



The Grove Independent School

Independent School

Inspection report

DfES Registration Number 826/6002
Unique Reference Number 110571
Inspection number 300770
Inspection dates 10–11 January 2007
Reporting inspector Mr David Rzeznik HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

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| Age group 2 - 12 | Published 05/02/2007 | Reference no. 300770 |
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Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

The Grove is an independent, non-selective day school for pupils aged from three months to thirteen years. The founder is the principal of the school. It was established in 1984 in premises just outside Milton Keynes. It first opened to children aged three years and under and was known as The Grove Nursery. The school expanded its provision to admit pupils up to thirteen years in 1989. It then relocated to its current, purpose-built accommodation in Loughton, Milton Keynes.

The school provides full- and part-time day care in its Nursery for children aged three months to three years. At the time of the inspection the youngest child on roll was nine months old. Day care provision was not inspected as it is subject to a separate inspection by a childcare inspector. The main school is divided into two phases. The pre-preparatory department accepts pupils aged three to eight, and the preparatory provision is for those aged eight to thirteen. There are currently no pupils with a statement of special educational need (SEN) although there have been some in the past. A small number of pupils are at the early stages of acquiring English as an additional language (EAL).

The Grove's vision is: *'to provide excellent education and welfare within a creative family atmosphere where each child and adult is stretched to achieve their full potential. We will enrich the human mind, body and spirit by delivering outstanding knowledge to all, alongside ideology and healthy living'*.

Evaluation of the school

The Grove is a good school with some outstanding features. Good teaching and a very rich and stimulating curriculum enable pupils to reach high standards, make good progress academically, and exceptional progress in their personal development. The specialist subject teaching is effective and is a key strength. Pupils' attitudes to learning and their behaviour are outstanding. In discussions with inspectors pupils said they were happy, safe and enjoyed school because learning was fun. Parents hold the school in high regard.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. The school aims to develop the whole child by enriching the human mind, body and spirit, and it successfully achieves this ambition. Provision results in all pupils, including those with learning difficulties, SEN and EAL, making good progress in their basic skills and exceptional progress in their personal development.

In the Foundation Stage staff plan a wide range of interesting and stimulating activities. There is a good balance between the teaching of basic skills by adults and pupils learning through free choice and independent play. Good outdoor facilities make a significant contribution to pupils' physical, creative and imaginative development. Elsewhere the curriculum is broad, balanced and meets pupils' needs well. Good attention is paid to the core skills of literacy and numeracy with a very strong emphasis placed on music, the creative arts and sport. Good links are made between subjects to make learning enjoyable and relevant. French is taught throughout the school, as well as Spanish to the oldest pupils. Very effective use is made of visiting artists who help to enable pupils to produce three-dimensional art and outdoor sculptures of the highest quality. Provision for personal, social and health education is good. An extensive range of extra-curricular activities, visits and residential trips further enriches the curriculum, and broadens pupils' horizons and widens their perspective on life.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good. In the Foundation Stage teaching is effective because staff have a good understanding of the needs of the youngest pupils and plan work successfully to meet them. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' personal and social skills alongside their language and creative skills and the activities stimulate and capture their imagination. Staff are sensitive to pupils' feelings and give good levels of encouragement and support, which moves learning forward at a good rate.

As pupils move through other years they achieve well. The specialist teaching in the preparatory department is particularly effective. The strengths in teaching include very good relationships between teachers, classroom assistants and pupils resulting in a very positive learning climate in class. Lessons are well planned and pupils clearly enjoy them. Teachers show a good command of their subject and use their specialist knowledge well to engage pupils and set challenging work. Good use is made of whiteboard computer technology to develop teaching points and capture pupils' interest. The few less effective lessons were characterised by pupils spending too much time listening to the teacher, without sufficient opportunities to apply their prior learning. On some occasions work is not properly matched to individual or group needs and classroom assistants are not sufficiently involved during the whole class teaching at the start of lessons. Teaching during form time, at the beginning of each day, is satisfactory, although time is not always used wisely. Teachers

hear individuals read and check their progress regularly. However, some of the spelling and mathematics activities lack challenge and social interactions are too unstructured.

There are good systems in place for tracking pupils' attainment. These include national assessments which determine pupils' National Curriculum level at the end of Years 2 and 6. In the Foundation Stage staff collect and record information on pupils' experiences and their progress regularly, using national guidance. The leadership recognises that the tracking of pupils' progress over time is not sharp enough in pinpointing the strengths and weaknesses in pupils' performance to plan extra support. The marking of pupils' work is regular but inconsistent. Whilst there are some examples of effective marking, it does not always indicate what pupils have done well and what they need to do to improve. Pupils are not helped enough to assess their own work and set targets for improvement.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is good and has some outstanding features. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong and their behaviour is outstanding. Their attitudes to learning are excellent, as demonstrated by their high rate of attendance and a clear sense of enjoyment in lessons. Visitors are greeted warmly and older pupils speak with great affection about the school and the interesting activities planned for them. Pupils' personal and social skills are very well developed through sport and the extensive provision for residential trips. Older pupils indicate that incidents of anti-social and racist behaviour are rare and are dealt with effectively by staff when they occur. Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of health issues and have gained considerable insight into the culture of others through religious education, music and art. Other cultures and faiths are valued and respected, thereby preparing pupils well for life in a multi-racial society. Pupils readily undertake extra responsibility by becoming class monitors or house captains. Older pupils demonstrate a level of maturity beyond their years. However, opportunities for them to develop their citizenship skills further and use initiative beyond the classroom are restricted. Pupils told inspectors that they would appreciate having a greater voice and more of a say in the decisions that affect them.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. They are encouraged to follow an active and healthy lifestyle. The wide range of sports and physical activities encourage pupils to take regular exercise and keep fit. The healthy meal options are helping pupils adopt a healthy diet. The school

