

Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

The Old Rectory, Lynn Road, Stow Bardolph, Nr. King's Lynn, Norfolk PE34 3HT

Inspection dates

18–20 September 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Good
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Good
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Inadequate

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- Since the previous inspection, the proprietor has ensured that safeguarding is effective. All the independent school standards are now met.
- The new headmaster has an accurate view of the strengths and areas for improvement of the school. Leadership and management are good.
- Leaders have an effective assessment system to accurately measure pupils' achievement and help pupils succeed more or catch up. This is especially the case in English and mathematics.
- Pupils are confident and articulate, and their behaviour is good. They are happy, safe and achieve well in a calm and orderly environment. Their personal development and welfare are outstanding.
- Pupils experience a wide and varied curriculum. Consequently, they develop a love of learning and a desire to excel.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural education is a strength. Pupils develop into caring and responsible citizens.
- The quality of teaching overall is good. This is because teachers have strong subject knowledge and use questioning well to encourage pupils to think and learn well.
- Children settle quickly into Reception. They are happy, safe and have good relationships with each other and with adults.
- Pupils' progress in key stage 1 is too variable. This is especially the case in science.
- Leaders do not yet have an overall curriculum plan for how pupils develop their knowledge and understanding in a wide range of subjects.
- Although overall pupils achieve well in mathematics, younger pupils do not have sufficient opportunity to use and apply their knowledge and understanding.
- Parents are positive and confident about the work of the school.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the requirements of the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve the quality of teaching, learning and assessment through:
 - teachers using assessment information with greater precision to plan learning that allows children in the early years and pupils in key stage 1 to make better progress from their starting points
 - increasing the opportunities for pupils to work scientifically so that they deepen their skills in science
 - continuing to provide pupils with the opportunity to use and apply their mathematics skills in a wide range of ways so that they make better progress.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - checking that there is clear progression in learning for pupils as part of the curriculum plan so that pupils increase their knowledge and understanding across all subject areas
 - continuing to work with families of pupils who do not attend school as often as they should.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The leadership of the school has undergone a marked change since the previous inspection and is now good. The headmaster, who started his post in December 2017, has a clear and widely understood vision and commitment to improve pupils' outcomes. Both the proprietor and the headmaster have an accurate understanding of the school's many strengths and areas for development.
- The headmaster has wasted no time in meeting the independent school standards that were not met at the previous inspection, and the school is now fully compliant. He carefully monitors and evaluates the success of the school by reviewing the precisely written action plans. The areas for improvement highlighted in these plans are appropriate and accurate to continue moving the school forward.
- The proprietor promotes a clear vision and set of values for the education of pupils at Downham Preparatory and Montessori Nursery school. Her passion for each pupil to grow in self-confidence and personal well-being is clear. Many parents applauded the school for how it provides a family-friendly atmosphere and ethos, and how every teacher knows their children well. Pupils' personal development and welfare are outstanding.
- The headmaster regularly checks on the achievement of pupils, particularly in English and mathematics, by using an appropriate assessment system. Adults are using assessment information increasingly well in key stage 2 to help pupils make even better progress. School information and pupils' work show that pupils are often achieving at levels above that found nationally for their age by the end of Year 6. Assessment information for key stage 1 and Reception is still relatively new. Teachers are currently not using this information as precisely as they could to ensure that younger children and pupils make rapid progress from their starting points.
- All respondents to the staff questionnaire stated that they are proud to work at the school. Staff are provided with the necessary professional development required so that their skills are continually enhanced. Most staff stated that the school has continued to improve since the previous inspection. The headmaster affirms that there has been a great deal of change over this year. Most staff agree that their workload and welfare are considered when decisions are made.
- Leaders ensure that pupils have many opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. Pupils have a mature understanding of respect and tolerance. They participate in many events from raising money for charities to providing musical entertainment at a local home for the elderly. Pupils' cultural education is a strength of the school, and pupils' experience of music and art is very strong. Through whole-school productions, such as 'The Lion King', every pupil is provided with an opportunity to perform and develop their creative skills.
- The effectiveness of middle leaders is improving. Leaders for English and mathematics have a secure understanding of pupils' achievement and what needs to be done to increase pupils' progress further. For example, this year, the English leaders have changed the way that spellings are taught. Leaders are using their knowledge of assessment information to ensure that adults have high expectations of what pupils can

achieve. They also ensure the teaching of spelling is precise and in line with national expectations for their age.

