



**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**BERKHAMSTED PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

**INTERIM INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Berkhamsted Preparatory School

The senior school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School/College	<b>Berkhamsted Preparatory School</b>		
DCSF Number	<b>919/6005</b>		
EYFS Number	<b>EY 239850</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>311056</b>		
Address	<b>Berkhamsted Preparatory School Kings Road Berkhamsted Hertfordshire HP43YP</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01442 358201</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01442 358203</b>		
Email Address	<b>prepadmin@berkhamstedschool.org</b>		
Head	<b>Mr A Taylor</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr P J Williamson</b>		
Age Range	<b>3 to 11</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>424</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Mixed (212 boys; 212 girls;)</b>		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	5-11:	<b>357</b>
	3-5 (EYFS):	67	11-18:
Number of Day Pupils	<b>424</b>		Capacity for flexi-boarding:
Number of Boarders	Total:	<b>0</b>	
	Full:		Weekly:
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs M Hall</b>		
EYFS Gender	<b>Mixed</b>		
Inspection Dates	<b>10<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Nov 2009</b>		

## 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 totally 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 January/February 2006.

The 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 2003 as subsequently amended with effect from January 2005, May 2007 and February 2009. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) The quality of education provided (Curriculum)
- (b) The quality of education provided (Teaching)
- (c) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) The welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) The premises and accommodation
- (g) The provision of information
- (h) The manner in which complaints are to be handled

Legislation additional to the welfare, health and safety Standard 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 31<sup>st</sup> 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 does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Berkhamsted Preparatory School is an independent day school for boys and girls from ages three to eleven. The Prep School opened as a co-educational junior school in September 1998, created from the merger of Berkhamsted Boys' Prep and The Beeches Girls' Junior School. The overall management of the school is under the principal of Berkhamsted School and the two schools have the same governing body. The present principal took up his post in September, 2008. The purpose-built accommodation is situated opposite the girls' section of the senior school on the south of the town and shares some of its facilities including the sports centre and theatre.
- 1.2 A total of 424 pupils attend the school with equal numbers of boys and girls. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) has 67 children, 59 of them attending the school part-time. The majority of pupils have parents with professional backgrounds. Most pupils come from Berkhamsted and the immediate area with some travelling from towns or villages up to twenty miles away. Entry to the school is by observed assessment for children aged seven and under and by formal examination in English and mathematics from Year 3. Transfer to the senior school is through the entrance examination. The majority of pupils move to the senior school, a small number going to local grammar schools or other independent schools. Internal school assessments indicate that the ability of the pupils is above the national average. All pupils have English as their first language and no pupils have statements of special educational needs. The school follows the National Code of Practice for special educational needs with 73 pupils identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities.
- 1.3 The school aims to develop confidence and basic skills in the younger children, to provide a good academic grounding for all pupils and to develop their potential within a happy, caring environment.
- 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 Pupils of differing abilities make steady progress as they move through the school. By Year 6 they reach high standards particularly in mathematics, English and science. Results in national tests at age eleven over the last three years for which comparative data are available are excellent when compared with the national average for maintained primary schools. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are articulate and make reasoned and cogent arguments. They enjoy learning, are interested, highly motivated, and work well both co-operatively and independently. Written work is carefully presented and organised. They have great success in a wide variety of activities from sport, music and drama to national maths challenge and poetry writing competitions.
- 2.2 High quality teaching is a contributory factor to pupils' success. Teachers are caring, supportive of the pupils and each other and hard working. They have thorough subject knowledge. In the best lessons teaching provides a constant level of challenge to pupils of all abilities, and gives pupils time to reflect on their learning. Resources, including interactive whiteboards are used constructively. A systematic method of tracking pupils' progress is carried out from Reception and information gained is used to identify differing needs. The school provides a varied curriculum although opportunities for open-ended tasks and cross-curricular learning are under developed. Information and communication technology (ICT) provision has been much improved over the last two years but is not fully embedded in subjects as a tool for learning. French has recently been introduced from Year 1. Teaching of personal, social and health education (PSHE) and drama is gradually evolving through the school. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities are given individual education plans and supported both in and out of class. An excellent range of extra-curricular activities, including sports activities on Saturday mornings are greatly appreciated by the pupils and contribute to their many successes, particularly in sport and drama.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 2.3 Pupils are happy, polite, helpful and well behaved. Their personal development is excellent. A range of opportunities enables pupils to develop personal responsibility both within the classroom and the school. The senior school chaplain makes a positive contribution to the collective worship programme and this is greatly valued by the whole school community. Pupils have the opportunity to reflect spiritually through assemblies and in PSHE or religious education (RE) lessons. They have a clear sense of what is right and wrong and express views about the school that are considered through the newly formed school forum. Opportunities for cultural development are interwoven throughout the curriculum and RE lessons enable pupils to study a range of faiths and make comparisons between different religions.
- 2.4 Pastoral care is excellent and appreciated by parents and pupils. Staff and pupils are positive role models. Efficient systems ensure that all pupils are cared for and have a positive environment in which to learn. Pupils report that there is no bullying, that they can turn to any teacher with their concerns and they feel safe. Lunches are nutritious and the choice appreciated by pupils. Arrangements for medical care are meticulous and efficient. Risk assessments, fire and health and safety checks are

made regularly. Registration procedures are thorough but the school has only just started to back up the admissions register as required. Most procedures to safeguard pupils are adequate but the central register of staff appointments is incomplete.

