



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

NORTHWOOD PREPARATORY SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Northwood Preparatory School

Full Name of School	Northwood Preparatory School
DfE Number	919/6225
Registered Charity Number	312647
Address	Northwood Preparatory School Moor Farm Sandy Lodge Road Rickmansworth Hertfordshire WD3 1LW
Telephone Number	01923 825648
Fax Number	01923 835802
Email Address	office@northwoodprep.co.uk
Headmaster	Dr Trevor D Lee
Chair of Governors	Dr Oliver Bangham
Age Range	3 to 13
Total Number of Pupils	346
Gender of Pupils	Boys
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS): 68 5-13: 278
Head of EYFS Setting	Miss Karen McNerney
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection dates	16 Nov 2010 to 17 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.

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 Northwood Preparatory School was founded in Northwood, Hertfordshire in 1910. It became a charitable trust in 1955. It moved to its present location, a fifteen-acre site in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire, in 1982. The site is designated as of significant historical importance. Over the years, new buildings and conversions, in keeping with the character, have been added. One of the most recent is a theatre, which opened in 2008. The Nursery was located in Northwood from its inception in 1999 until 2008, when it moved to custom-designed premises on the site of a nearby school with which the school has close links.
- 1.2 The school has a Christian ethos, but all faiths are accepted. Its main aim is to provide a caring environment in which pupils are valued for themselves, in which each is given the opportunity of full development, and in which all concerned, pupils, staff and governors strive for excellence. Supporting aims include developing pupils' intellectual curiosity and independent learning.
- 1.3 The school is divided into three sections: the Nursery is for boys and girls aged three to four years and is on the site of a neighbouring senior independent school. No girls are on roll currently. The junior school is for boys aged four to seven (Reception class and Years 1 and 2); and the senior school is for boys aged seven to thirteen (Years 3 to 8). Currently, 346 pupils are on roll; 68 of whom are aged three to five years and in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), including twelve who attend part-time. Before- and after-school care is provided. Pupils are drawn mainly from Northwood, Rickmansworth, and the surrounding area. Approximately two-thirds of the pupils come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. At the time of the inspection, six pupils were at an early stage of learning to speak English, and were receiving support.
- 1.4 The ability profile of the school is above average. Two pupils have statements of educational needs and a further 25 are identified by the school as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).
- 1.5 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 achievements are excellent and fully meet the school's aim to strive for excellence in all areas. Extremely effective learning starts in the EYFS and continues across the school. Pupils demonstrate particularly high levels of knowledge and understanding, and express their ideas cogently. They read and write intelligently and fluently, and demonstrate a wide range of vocabulary. Well-developed numeracy skills, together with the ability to think critically and creatively, enable pupils to solve mathematical problems confidently. They demonstrate a logical approach towards investigations in science practical tasks. Pupils use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills well. Standards in the arts and physical activities are high and pupils have gained many individual and team successes in these areas.
- 2.2 Data for the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available (2005-2008) show that standards are far above the national average for maintained primary schools. Inspection evidence, including examination of work, shows that the pupils' current attainment remains excellent. The school is successful in preparing pupils for entry to their chosen schools. A high proportion of those who apply gain scholarships, academic, sporting, musical or for art, some to highly selective senior schools.
- 2.3 Progress is good overall. Data show that pupils make at least good and often exceptional progress in their acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding. Standardised measures of progress also show that progress is good relative to the average for pupils of similar ability.
- 2.4 The work ethic throughout the school is excellent and pupils are competent, enthusiastic and well-motivated learners. Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning. They listen attentively and concentrate well when working independently; they also enjoy collaborative work. They are happily engaged in their learning, enthusiastic, well motivated and well behaved. Their creativity is encouraged and their response is celebrated in colourful art displays around the school and in the musicals and dramatic productions performed in the new theatre.
- 2.5 Through the broad and vibrant curriculum and extensive range of extra curricular activities, the school successfully meets its aim for each pupil to be given the opportunity of full development. Since the previous inspection, many aspects have improved significantly, including ICT and drama. In discussion, pupils spoke with enthusiasm of their eagerly rehearsed musical drama productions, often written by school staff, staged in the magnificent theatre. The inclusion of a 'Philosophy for Children' agenda enhances learning in many subjects that require reasoning and argumentative skills.
- 2.6 Teaching is excellent overall and underpins the pupils' high achievement. Through work scrutinised, lessons observed, documentation studied and through discussion, it is clear that, as one pupil commented, typically, 'Teachers keep us on the ball and make sure we make great progress.' Most lessons showed an expert awareness of the need for careful structure, incorporating a variety of teaching and learning styles, with tasks matched precisely to the differing abilities within the group. At times, a lack of attention to the differing abilities within the class means that progress dips for a few pupils in those lessons. However, learning support policy and practice are