has a range of well-written policies relating to health and safety, discipline and child protection and procedures are implemented effectively. The principal is the designated member of staff for child protection and she has ensured that all staff have been appropriately trained. Robust risk assessments are carried out for the building and for trips or residential visits out of school. Good provision is made for fire safety with regular fire drills and sound annual fire risk assessments. All fire appliances and portable electrical equipment are maintained appropriately by a qualified person to ensure that they are safe to use. The good staffing ratio ensures that pupils are supervised well. Pupils feel safe and say that they are free from any form of harassment or intimidation. The school has not yet drawn up a three-year plan of action to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Staff recruitment and vetting procedures are rigorous and are effectively implemented. Before staff are appointed appropriate checks are made to confirm their identity, past employment history and qualifications. All staff have been subject to a check by the Criminal Records Bureau at an enhanced level to confirm their suitability to work with children. The records held at the school comply fully with government requirements.

School's premises and accommodation

The accommodation is modern, purpose-built and of very good quality. It is well maintained, exceptionally clean and very well cared for by maintenance staff and by the pupils themselves. All of the classrooms are of an appropriate size and are well equipped. Staff have gone the extra mile when displaying pupils' work and achievements in classrooms and corridors. Some of the art work inside and outdoors is stunning.

There are specialist teaching rooms for science, information and communication technology, art and music and they are used effectively. There is a large hall, library, reception area and two offices. A suitable medical room is used to treat injuries and for those who are ill. The kitchen is kept in a hygienic condition and there are good facilities for dining and food preparation. Indoor lighting, ventilation and heating meet the regulations, but the main car park is poorly lit and is a potential hazard. The school grounds are attractive and spacious. There is a suitable mix of hard and grassed areas for play and recreation. The large play equipment is of good quality and has appropriate safety flooring beneath or surrounding it.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school prospectus and handbook provide parents and prospective parents with a wealth of useful information about the school, its philosophy and work. The details supplied meet most, but not all, of the regulations. The school does

not provide particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of SEN or for those with EAL. As there is no written complaints procedure, parents are unaware of the arrangements for managing complaints or the number of complaints registered during the preceding year. The school does not make explicit that parents may request details about the number of staff employed by the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications.

The attractive website allows pupils and parents to communicate with the school through a secure link. The termly magazine and newsletters keep everyone abreast of pupils' achievements, events and general news. The school's open door policy is welcomed by parents. It is common to see them meeting and chatting to teaching staff each morning and evening as they drop off and collect their child. The message books that go between home and school on a daily basis are an important and successful vehicle for communicating information appertaining to the child. All parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire report that they are happy with the information they receive.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has no written complaints policy, although parents feel comfortable about talking to the school about any concerns or problems they might have. This is because the school has developed effective lines of communication for dealing with complaints on the rare occasions that they occur, and by regularly seeking parents' views through surveys and consultation evenings with the leadership team.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- improve the lighting in the main car park to a satisfactory level (paragraph 5(p)).

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

- provide particulars of the educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements of SEN and for those with EAL (paragraph 6(2)(f))

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- ensure that parents and parents of prospective pupils are aware that they may request details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding year (paragraph 6(2)(j))
 - ensure that parents and parents of prospective pupils are aware that they may request details about the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of procedures for handling complaints (standard 7) and must:

- produce and implement a written complaints procedure that meets all the requirements of the regulations (paragraphs 7(a) to 7(k)).

In order to comply with the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002 the school should devise a three-year accessibility plan.

What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- improve pupils' contribution to school life by actively encouraging them to voice their views and involve them in the decisions that affect their lives
- improve the tracking of pupils' progress over time to identify strengths and weaknesses in provision and so inform intervention
- improve the consistency and quality of teaching in form time, ensuring that activities are worthwhile and suitably challenging
- improve the consistency of marking and involve pupils in target setting.

School details

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| Name of school | The Grove Independent School | | |
| DfES number | 826/6002 | | |
| Unique reference number | 110571 | | |
| Type of school | Primary and secondary with- day nursery | | |
| Status | Independent | | |
| Date school opened | 1984 | | |
| Age range of pupils | 3 months – 13 years | | |
| Gender of pupils | Mixed | | |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils) | Boys: 97 | Girls: 79 | Total: 176 |
| Number on roll (part-time pupils) | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Number of boarders | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Number of pupils who are looked after | Boys: 0 | Girls: 0 | Total: 0 |
| Annual fees (day pupils) | £9,228 | | |
| Address of school | The Grove Independent School Redland Drive Loughton Milton Keynes Buckinghamshire MK5 8HD | | |
| Telephone number | 01908 690590 | | |
| Fax number | 01908 694043 | | |
| Email address | m.jones@groveindependentschool.co.uk | | |
| Principal | Mrs Deborah Berkin | | |
| Proprietor | Mrs Deborah Berkin | | |
| Reporting inspector | Mr David Rzeznik HMI | | |
| Dates of inspection | 10-11 January 2007 | | |