

Bowdon Preparatory School for Girls

Ashley Road, Altrincham, Cheshire, WA14 2LT

Inspection dates	11–13 March 2013	
Overall effectiveness	Good	2
Pupils' achievement	Good	2
Pupils' behaviour and personal development	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Good	2
Quality of curriculum	Good	2
Pupils' welfare, health and safety	Good	2
Leadership and management	Good	2

Summary of key findings

This school is good because

- Senior staff and the trustees have managed the merger with Culcheth Hall well to ensure that the quality of teaching is good. Teachers know a great deal about the subjects that they teach and this enthuses pupils.
- Pupils' achievement is good. They make good progress from their starting points to reach standards that are typically well above what is expected for their age.
- The good curriculum provides pupils with a well-rounded education that ensures that pupils enjoy their time at the school.
- There are good arrangements in place to provide pupils with extra support if their progress in reading falters.
- There are good arrangements to safeguard students' welfare, health and safety and pupils confirm that they feel safe. Staff take good care of pupils and pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding.

It is not yet outstanding because

- Teaching does not always challenge all pupils, particularly the most able, and teachers' marking does not always indicate how future work should be improved.
- Although senior leaders have correctly identified that there is some variability in the quality of teaching, they do not formally monitor lessons in order to guide improvement.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with half a day's notice.
- The inspectors observed 22 lessons taught by 17 different teachers, looked at pupils' work, and held meetings with the headteacher, Chair of the Trustees, staff and groups of pupils.
- The school's documentation was examined, including schemes of work, teachers' planning, records of pupils' progress and staff training records. The school's compliance with the regulations for independent schools was checked.
- The views of both pupils and parents and carers were taken into account, including 40 responses on Parent View, an online questionnaire. Responses to the Ofsted questionnaires from all the staff were scrutinised.

Inspection team

Amraz Ali, Lead inspector

Her Majesty's Inspector

Kathryn Gethin

Her Majesty's Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Bowdon Preparatory School is an independent non-selective primary day school for girls between the ages of three and 11 years of age. The school aims to 'engender a love of learning and a confident and enthusiastic approach to study'.
- The school is registered for 320 pupils and there are currently 320 girls on roll; this includes 24 children in the kindergarten that attend the school on a part-time basis. No pupils have statements of special educational needs.
- The school opened in September 1983 and was previously on two sites. In 2011, the preparatory department merged with the preparatory department of Culcheth Hall School and relocated to the current site. In 2012, the kindergarten also moved to the current site.
- The school has been granted exemption from the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Hence, these aspects were not inspected.
- The school is housed in spacious accommodation in a residential area in Altrincham.
- The school was last inspected in November 2009. Since then, the number on roll has increased by more than 100 and the size of the teaching staff has almost doubled.
- Since the last inspection the ownership of the school has changed and there is now a board of trustees.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Review the provision for the youngest children so that the learning environment and the planned activities better meet the needs of all children.
- Ensure that all teaching is at least good or better by making sure that:
 - all planned lessons challenge and extend the most-able pupils
 - marking and feedback to pupils more consistently identifies how future work can be improved, particularly in writing.
- Improve the arrangements for self-evaluation so that it includes a more formal approach to evaluating the quality of teaching and includes providing teachers with written feedback.

Inspection judgements

Pupils' achievement

Good

Pupils' achievement is good. This is as a result of the good teaching over the time that the pupils are at the school. Pupils make particularly rapid and sustained progress in reading and mathematics so that by the time they leave Year 6 their attainment is typically well above what is expected for their age. An improvement since the last inspection is that pupils are provided with more opportunities to undertake a range of writing styles including reports, biographies and arguments. However, although good overall, progress in writing is somewhat more variable across the school. Progress in the final two years of their time at the school is particularly strong and has been a factor in ensuring that all pupils do well in entrance examinations for places at selective maintained grammar schools and independent schools. Over the last five years, every pupil has successfully secured a place at the secondary school of their choice. All pupils, including those who have special educational needs, make good progress in a broad range of subjects. In addition to reading, writing and mathematics they acquire a good range of skills in physical education, art and music. For example, pupils in the choirs sing well and enjoy representing the school at festivals.