good so that pupils needing help with their learning outside the classroom, including those with statements of special educational needs, are enabled to make the same progress as their peers. This is also the case for those who speak English as an additional language. Regular tracking of progress in key subjects to enable quick reaction to any shortfall is developing well, but its use is not yet consistent. Other aspects of assessment and marking are well-embedded and used to help pupils improve their work.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.7 The pupils' personal development is exceptional and a major strength of the school. Their excellent spiritual and cultural development is typified in the reflective, caring, friendly and harmonious atmosphere. The Christian ethos is promoted well, yet not to the exclusion of other faiths because the school is a supportive community in which pupils learn about and show great respect for the beliefs of others. Pupils have high self-esteem and are confident in their views. In-house theatre productions, and many areas of the curriculum, enhance pupils' excellent cultural awareness. Similarly, their charitable work with a school in Uganda, and sports trips and cultural trips in Europe and beyond, for instance to Barcelona and Antigua, cement their high-quality cultural and spiritual development.
- 2.8 Pupils have an extraordinarily deep moral sense, and a mature understanding of right and wrong. Their behaviour is exemplary around the school and in most lessons. Pupils have a mature sense of the ethos of the school and what it offers them, and more importantly, what they can offer the school, in terms of their commitment and respectful attitudes.
- 2.9 Pupils speak warmly of their enjoyment of each other's company and the strong relationships between different year groups, demonstrating exceptional social development. They enjoy all the opportunities to take responsibility, and the school houses play an important role in this respect. The 'Pupils' Forum' is a vibrant group that contributes well to pupils' understanding of how society works. Pupils vote for form captains who form the Forum. Members contribute substantially to their school community, for instance, through their suggestions for enhancements to safety procedures for cars on the site. These were quickly adopted to provide two-way mirrors and additional ramps.
- 2.10 The school makes outstanding arrangements for care of the pupils. Staff have built good-humoured and supportive relationships with their pupils, providing excellent role models. Both in response to the questionnaire and in discussions pupils were clear to whom they would turn if encountering problems. 'You can talk to anyone in the years above, or form tutors, or the deputy head, or any teacher' was a representative comment in the pupils' questionnaire. 'The school has a warm feel, and the teachers are always ready to help' said others. The before- and after-school care provided for pupils meets all the requirements and provides an environment that complements the school day. This high standard of care is supported well by excellent safeguarding, welfare, health and safety policies and practices.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.11 Governance of the school is excellent. Governors have wide and appropriate expertise in educational matters as well as finance and legal aspects. They are fully aware of their responsibilities, for instance for child protection, health and safety and risk assessment, and they are well informed about the school's work through the headmaster's report and through regular contact with the school. Named governors take a key interest in particular areas such as the EYFS. Governors exercise prudent financial planning and have a clear, well-thought-out long term vision shared with all staff and parents.
- 2.12 The leadership and management of the school are excellent overall. The head fully communicates his vision for the school. As a parent commented, echoed by others, 'The school lives by its ethos, which is seen through each child present.' Middle managers have made considerable gains in their leadership skills since the last inspection. Whilst their monitoring activity has improved, promoting quality in teaching and learning, follow-up on any identified action points as a result of the monitoring is not always so well developed. Opportunities for best practice to be shared are too few for the excellent practice evident to be quickly shared. Management links between the three sections of the school are effective. Leaders and managers are engaged in discussions to determine a consistent manner in which to set subject targets and measure the pupils' progress more effectively, to ensure all pupils achieve the best possible outcomes.
- 2.13 All the required aspects to ensure that children are safeguarded, and staff are suitable, are checked and noted on a single central register. A comprehensive range of policies is regularly reviewed. The school is located in a spacious rural setting in excellent, attractive buildings that are well decorated and maintained. A programme of steady development has resulted in excellent facilities for many areas of the curriculum, for instance for ICT, drama and reading. The library includes an excellent learning resources centre that supports pupils' learning extremely well. Eye-catching displays throughout the school show pupils' achievements in many subjects.
- 2.14 Links with parents are excellent. In their responses to the parental questionnaire, parents expressed a high level of satisfaction with the school, in particular with the curriculum and standards of behaviour and attitudes. Whilst nine out of every ten parents who responded to the questionnaire felt highly satisfied with all aspects of the school, a very small number of parents felt they do not receive enough information about their child's progress. Inspectors found that parents are provided with comprehensive information about the school and about their child's progress. School reports are regular and of high quality and regular opportunities are scheduled for parents to discuss their child's progress. There have been no occasions to invoke the comprehensive complaints policy in recent years.

