

# Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

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

**Inspection dates** 22–24 October 2014

<b>Overall effectiveness</b>	<b>Outstanding</b>	<b>1</b>
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Early years provision	Outstanding	1

## Summary of key findings

### This is an outstanding school

- An outstanding range of learning activities engages and motivates pupils to learn exceptionally well. Consequently their achievement is outstanding.
- The nursery provides an outstanding learning environment which develops children's skills extremely well in all areas of learning and particularly their personal development, their early mathematical understanding and reading, and their general knowledge particularly well.
- In Reception all children make rapid progress in their creative activities, letter and sounds work, in number and reading, so that the large majority exceed the early learning goals and all are very well set up for their entry to Year 1.
- Outstanding teaching is characterised by a very strong partnership between teachers and support staff because of their effective training and planning. Work and other activities are very well matched to each pupil's needs so that it is never too difficult or too easy and pupils have very well targeted support when it is needed.
- A very strong emphasis on developing the core skills of literacy and numeracy in all subjects, as well as English and mathematics, ensures that pupils progress in these skills extremely well.
- The outstanding senior leadership team have clearly defined responsibilities and a tenacious focus on improving the school even more.
- The leadership has addressed issues from its last inspection very well, creating an inviting outdoor learning area for younger children, an information technology room and ensuring that the monitoring of teaching and tracking of pupils' progress is now a strength.
- Pupils' behave very well indeed and their attendance is excellent. They demonstrate high levels and interest in and great pride in their work.
- Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is promoted very well because of the breadth of opportunities provided within subjects and in their other experiences at school.
- Pupils feel exceptionally safe and are very well supported. Parents share a very high confidence in the school's provision and safeguarding.

### 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

- The inspection was carried out at one day’s notice.
- The inspectors observed 17 lessons and made brief visits to other classrooms through learning walks. A few of these were carried out jointly with the headteacher and a deputy headteacher.
- Inspectors looked at pupils’ work in many subjects and held discussions with the headteacher and the proprietor, other staff and a range of pupils. They took account of the responses to 21 staff questionnaires. Thirty eight responses to the Ofsted online questionnaire (Parent View) were also analysed, together with two letters from parents and carers.
- A range of school documentation was examined. These included the school’s prospectus, information about pupils’ progress using the school database, the school’s own evaluation of its work, and pupils’ workbooks. Records relating to attendance, behaviour, health and safety, safeguarding and welfare were also scrutinised.

## Inspection team

Sa'ad Khaldi, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Susan Tabberer

Additional Inspector

## Full report

### Information about this school

- Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery is a small, independent preparatory school for children aged three months to 11 years of age. The school was established in 1984 and is situated in the grounds of the Old Rectory.
- There are currently 96 pupils in the main school, with 17 pupils in the reception class. Twenty one pupils attend the nursery, some part time and some full time. Eighteen of these receive state funding for part or all of their nursery education.
- The majority of pupils are of White British heritage, although a very few children do enter school in the nursery and occasionally the main school with English as an additional language. The proportion of pupils who are identified as having special educational needs and disabilities is broadly similar to other schools nationally. Currently, nineteen pupils are identified, including four early years children, seven older pupils who receive support at school action plus and two pupils who have a statement of special education needs.
- The nursery follows a broadly Montessori approach, particularly in the Early Years Foundation Stage. Primary aged pupils follow the National Curriculum. Many pupils transfer to secondary independent schools on completing their education at Downham.
- The headteacher is also the proprietor and teaches regularly in the school.
- At the time of the inspection the school was extending its learning accommodation so as to have larger classroom facilities and a specific space for the performing arts.
- The school aims to provide 'the broadest education possible'.
- The school was last inspected in March 2009.

### What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Improve teaching and pupils' achievement even further by ensuring that marking always helps pupils to improve their work and that teachers check how pupils have used their comments to do so.