Pupils' behaviour and personal development

Outstanding

Pupils' behaviour and personal development are outstanding. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is also outstanding. Pupils have very positive attitudes to learning and thoroughly enjoy coming to school. Outstanding relationships between staff and pupils ensure that classrooms are warm and good-humoured, and that all pupils are valued as individuals. Staff are extremely caring and attentive to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils state that they feel very safe and very well care for. Attendance and punctuality are good. Pupils' behaviour is outstanding both in lessons and around the school. They are very well mannered and show kindness to each other. During their time at the school pupils develop into well-rounded individuals. They develop their confidence well. For example, in assemblies they read aloud with enthusiasm and are delighted to celebrate the achievements of others. Pupils demonstrate a high level of responsibility, such as acting as monitors or as representatives on the school council. Pupils play a productive part in the community through visits to local residential homes and by fund-raising for charities.

The programme of religious education includes the major world religions. Assemblies consider a range of issues which help to extend pupils' understanding of different faiths and cultures, and help prepare them for life in modern British society. Pupils can talk confidently and respectfully about aspects of the celebration of Hanukkah and show an understanding of the power of prayer. They understand right from wrong and make their views known about ways to improve the school environment. Elections for class representatives on the school council help them to understand about the place of democracy in Britain. They learn about aspects of British culture as well as significant institutions and services in England. For example, they mark events such as the Queen's Jubilee and Remembrance Day, as well as learning about the work of magistrates and the police force.

Quality of teaching

Good

The quality of teaching is good and enables pupils to make good progress. However, the quality of individual lessons varies from adequate to some which are outstanding. The headteacher and senior staff have identified this variability and are aware of where most improvement is required. Very good relationships between staff and pupils ensure that pupils are always respectful and polite. Teachers use their good subject knowledge well to explain subjects and to pose effective questions that check on pupils' understanding and extend their learning. A key feature of the school's success is the good staff-to-pupil ratios in lessons so that staff are able to give pupils much individual attention, which helps them to make good progress in lessons and over time.

Planned lessons typically identify tasks that are generally set at an appropriate level for most pupils in each class. Lessons are most successful where pupils are provided with extra help or the teachers' questions are pitched to challenge individuals. For example, in one English lesson, questions about different types of connectives were very carefully pitched at just at the right level for each of the pupils, which challenged all including the most able. However, in a few lessons tasks are not always planned so that all are challenged, particularly the most able, who sometimes find that they complete tasks quickly. They then have to wait for others to catch up or are given additional undemanding tasks, such as colouring in pictures. In the best lessons there is effective use of additional adults and learning proceeds at a good pace. However, in the less successful lessons there is sometimes too much teacher-talk and not enough opportunity for pupils to undertake work. While teachers mark pupils' work conscientiously, this does not always give pupils sufficiently clear feedback on how to improve, particularly in writing.

Quality of curriculum

Good

The quality of the curriculum is good. Based on the National Curriculum, it is broad and balanced and fully meets requirements. Although there is a clear focus on the development of reading, writing and mathematics, this is not at the expense of other subjects. There are particular strengths in the arrangements for teaching pupils to read and for the teaching of mathematics. The plans for the teaching of writing are good but the approach to teaching writing varies between classes. In the best examples, good support and direction is provided by encouraging pupils to plan the content of written pieces. Pupils say that they enjoy the variety of lessons that they experience, including music, science, history, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), religious education, physical education, design and technology and art. The specialist rooms for ICT, science and art make a positive contribution to the curricular experience of pupils, with many stating that they particularly enjoy practical science activities in the science room. Pupils comment that they enjoy their ICT lessons but would welcome more opportunities to use computers in other lessons. Personal, social and health education provides good opportunities for pupils to learn about the importance of healthy life styles and to comment on moral dilemmas. There is a very good range of extra-curricular activities available to pupils, such as a drama club and a rhythmic gymnastics club. This is complemented by a good range of music tuition which is available to all pupils for an additional charge. A relative weakness in the curriculum is the provision for the three-year-olds, where the learning environment and the planned activities do not always meet the needs and abilities of all children. The outdoor area is sometimes under used and is not well equipped. As a result, there is a lack of purposeful play.

