productions which combine their acting and musical talents. Their skills in information and communications technology (ICT) are satisfactory. Pupils enjoy and benefit from the wide variety of optional extra-curricular activities on offer at the end of the day or on Saturday mornings. Pupils with LDD are given appropriate support and make good progress.
- 2.2 Achievement overall is above the national average, and thus, in relation to the wide range of the ability profile, pupils make good progress over time. The pupils' success is supported by the broad and balanced curriculum. This enables pupils to fulfil the aim of the school to foster the best possible work ethic. An excellent study skills programme for the older pupils operates weekly and provides guidance on how to study and prepare for examinations. Curriculum planning does not generally include the use of ICT and therefore does not encourage pupils to make use of their skills for research or presentation. The pupils benefit at an early age from the experience of learning a modern foreign language for one year. These include French, German, Spanish or Mandarin. This enables them to make informed choices at a later stage. Pupils have in recent years taken part in national finals in swimming, public speaking and athletics competitions and represent the county at cross country, rugby and cricket.
- 2.3 The quality of teaching is good overall and pupils enjoy the variety of tasks provided for them. Teachers are knowledgeable. Usually they show an awareness of the need for careful structure in lesson planning, incorporating a variety of teaching and learning styles to accommodate the wide ability range in some groups. At times, pupils' learning is restricted as lessons lack pace and rely too heavily on either one teaching style or repetitive exercises. Marking is extremely effective because it summarises achievement and points the way for pupils to improve their work. Resources are plentiful and of good quality and are used well by the teachers in lessons. Pupils from the nearby boys' senior school visit regularly after school to act as mentors for some of the prep school pupils. Pupils are competent and motivated learners who display enthusiasm and sustained concentration. They are able to work co-operatively, as when older pupils were discussing what they knew about the sun, moon and stars. Their behaviour in lessons is exemplary.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.4 The personal development of the pupils is outstanding. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Pupils are confident, considerate and responsible and relate well to others. They show high levels of self-esteem and were pleased to talk about their individual and group achievements. The pupils have a well-developed sense of the spiritual, as shown in their appreciation of readings in assembly and the writing of older pupils about their feelings on an autumn day. Pupils' moral awareness is highly developed. They understand the difference between right and wrong and are aware of the consequences of unacceptable behaviour. They respect and understand the rewards and sanctions system. Older pupils set a good example to younger ones.
- 2.5 The pupils' social development is excellent. They are thoroughly tolerant and responsible, and work and play together very well. Within the house system pupils are given responsibility for ensuring that different areas of the school are tidy. They gain an awareness of the needs of those who are less privileged, both in this country and around the world. They spoke about their efforts with pride and understanding. The pupils begin to understand democratic principles through their work with the school council as they contribute their ideas via their form representative for school improvements.
- 2.6 Pupils' cultural development is excellent. They are aware of different world religions through the religious education programme, and older pupils are given opportunities, which they value, to discuss ethical issues such as contraception and euthanasia. Pupils take an interest in and learn from the small number of pupils who come from other countries. The opportunity for pupils to study one of four different modern foreign languages heightens their awareness from a young age of cultural differences.
- 2.7 The pupils' success is strongly supported by the excellent arrangements for pastoral care. Pupils who board speak highly of the boarding experience, the friendly relationships, the facilities they are able to use and the activities provided for them. All pupils appreciate the high level of care they receive and spoke of feeling safe within the school environment. They know who to turn to if they have a problem, and how, if necessary, to make a complaint. Contact details of independent listeners are posted around the school and the effective and little-used anti-bullying policy is printed in homework diaries, along with school rules and pupil responsibilities. Weekly staff meetings provide an effective forum for ensuring that any pupils about whom there is a concern are discussed. Concerns are acted upon quickly and suitable records are kept.
- 2.8 The school's arrangements for welfare, health and safety are excellent. Great care is taken to ensure that the school environment is a safe, positive environment. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive and correct and all staff have appropriate training. Fire protection arrangements and risk assessments are correct. All checks are carried out, and fire drills are held, including at night time for boarders. The well-equipped medical facility ensures that pupils suffering from illness or injury are dealt with quickly and sympathetically. The plan to improve access for those with disabilities is up to date, outlining the improvements the school intends to make. Educational visits are meticulously planned. Admission and registration registers are accurate. A choice of good quality nutritious food is available for all pupils, who are made aware of healthy eating choices and the need for physical exercise.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.9 Governance is excellent and the school is strongly supported by its governing body. Governors provide a valuable blend of experience and expertise and have a good insight into the workings of the school supporting its aim to enter into a partnership which embraces trust, and respect. They exercise prudent financial control and in recent years have been able to add purpose-built accommodation to the original buildings. Governors ensure that the buildings, staffing and resources are of a high quality. The governors take a close interest in the daily life of the school and make visits to ensure that they are fully up to date. Governors take their legal responsibilities very seriously. They review all required policies and procedures connected with safeguarding, health and safety regularly and thoroughly. A governor has been appointed recently to take a special interest in the EYFS, and each of the regulatory standards is overseen by a nominated governor. Recruitment systems are thorough.
- 2.10 The leadership and management of the school are good overall, with some outstanding features. Pupils' excellent personal qualities are a result of the leadership. Senior managers work tirelessly to ensure that pupils are offered the best possible opportunities in line with the school's aim to discover and develop their own personalities and talents. Since the last inspection the school development plan has been reviewed, and it is now at the heart of all development, both material and educational. A number of senior managers have limited time allowances to fulfil their roles effectively and their job descriptions are too long. A system for monitoring teaching and learning more effectively is developing. The role of subject leaders is not fully effective and a programme has been developed to consider how they can be improved. New systems to track pupils' progress are in place. All policies, including safeguarding and safer recruitment are in place, up-to-date and implemented thoroughly. Governors and staff are properly appointed, and the central staff register correctly completed. Administration of the school is thorough.
- 2.11 Links with parents are outstanding. Parents are provided with all necessary information, and frequent newsletters keep them up-to-date with school activities and pupil successes. Reports are detailed; they inform parents of their children's progress and offer suggestions for improvement. The complaints policy is robust and parental concerns are dealt with promptly and correctly. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents were overwhelmingly supportive of the school and extremely satisfied with all aspects of the education it provides.