## Inspection judgements

### The leadership and management are outstanding

- The proprietor has built up a highly effective team of leaders and managers who have a shared vision about the school's aims and its continuing development. Leaders have worked together tirelessly to improve the school so that there is now very high pupil attendance, outstanding achievement for pupils of all abilities because of the outstanding teaching and provision.
- A very successful focus on monitoring teaching and learning has ensured that these have improved to be outstanding. Leaders use a wide range of evidence to inform their judgements about teaching over time and carefully link teachers' professional development, training and performance management to these. Teachers are held to account very well for pupils' achievement. Consequently teaching has improved and is consistently of a very high standard.
- Although the school is small, the buildings and extensive grounds are very well managed with all relevant risk assessments and a secure boundary and provide a safe, welcoming and attractive environment for all to learn in.
- The school has improved its learning environments in response to the last inspection, creating separate outdoor learning areas for both the Reception class and the nursery. It has added an information technology room and extended the range of its environmental and physical education (PE) activities. It is now adding an indoor space for the performing arts so as to offer better accommodation in its pursuit of educational excellence.
- Pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities are very well provided for because of very strong leadership. The school ensures that these pupils' needs are identified and resources and support are provided as early as possible. Two special educational needs co-ordinators focus on the nursery and main school respectively and check on these pupils' progress very well. These pupils make significant gains through literacy and numeracy catch-up sessions and through close working with others such as speech and language therapists.
- The needs of most able children are also swiftly recognised and suitable challenges offered. This is because of the rigour overall with which the school assesses pupils on entry, checks on their progress and modifies each pupil's provision accordingly.
- The leadership of literacy is a marked strength of the school, with early and systematic support for recognition of letters and sounds, spelling homework and regular reading opportunities throughout the school. The impact of this strategy is highly visible in older pupils who read and review a range of factual literature and novels fluently with marked comprehension. Their book reviews show how well they have developed critical understanding of differing texts but also are testament to the high quality of their writing.
- The school's curriculum is rich, broad and balanced. It contributes very well to the breadth of pupils' achievement, their core skills in literacy and numeracy, their safe behaviour and physical well-being and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders ensure that pupils are very well prepared for the next steps of their education and to understand life in modern Britain through their learning experiences and opportunities to discuss and debate issues.
- A new tracking system means that the school now tracks very well how well pupils are doing compared to others of their age in the different subjects. As a result of this tracking leaders understand the school's strengths and pupil progress very well and hold teachers to account for this effectively.
- The school works very successfully with parents and carers. Parents and carers are given much helpful guidance in a pack on school routines and rules. Parents and carers are provided with high quality reports of the progress and attainment of their children in all subjects.

The school's complaints policy is very well communicated to parents and carers and followed. Leaders are quick to respond to any concerns parents and carers might have on a day to day basis and check carefully that all other policies are effectively followed.

#### ■ **The governance of the school:**

- The headteacher as proprietor is supported by a bursar and together they effectively manage the school and its financial resources. The proprietor has ensured that all the independent school standards are met including those relating to preparing pupils well for life in modern Britain and protecting them from extremism. The proprietor has invested in new resources and buildings to ensure that the learning environment is constantly improving and that pupils have the resources that they need. This all contributes to the pupils' outstanding achievement and high attainment when they leave.
- The proprietor has ensured that the school fulfils its safeguarding role and statutory duties with full compliance and much personalised pupil care. Parents and carers commented in detail about how very well supported they feel about their child's safety and welfare.

### **The behaviour and safety of pupils**

**are outstanding**

#### **Behaviour**

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding. Pupils show pride in their school. They are outgoing and welcome visitors. They are keen to learn, concentrate very well in lessons and work very well together. They show great determination and perseverance when they find work hard and are very proud when they get the right answer.
- Teachers do not have to manage any misbehaviour, because pupils have such high expectations of themselves. Lessons start quickly and pupils settle to their tasks readily. They like to complete their work within the given time frame. Such highly positive attitudes are fostered from the moment children enter the nursery because of the high expectations of nursery staff and the ways in which they support and encourage children's interest and thirst for learning.
- The school offers pupils many opportunities to take on personal responsibilities whether as house captains, library and lunch assistants, monitors, pet care helpers, or older pupil 'buddies' to younger children. Pupils relish the opportunities to take these up. They form very good relationships with each other and their teachers. Children in the nursery showed marked consideration for others as they were encouraged to play and talk together about the different things they were doing.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of respect and tolerance for others, whatever their backgrounds or beliefs. They are encouraged to think about the world from others' perspectives. In religious education, for example, they take the Lord's Prayer, simplifying it in a very personal way so that they can explain it to a 5 year old. In their study of Islam, others describe the Prophet's night journey with much interesting detail.

#### **Safety**

- The school's work to keep pupils safe is outstanding. Teachers and other adults are diligent in ensuring that pupils stay safe and are taught rules for internet safety and cyber bullying. The school makes very good use of national initiatives on internet safety and pupils are highly aware of the dangers of these and the importance of keeping themselves safe. Pupils say that bullying is rare and school records show that action is immediately taken. Pupils are confident that adults will listen to them if they have concerns.
- Pupils learn about diversity through a variety of sources such as modern language teaching in French and Spanish, history, geography, planned local and residential visits and religious education. Through these activities they learn about tolerance and to respect differing cultures and ways of living.
- Pupils say that they enjoy coming to the school and this is reflected in their high levels of attendance and punctuality. Parents are highly positive about both the behaviour and safety of pupils. In their responses to the Parent View survey and written comments parents are highly positive about the school, the ways in which it cares for their children and keeps them safe and for their children's achievements.