Pupils' welfare, health and safety

Good

The provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good and all of the independent school standards are met. There are good staff recruitment procedures in place and all staff have been subjected to all the required checks; the information is held on the required single central register of staff appointments. The designated person responsible for safeguarding has been trained to the higher level, and all other staff to the required level. The school has devised and implemented the required range of policies, which meet the latest guidance. These include policies for child protection, anti-bullying, behaviour, and health and safety. Although risk assessments are in place and all are appropriate, there is a programme in place to comprehensively review these. Checks are regularly made on electrical appliances and procedures to prevent fire are fully implemented, including checks on fire safety equipment and regular fire practices. A suitable policy for educational visits ensures that appropriate steps are taken to keep pupils safe when they undertake visits off the school site. Pupils are well supervised on and off the school site and there are clear procedures in place for undertaking local visits or for groups to cross the road to gain access to the sports field and tennis courts. The admission and attendance registers are properly maintained and meet the regulations.

Effective policies are in place for promoting good behaviour and these are consistently applied by

staff. Discussions with pupils indicated that behaviour is typically very good and that bullying is rare but if it does occur they are confident that staff deal with it well. Pupils say they feel safe and parents and carers indicate strongly that their children are kept safe. The school works hard to promote healthy lifestyles, particularly healthy eating, and there are good opportunities to participate in sport and exercise. An improvement from the last inspection has been the introduction of a salad bar for those pupils who take school lunches.

Leadership and management

Good

The quality of leadership and management is good. The headteacher, trustees and senior team have successfully managed the merger, relocation and significant increase in pupil numbers well. A number of logistical obstacles have been overcome in order to ensure that all pupils receive a good, well-rounded education and some outstanding features have been maintained. A clear sense of team work exists amongst staff, who indicate their overwhelming support for the school. A very small number indicate that they would welcome more opportunities for professional development. There are effective arrangements for assessing and tracking the attainment and progress of pupils' reading and spelling using commercial tests. These are well used to identify early any pupils who are not making expected progress and effective arrangements are put into place to provide extra help to these pupils. However, the arrangements for carefully tracking the attainment and progress of pupils in writing are less well developed. The headteacher and senior staff know the school well. They have used largely informal arrangements to identify the school's most significant strengths and areas for improvement. Although there are some systems in place for checking on the effectiveness of the teaching workforce, such as reviewing lesson plans and scrutinising work books, the use of first-hand observations of lessons to evaluate the quality of teaching is underdeveloped as a tool for securing improvement.

The school provides parents, carers and others with all of the required information through its prospectus. The school website provides helpful information and is in the process of being updated to allow access to a wider range of information. Parents and carers receive a termly summary of their child's achievements and an end of year report. The school's procedures for handling complaints are clear and concise and meet the requirements for independent schools. The staff have ensured that the premises and accommodation are suitable and safe, and that the independent school standards are all met. The spacious accommodation and grounds represent a significant improvement and both pupils and their parents and carers talk with enthusiasm about the improved facilities.

What inspection judgements mean

School		
Grade	Judgement	Description
Grade 1	Outstanding	A school which provides an exceptional quality of education and significantly exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 2	Good	A school which provides a high quality of education that exceeds minimum requirements.
Grade 3	Adequate	A school which meets minimum requirements but needs to improve the quality of education it provides.
Grade 4	Inadequate	A school where minimum requirements are not met and/or the quality of education has serious weaknesses.

School details

Unique reference number	106377
Inspection number	409504
DfE registration number	358/6000

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, 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	Preparatory
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	3–11 years
Gender of pupils	Girls
Number of pupils on the school roll	320
Number of part time pupils	24
Proprietor	Bowdon Preparatory School Board of Trustees
Chair	Angus Whyte
Headteacher	Jane Tan
Date of previous school inspection	25 November 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5658
Telephone number	0161 928 0678
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