### **The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management**

- 2.5 The governing body is highly supportive. It has a thorough insight into the school through its system of committees and is well aware of strengths and weaknesses. A range of helpful opportunities is given to staff to become involved in the governance of the school and a designated governor provides extra support. Procedures for reviewing health and safety and child protection policies are largely successful but the monitoring of the checking of staff appointments is inadequate. Improvements to premises and resources are ensured through the governors' careful financial planning.
- 2.6 Leadership and management is highly successful in achieving its aims of helping every pupil to develop their full potential. An extremely dedicated team of senior teachers, working with all staff, promotes excellent personal development in pupils and ensures that they reach high standards in their work. A newly-formed senior development team meets regularly and is effective in planning, prioritising and implementing the curriculum and procedures. However, rigorous oversight of teaching and learning within subjects is limited. The school development plan, still in its early stages, is clear and concise. Appointments of new staff follow clear procedures but checks to ensure their suitability to work with children are not fully robust. The school has not completed the required single register of staff appointments. Parents are given helpful information about the school and their children's progress and have frequent opportunities to be involved in school life. A clear complaints policy is in place. In questionnaires completed before the inspection, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the teaching and curriculum, including extra-curricular activities provided by the school. A small minority of parents considers that too much homework is given to children and that there is insufficient support for those with learning difficulties and disabilities or for the more able. The inspection team found that pupils with additional needs were generally well provided for by the school. Premises and accommodation are well maintained and include specialist areas for teaching music, French, science, ICT and design technology. The school benefits from additional use of the senior school's extensive facilities for sport.

### **3. MAIN SCHOOL: ACTION POINTS**

#### **(a) 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 2003 as subsequently amended, with the exception of those indicated below.

Under Standard 3 (Welfare, health and safety) it must:

- back up the admissions register monthly and keep the back ups for the required time [Regulation 3.(9)];
- ensure that the required procedures for appointing staff are followed in full [Regulation 3.(2)(b)].

Under Standard 4 (The suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors) it must:

- ensure all required checks are carried out on staff and volunteers on appointment [Regulation 4.(2)(a)];
- complete the compilation of the centralised register of appointments [Regulation 4C].

#### **(b) Recommended action**

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

1. extend provision for PSHE within the curriculum;
2. increase the monitoring of teaching and learning within subject areas.

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

- 4.1 The EYFS provides care and education in two Nursery and three Reception classes, known collectively as Stepping Stones. The Nursery takes up to 33 children and Reception up to 54. There are currently 33 children on roll in the Nursery and 34 in Reception, all of whom receive funding for Nursery education at present. Two children require additional support. There are none for whom English is an additional language.
- 4.2 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is good. Some elements of its work are outstanding. Provision for children's learning and development, and for their day-to-day welfare is excellent, and children's needs are very well met, enabling all to flourish and reach their potential. Leaders and managers have a very clear understanding of how young children learn and develop. Some administrative procedures do not currently meet the requirements of the EYFS, though the school is working hard to rectify this. The setting has not been complacent since its last inspection, and continuously strives to maintain the high quality of its work. Senior staff know precisely how to develop the provision still further, and the setting has an excellent capacity for further improvement.
- 4.3 Leadership and management of the EYFS are good and enable all children to have an equal chance of success. Some aspects are outstanding. There is an exceptional sense of teamwork throughout the setting. Staff are well trained and directed, and carry out their roles competently. Procedures for safeguarding children are thorough, though records are not currently systematically kept. Self-evaluation is good, leading to appropriate priorities for development. There are very good links with parents, who appreciate the work done by the setting for their children.
- 4.4 The quality of the provision is outstanding and offers a wealth of opportunities for all areas of learning in stimulating and word-rich surroundings. Planning is creative, encouraging children to think independently. Staff know exactly when to help children with their learning, and when to let them find out for themselves, and consequently there is a very good balance of child initiated and adult led learning. Although the outside area is limited in size and not adjacent to the classrooms, staff make very imaginative use of what is available to complement indoor learning. Excellent work was seen with Reception children as they devised treasure maps, and with Nursery children as they explored the possibilities offered by giant pieces of chalk. Assessments are thorough, and are used very well to inform future planning and parents. Staff are very vigilant in their attention to children's well-being at all times, promoting safe and sensible behaviour and consideration of the needs of others. Daily procedures for care are robust.
- 4.5 Outcomes for children in the EYFS are outstanding. They are happy in their surroundings, eager to get involved in their activities and able to apply themselves wholeheartedly. From a range of starting points, they make very good progress, entering Year 1 with a range of skills well above expectations for their age. Children feel very safe, and instinctively approach known adults if they need help. Well-established welfare routines mean that children are developing a secure understanding of how to keep themselves healthy. Children co-operate with one another and share resources very readily. They have a sense of belonging to their community in Stepping Stones and the whole school. They are progressing in leaps

and bounds in their literacy, numeracy and ICT skills, as well as their social skills. As a result children leave the EYFS very well prepared for the fresh challenges of the next stage in their education.

## **5. EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE: ACTION POINTS**

### **(a) Compliance with the Early Years Foundation Stage requirements**

5.1 In order to comply with the welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school must:

- ensure that the single central register of school staff is fully in place.

### **(b) Recommended action**

5.2 The Early Years Foundation Stage setting should take the following action to improve:

1. implement plans for developing the outdoor area for the EYFS, as set out in the school development plan.

## **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 the chair of 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 Anthea Hickman	Reporting inspector
Mr Keith Morrow	Junior Team Inspector (Head, IAPS)
Mrs Jane Chesterfield	Early Years Lead Inspector