- The school carries out all the required fire, health and safety checks and training meticulously. There are good numbers of staff trained in first aid, including those who have specific training relevant to early years children. Staff are very well deployed to ensure that pupils are safe at break and lunch times and when on school journeys. All regulations regarding the suitability of staff are met. Such checks are carried out and recorded rigorously. Risk assessments are very well considered and written in an accessible way for staff to follow. Leaders actively promote a culture of safety and safe practice.

### The quality of teaching

### is outstanding

- Teaching is outstanding in English and mathematics and in all other subjects taught. Teachers plan very effectively and this, plus the effective use of questioning, enables pupils to deepen their understanding of topics. As a result pupils' general knowledge is extensive. No time for learning is lost because teachers engage pupils' interest from the beginning and pupils are very strongly motivated to try their best.
- Teachers are well qualified and knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. The school uses a combination of class and specialist subject teachers. They work very well with support staff so that any additional help is effectively deployed. This means children in the nursery and elsewhere in the school who have English as an additional language make quick and often remarkable gains in their speaking and listening skills. These pupils achieve as well as others by the time they leave the school. Similarly those with special educational needs and disabilities catch up and achieve high levels compared with all other pupils of their age because of the very high quality support they receive.
- The teaching of literacy is a consistent strength within the school and pupils' writing, spelling and communication are very well developed by the time they leave the school as a result. Staff are expert at seizing opportunities to check on pupils' understanding of what they are reading and in developing this further. Teachers' enthusiasm inspires a love of reading and literature which sets pupils up very well for the next steps in their education.
- The most able pupils learn exceptionally well in class and through very well targeted homework activities. They show remarkable maturity in their writing in subjects such as history. This is because teachers recognise that pupils may have particular aptitudes and talents and they give highly effective feedback and guidance on an individual basis to extend these pupils' learning. Some outstanding examples of art and music were also seen.
- The school has a strong homework policy that is published in the prospectus for parents and carers. This sets out very clear guidelines and expectations. Homework is carefully matched to pupils' abilities and contains a good level of challenge for each and so contributes very well to pupils' progress and parents' involvement in their child's learning.
- Marking is regularly and well completed. The leadership checks on this regularly through work surveys. However, sometimes pupils continue to make similar mistakes and not all teachers check on how well pupils are responding to their feedback.
- A particular strength across the school is the way in which pupils are expected to think about and reflect on their learning and on different topics. This has a direct impact on the way that pupils approach their work. They are used to asking open questions such as how and why, and this leads to particularly responsive answers in their work.
- Pupils' learning and personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is enriched through a wide variety of planned visits, visitors, assemblies and charitable initiatives. Pupils have a strong sense of social awareness and are very well prepared for life in modern British society. The broad curriculum provides all pupils with a wide cultural awareness and inspires them to write or perform with confidence. The school has a vibrant choir and pupils recently participated in a local archaeological dig.

**The achievement of pupils is outstanding**

- Children in the nursery and Reception class make outstanding progress. When they enter the school their starting points are typical when compared with others of their age, although a few have weaker skills particularly in speech, language and communication whilst others may have good skills in this area. At the end of their Reception year almost all have exceeded the early learning goals and they are very well set up to enter Year 1, particularly in their literacy development.
- The majority of pupils start Year One with attainments in English and mathematics which are high compared to their age. By the time the pupils leave the school, all attain very high standards in relation to others of their age, which sets them up very well for their next steps in education. More than half achieve the highest level in English and over a third in mathematics.
- All groups of pupils including those with special educational needs and disabilities, those with English as an additional language and the most able make outstanding gains in their knowledge and understanding in all subjects. This is because of suitable interventions, and regular checks made on their progress. Target setting is widely understood by older pupils. They often have the confidence to self assess themselves and challenge themselves to achieve even more.
- In Year One pupils read clearly using the aid of letter sounds, predicting the rhythmic storyline of stories such as 'We are going on a bear hunt, They write excellent sentences based on their dramatic ideas discussing suitable new words with confidence. Year Four pupils show a capacity to analyse and understand Queen Elizabeth's historic Tilbury speech to the English forces in 1588 demonstrating how far they had progressed in literacy, and speaking and listening, both in the ways they write about this and memorise. They enjoy reciting its famous lines.
- Work seen in art illustrates that pupils have developed considerable skills linked to styles and schools of painting. Pupils have studied Gaudi and Michelangelo translating these studies into elaborate mosaics and renaissance portraiture of high quality. In information technology show an excellent understanding of simple programming. In science pupils understand fair testing in practical work, they show very good interpretation skills in using graphs and measurement. Pupils study Spanish over four years and many by Year Five have very good oral and vocabulary skills. Similarly pupils attain very high standards in drama and music.
- Scrutiny of pupils' work across the school by inspectors confirms the accuracy of the school's tracking and assessment. Work demonstrates that pupils acquire skills and understanding at a rapid rate and that a very high proportion achieve the higher or highest levels compared to others of their age.