- Leaders continue to review and improve the curriculum provision. Pupils are taught by specialist subject teachers from Year 1. Pupils produce strong work in a number of subjects. For example, in Spanish, pupils are writing advanced and grammatically correct sentences from a young age. In music, the compositions that pupils produce, together with their explanations, demonstrate a depth of knowledge and understanding. One pupil commented, 'We are all about education and fun.'
- Although the curriculum is generally well planned, leaders do not identify the progression of key knowledge and skills that pupils will gain in each subject area as they move through each year group. In subjects such as science at key stage 1, pupils are not receiving sufficient opportunity to practise their scientific knowledge and understanding so that they can achieve more. Equally, in subjects such as history, younger pupils do not have the same opportunity to use high-quality literacy skills as they do in English. Leaders acknowledge that in these subjects pupils' progress varies, especially for younger pupils.
- Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain, demonstrating a secure understanding of the values that underpin society. They speak confidently about respect, tolerance, rights and responsibilities. Older pupils use appropriate vocabulary and explanations when speaking about others who are different from themselves or who have protected characteristics.
- Leaders provide well for pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities and ensure that there is equality of opportunity. These pupils are often given additional responsibilities, such as school council representatives or caring for the goats, rabbits and guinea pigs on the school site. Leaders carefully check the progress that pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities make and adapt the provision to suit their needs. As a result, these pupils often achieve well both personally and academically.
- Communication with parents is positive. For example, during the inspection, the headmaster was holding an event to inform parents how assessment information is collected, analysed and used to improve the progress that pupils make. From the responses to Parent View, most parents are very happy about the work of the school and would recommend it to others.
- The headmaster has set up a parent liaison committee to ensure that parents are involved in decisions about school improvement. Minutes of meetings demonstrate that this group ask challenging questions of school leadership.

Governance

- The school is owned by a sole proprietor who is also the school's principal. There are mechanisms in place to hold school leaders to account for the quality of education. Some of these are less formal, such as the parent liaison committee.
- The proprietor and the board of directors, who have responsibility for governance, meet regularly. They ensure that the school meets the independent school standards and that finances are effectively managed.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- The headmaster and other leaders have ensured that the independent school standards, highlighted as unmet in the previous inspection, have now been met. Staff receive regular and highly effective safeguarding training that is relevant, up to date and in line with current statutory guidance.
- Leaders are appropriately trained in safer recruitment. All statutory processes and procedures for checking the suitability of staff, before they commence employment, are in place. Induction information is relevant and specific to the context of the school. As a result, staff are vigilant and know how to record concerns that they may have so that leaders can take suitable action if necessary.
- The proprietor provides suitable accommodation for the short-term care of sick and injured pupils that is near a toilet and includes washing facilities. Staff are appropriately trained in first aid, and accidents are recorded diligently.
- The temperature of all hot water taps is regularly and systematically checked to prevent the risk of scalding to pupils or staff. Inspectors found at this inspection that the checking procedures were thorough, and also found no taps that present a scalding risk.
- Risk assessments are appropriate. Leaders ensure that pupils are instructed in making positive choices around risk, for example when using online technology. Practice around the caring for animals on site is effective and pupils demonstrate a thorough understanding of the risks and how to overcome them.
- Most parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, agreed that their children were safe and well cared for at the school. One parent echoed the sentiment of many when writing, 'I leave both my children at school and nursery knowing they are safe, well and happy to be there.'

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The strengths identified at the previous inspection remain. Relationships between staff and pupils are strong. Adults create a calm place in which to learn. Lessons flow well, and pupils respond to instructions from adults promptly.
- The quality of teaching, learning and assessment, particularly in English and mathematics at key stage 2, are a strength. Teachers ask questions effectively in order to make pupils think hard and debate their answers. In pupils' books, it is evident that there are often logical teaching sequences and that pupils usually build their knowledge and understanding well.
- Pupils make good progress with their reading. This is because adults listen to pupils read and help pupils to build their skills. Adults also use the well-stocked library effectively, and pupils develop a love of reading. Many pupils can identify their favourite authors or characters in books. In class, when pupils read, they do so confidently and with appropriate expression.