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. Enhance the effectiveness of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning by increasing middle leaders' involvement, promptly following up action points and sharing best practice, and by implementing a unified system to track and set targets for the pupils' progress.
 2. Improve informal links and activity sharing between the Nursery and Reception classes.

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 The EYFS is outstanding overall and the school successfully meets its aim of striving for excellence. Staff know each child's individual needs and promote a caring environment where pastoral and academic development are nurtured. Boys make excellent progress in their learning and development. Safeguarding procedures are rigorous and the careful attention to children's welfare is supported by close engagement with parents. Staff continuously and effectively evaluate their provision and identify targets for improvement. Since the last inspection, improvements have included stronger home/school links through the introduction of the 'key person' role, and the promotion of outdoor learning.

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

4.2 High aspirations and ambitious vision are evident in the outstanding leadership and management. Staff work as a strong team, continuously evaluating their practice. Training is frequent and staff embrace new initiatives enthusiastically. The robust implementation of policies and ongoing risk assessment ensure that children are safeguarded well. Dedicated and suitably qualified staff make excellent use of resources and strongly influence outcomes. The process for planning and recording of progress for individuals is thorough. A strong commitment to equality ensures that children are provided for according to their needs, and discrimination is not present. Parents are very happy with the education provided; the school works very well with its parents and with external bodies.

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

4.3 Provision is outstanding. Assessment through observation is rigorous and guides next steps of learning. Teaching is inspirational and innovative and children are highly motivated. A particular strength of the setting is the implementation of a 'philosophy for children' programme which successfully encourages the boys to be independent thinkers and learners. Staff provide children with a welcoming indoor and outdoor learning environment, together with a balance of stimulating adult-led and child-initiated experiences throughout each area of learning. Key persons make use of their own specific expertise well and are continuously developing their role as a link with parents. Additional learning needs are effectively identified and catered for. Children are prepared for a seamless transition between classes but there is little opportunity at present for Nursery and Reception to link informally and share activities together. Good health and well-being are emphasised. The behaviour policy is well implemented.

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

- 4.4 Outcomes for children in the EYFS are outstanding. Boys make significant progress in relation to their starting points and begin to develop excellent skills for the future. They are inquisitive and enthusiastic learners. They persevere with activities and begin to make choices and decisions. They love books and show a sense of responsibility when handling them. In group work they learn to listen and take turns and know that they need to respect the opinions of others. Nursery children learn to make predictions and use language such as full and empty. Reception children know their sounds and can read more complex words. They can write simple sentences. They speak confidently and articulately and develop reasoning skills. Children are well behaved and polite. They demonstrate understanding of the need to eat healthily, maintain good hygiene and be safe. They begin to have a sensitive understanding of how people live in different countries, for example the children in Uganda. Their understanding of the wider world is clearly demonstrated through their play and activities.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors/the proprietor/a governors' representative/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 Ruth McFarlane	Reporting Inspector
Mr Ian Wood	Former Headmaster, IAPS school
Mrs Bridget Forrest	Early Years Lead Inspector
Mrs Susan Cookson	Early Years Team Inspector (Former Headmistress, GSA school)