**The early years provision is outstanding**

- Outstanding teaching in early years is underpinned by experiences and conversations with children that are very well matched to their individual needs. Key workers help children to discuss recent events increasingly effectively, skilfully drawing out from them new ideas and experiences. Much emphasis is placed on pupils' personal, social and emotional development and their capacity to understand the world around them and children make huge strides in these areas.
- A wide range of challenging indoor and outdoor activities is provided that cover all areas of learning effectively and particularly promote ways in which children are encouraged to think about the world and about others. The children enjoy all of these opportunities and particularly the wide variety and stimulation of stories and of shared reading which is often linked to letter and sounds work. Music is used very well to signal the end of an activity and to help children to listen.
- Children's starting points are accurately assessed on entry to the nursery and these show that the majority of children enter at levels of development typical for their age. Their learning records show that they make outstanding progress from these starting points, so that almost all exceed the early learning goals and very high proportion have a good level of development by the end of Reception.
- Assessments made on entry help to identify any child who might need additional support such as for

speech and language difficulties. When this happens early years special needs co-ordinator ensures that early action is taken and detailed in an individual education plan. The school draws well on external advice to support these children and so they too make outstanding progress. Often by the end of the Reception they have caught up with their classmates as a result.

- All the staff working with early years children make a very strong contribution to children's progress. All contribute to the day to day tracking and celebration of children's achievements and learning, collecting visual evidence of children's work, their writing, number work and progress towards the early learning goals. Local authority checks confirm the accuracy of these records and the outstanding learning and development of early years children.
- This all means that children transfer to Year 1 with the key skills needed to make a very good start. Parents are particularly pleased about how well their children read and the confidence they display.
- Children are safe, happy and well cared for. All the required welfare, health and safety requirements are in place and risk assessments and checks are carried out rigorously for the accommodation and proposed activities. Relationships between staff and children are highly positive and caring. All children swiftly develop highly trusting relationships with staff. This all ensures that they feel safe to learn and support their outstanding progress.



## What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/140053).

## School details

<b>Unique reference number</b>	121251
<b>Inspection number</b>	443466
<b>DfE registration number</b>	926/6143

This inspection was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as inserted 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.

<b>Type of school</b>	Preparatory
<b>School status</b>	Independent school
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	0-11
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed
<b>Number of pupils on the school roll</b>	134
<b>Number of part time pupils</b>	7
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mrs E Laffeaty-Sharpe
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs E Laffeaty-Sharpe
<b>Date of previous school inspection</b>	March 2009
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£5886-£7947
<b>Telephone number</b>	01366 388066
<b>Fax number</b>	01366 385833
<b>Email address</b>	down.mont@talk21.com

Any complaints about the inspection or the report should be made following the procedures set out in the guidance 'Complaining about inspections', which is available from Ofsted's website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk). If you would like Ofsted to send you a copy of the guidance, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).



You can use Parent View to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school. Ofsted will use the information parents and carers provide when deciding which schools to inspect and when.

You can also use Parent View to find out what other parents and carers think about schools in England. You can visit [www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.parentview.ofsted.gov.uk), or look for the link on the main Ofsted website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) regulates and inspects to achieve excellence in the care of children and young people, and in education and skills for learners of all ages. It regulates and inspects childcare and children's social care, and inspects the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass), schools, colleges, initial teacher training, work-based learning and skills training, adult and community learning, and education and training in prisons and other secure establishments. It assesses council children's services, and inspects services for looked after children, safeguarding and child protection.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the Education Act 2005, the school must provide a copy of this report free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

If you would like a copy of this document in a different format, such as large print or Braille, please telephone 0300 123 4234, or email [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk).

You may copy all or parts of this document for non-commercial educational purposes, as long as you give details of the source and date of publication and do not alter the information in any way.

To receive regular email alerts about new publications, including survey reports and school inspection reports, please visit our website and go to 'Subscribe'.

Piccadilly Gate  
Store St  
Manchester  
M1 2WD

T: 0300 123 4234  
Textphone: 0161 618 8524  
E: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)  
W: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