- Teachers are making good use of the skills that they have acquired and sharpened following recent professional development in mathematics. They provide learning that helps pupils build their speed and fluency, especially when practising their times tables. Pupils relish the challenge that they receive in mathematics. One Year 3 pupil explained, 'My mathematics is neither too easy nor too hard, it is just right.' However, too few pupils receive as much opportunity to use and apply their mathematics in a wide range of ways so that they can make even better progress.
- Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects that they teach. Pupils experience lessons with subject specialists, where the learning is explained using interesting examples and memorable activities. For example, in a music lesson, pupils were able to compose their own musical sequence on the djembe drums. These pupils had a deep knowledge and understanding of the importance of layering sounds, and they produced work above that expected for their age.
- Work in pupils' exercise books shows that they develop their factual knowledge in subjects such as science and history well. In key stage 2, pupils are given opportunity to practise and develop their creative writing skills during history and to think scientifically in science. However, adults do not plan sufficiently well for the clear progression of knowledge and skills when pupils are in key stage 1. Consequently, pupils in this key stage do not make such strong progress in their learning.
- Adults provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities for pupils to enjoy. These range from many sporting activities to clubs for pupils who enjoy knitting. Many of the class teachers take these clubs, and they are well attended. Adults use the outside area well to teach sports, such as hockey and rugby.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding. Pupils are highly articulate, welcoming and extremely polite. Without prompting, they hold doors open and greet everyone they meet. Pupils demonstrate mature levels of respect for each other, and for adults, that often belie their age.
- In lessons, pupils debate with each other maturely and express their ideas extremely effectively. They communicate their knowledge and understanding using vocabulary specific to a particular subject accurately and with enthusiasm.
- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities are often successfully provided with additional responsibilities to develop their personal confidence and social skills. Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery is a very inclusive place where individuals are highly valued.
- Pupils are attentive and make the most of their lessons. They understand how to keep themselves safe, particularly when using online technology. Adults ensure that there are posters and clear instructions for pupils so that pupils' understanding continues to develop.
- Pupils spoken with were clear that there is no bullying at school. One pupil said that if

there was, it would be 'exterminated'. Leaders' records of behaviour incidents confirm this to be the case. Where there have been issues of poor behaviour, these are thoroughly dealt with in line with the school's policy.

- Pupils are encouraged to be caring and responsible citizens through a strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. They raise money for charities and take part in whole-school creative events, such as singing in the choir in Kings Lynn and performing in the summer performance. Pupils are proud of their school as a result.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils' conduct is exemplary. They walk around the school sensibly, and changes of lessons are very smooth. For example, young pupils in Year 1 move to different rooms for their subjects with ease. Consequently, most lessons flow without the need to stop for issues of poor behaviour.
- In less structured times, pupils continue to behave well and enjoy each other's company. At lunchtimes, the school hall is filled with pupils socialising and discussing their likes and dislikes. Supervision by adults is appropriate, and pupils enjoy the large grounds in which they can play.
- Pupils are generally diligent and work hard in lessons. On occasions, when the work is not precisely demanding enough, they contribute fewer ideas during the lesson, waiting patiently until they are provided with another activity. Their behaviour is never less than good, but adults could have higher expectations of what pupils, especially those in key stage 1, could do. Conversely, where teachers use focused learning objectives effectively, pupils' behaviour is highly positive.
- Pupils' attendance is just below that found nationally for primary schools, and it remains broadly the same as at the previous inspection. Leaders deal with issues robustly, where a pupil's attendance falls below the high expectations that leaders expect.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils achieve well in key stage 2, especially in reading. School assessment information for 2018 demonstrates that all pupils reached at least the national standard in reading, writing and mathematics.
- The headmaster has introduced an assessment system to measure the progress that all pupils make, and to compare the information gathered with that which is typical of pupils of a similar age. From the evidence seen from pupils' exercise books and in lessons, the school's assessment of pupils' achievement is accurate.
- Pupils receive more work that is precisely matched to their needs and abilities in key stage 2 than in key stage 1. Older pupils make good progress in writing and mathematics. This is because these pupils receive work that makes them think and apply their knowledge and understanding effectively.
- Pupils make good progress in spelling, grammar and handwriting. Adults have clear expectations and precise plans that ensure pupils develop their knowledge of spelling

rules effectively. A great deal of importance is placed on good-quality handwriting and presentation. Pupils rise to the challenge and their work books are well kept, demonstrating pride in their work.

- Pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities achieve well and make good progress from their starting points. Often by the end of key stage 2, these pupils are making as much progress as their peers nationally.
- School assessment evidence, supported by pupils' work in books, shows that in key stage 1 pupils are not making the rapid gains that are seen in the rest of the school. At times, the expectation of what these pupils can achieve is not sufficiently high, and the progress that pupils make is not consistent enough.
- The proportion of pupils who passed the Year 1 phonics screening check in June 2018 was broadly in line with the national average. However, inspectors found that pupils' knowledge and understanding of sounds were not as secure at the start of the year. Teachers have already identified this issue, and are ensuring that pupils catch up swiftly.

Early years provision

Good

- Children start well at school. Adults ensure that the transition from the Nursery into Reception is thoughtfully planned to meet children's individual needs. Consequently, children are happy, understand and follow the routines quickly and willingly.
- Children's starting points in Reception are broadly typical or above for their age. This year, leaders have a greater sense of the achievement of children in Reception. Accurate assessment information is in place so that leaders can measure the progress that children are making from their starting points, and to ensure that all children make the progress that they should.
- Although the school is registered to provide education from two years of age, the youngest children are educated in the Nursery, which is located on the same site. The Nursery was inspected separately at the same time as the school.
- Children behave exceptionally well in Reception. They choose their activities thoughtfully and share resources generously with each other. They are kind and respectful when they speak with children and adults alike. Relationships are very strong in the class, and children have quickly built positive friendships.
- Children have access to a large and well-resourced outside area where they can develop their physical skills. Children enjoy the climbing frame and the ball-pond area particularly.
- Adults are adept at planning learning that appeals to the interests of children and at using resources to develop children's learning further. For example, in one mathematics lesson, pupils were using apples to 'measure' their length as they lay on the ground. They counted the apples to reach the correct totals.
- Children are safe and well cared for in Reception. Children's learning journeys from the previous academic year show that children experience all the areas for learning expected in the early years.

School details

Unique reference number	121251
DfE registration number	926/6143
Inspection number	10055828

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, the purpose of which is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	2 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	101
Proprietor	Mrs E Laffeaty-Sharpe
Headteacher	Mr Mark Jefferson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,426–£9,900
Telephone number	01366 388 066
Website	www.downhamprep.co.uk
Email address	office@downhamprep.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	28–30 November 2017

Information about this school

- Since the previous inspection, there has been a change of headmaster.
- Downham Preparatory and Montessori Nursery School is a small independent school that is privately owned. It is registered with the Department for Education (DfE) to admit and educate pupils between two and 11 years. Currently, children from three months to four years are registered as part of the Nursery provision, which has a separate unique reference number. Therefore, there are no children below the age of Reception included in the early years section of this independent school report.
- Separately registered provision for three months to four years is also provided on the same site as the school. The Nursery, also named Downham Preparatory and Montessori Nursery school, was inspected at the same time as the school inspection under its unique reference number EY305661. Details about the quality of education for all children below

the age of Reception can be found in the separate early years inspection report.

- The proprietor also owns a second nursery setting, Downham Nursery School (unique reference number EY398091). The nursery settings receive separate reports to the school, and these are available on the Ofsted website.
- The DfE is aware that the school has admitted pupils above the age of registration. School leaders are in communication with the DfE to apply for a material change to their current registration agreement.

Information about this inspection

- The inspectors observed teaching for all year groups, including the Reception year and across a wide range of subjects. Some observations to determine the quality of teaching over time were carried out jointly with the headmaster. Pupils' work books were evaluated, and an inspector heard pupils reading aloud in class and in the library.
- The inspectors held a meeting with the school council and informally discussed pupils' learning and work with them in class.
- Inspectors scrutinised a wide range of documentation, which included: information about pupils' attendance and registration; pupils' achievement information; records of behaviour incidents; school self-evaluation; school improvement action plans; safeguarding and safer recruitment records and practices; the curriculum; and the monitoring of teaching, learning and assessment.
- Meetings were held with a range of leaders, including the headmaster, the proprietor, early years leadership, subject leaders and representatives from the parent liaison committee. A telephone call was held with a member of the independent committee for the school's complaints procedure.
- The quality of provision for pupils who have SEN and/or disabilities was evaluated.
- The views of 33 parents who responded to the online questionnaire, Parent View, together with their comments on the free-text service were considered. The inspector also took account of the views of 29 staff who responded to the staff questionnaire.

Inspection team

Kim Hall, lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Jason Howard

Her Majesty's Inspector

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