3. ACTION POINTS

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

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

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Review the job descriptions and time allowances of senior managers in all sections of the school, including the EYFS.
 2. Continue to develop the programme of monitoring and tracking of pupils' progress.
 3. Ensure that the use of ICT is included in curriculum planning.

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

4.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.1 Overall, the effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding. It fulfils the school's aims to provide a happy, safe, structured and caring environment, in which children develop a love of learning. The setting recognises the uniqueness of every child, supporting individual needs extremely well, enabling all children to make excellent progress in learning and development. This is supported by the highly effective working relationships with parents and carers. Children's welfare is given the highest priority with risk assessments carefully undertaken. The school's development plan has clear targets for the EYFS, and since the previous inspection, the outdoor learning areas have been developed further, demonstrating the setting's ability to make improvement.

4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.2 The leadership and management of the setting are good overall, with some outstanding aspects. Highly effective policies and procedures are consistently implemented across the EYFS and there is a strong commitment to equality and diversity. Parents are strongly supportive of the school and spoke warmly about the extremely caring staff and the happiness of their children. Staff are suitably qualified and deployed effectively; all adults within the EYFS have paediatric first aid training. Rigorous procedures for safeguarding children are in place and work well. The setting has good links with local agencies for training, monitoring and support services. Processes for self-evaluation are good; however, the head of the setting has insufficient time to monitor teaching and undertake staff appraisal. All the learning environments and equipment are regularly checked for safety. Resources, both in and out of doors are plentiful and used effectively to promote the children's learning.

4.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

4.3 The quality of the provision is outstanding. Staff are highly dedicated to the care and education of the children and have a thorough understanding of the EYFS framework. The learning areas, both indoors and outside, provide stimulating educational environments, and there is an excellent balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities. Curriculum planning is of a consistently high quality, enabling vibrant learning opportunities for the children. Detailed assessments for each child, including annotated photographic evidence, inform the planning and assist adults in identifying the next steps in learning. The children in both Reception and Nursery have excellent access to the outdoor areas. The high expectations of key people promote children's personal development: they are encouraged to care for one another and are taught the importance of healthy eating and of keeping safe. Good provision is made for children who are ill and for those who have special dietary needs.

4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 4.4 The outcomes for children are outstanding. Within this supportive learning environment, children are able to make very good progress overall in relation to their starting points and capabilities. Children in both the nursery and reception are extremely well-motivated, confident, independent learners, who respond to school with great enthusiasm and enjoyment. They feel safe in the setting and are keen to explore and think creatively, communicating their ideas with a high degree of self-assurance. Children in the nursery can recognise their own name and identify two-dimensional shapes, and in reception were able to add numbers to 10 and use predication skills in a weighing exercise. Children listen carefully to adults and eagerly make choices and decisions between activities. They develop very good skills in literacy, numeracy and use ICT with competence. The children's behaviour is excellent; they are well-mannered and co-operative, and respect the needs of their friends. Children enjoy their healthy meals and snacks, and they show a growing understanding of the importance of good hygiene practices and physical activity. Through circle time, role play opportunities and visitors to the setting, children's cultural understanding and knowledge of the wider world are developing well, equipping them with essential skills for the future.

Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff, with 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

Mrs Penny Horsman

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Reporting Inspector

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