

# Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	926/6143
Unique Reference Number	121251
URN for registered childcare	EY305661
Inspection number	332457
Inspection dates	12 March 2009
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005). The inspection of childcare was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

---

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House  
33 Kingsway  
London WC2B 6SE  
T 08456 404040

[www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)



## Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The inspection of registered provision<sup>1</sup> was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

## Information about the school

Downham Montessori Nursery School was founded by its present owner in 1984 for children aged between two and five years. In 1988, the Preparatory School was opened in an adjacent building for children up to 11 years. In 1991 the school and Nursery moved to its present site and in January 2005 a purpose-built school in the grounds of the Old Rectory opened. The school serves the local rural community and is able to provide before and after school care and holiday care. There are currently 162 children on roll, including 53 in the Nursery, with a wide variety of part-time attendance patterns. There are 38 three- and four-year-olds who receive funding for their Nursery education. There are a small number of pupils who experience learning difficulties and/or disabilities and the school offers additional help for pupils with dyslexia. There is currently one pupil who holds a statement of special educational needs. The Nursery broadly follows the Montessori educational philosophy of developing the whole needs of the individual child, but practice is mainly based on the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. Primary-aged pupils follow the National Curriculum. The school aims to provide the 'broadest education possible'. Its belief is 'that a child's capacity to learn and the depth of their understanding is greatly underestimated by many educationalists', therefore striving to offer 'a varied and interesting educational environment' for pupils of all abilities.

## Evaluation of the school

Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery provides outstanding education and care for its pupils. Teaching is good overall, although it is outstanding in some subject areas, including English and mathematics. Pupils flourish, are happy

---

<sup>1</sup> Schools which provide childcare for children from birth until the term in which they reach their third birthday must register this provision separately with Ofsted.

to be at the school and are motivated to learn. Relationships amongst the pupils are strong, as are those between staff and pupils. Parents and pupils are overwhelmingly positive about the school and Nursery. The school meets all the independent school regulations, and the learning, development and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage. The registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006. The last inspection of the school was in May 2005 and for the Early Years provision was in May 2007.

## Quality of education

The quality of education is outstanding and the school fulfils its aims.

The curriculum for the main school is outstanding. It makes exceptionally good use of the outdoors for learning, including very regular walks into the extensive vicarage grounds, the village and the surrounding countryside. Activities which enthuse the pupils often take place in the outdoor play area or garden, including the pets' corner. The curriculum is very broad and is directly based on the six areas of learning as outlined in the Early Years Foundation Stage and the National Curriculum programmes of study for Key Stages 1 and 2. Schemes of work have been very thoroughly prepared. They are adapted well according to pupils' interests and needs. The curriculum includes aspects of provision designed to meet the needs of pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities and for any pupils who speak English as an additional language. It is notably strong in providing effectively for both. The curriculum is enhanced by a wide range of carefully chosen displays and an excellent range of resources, including information and communication technology (ICT), which pupils make good use of in all subject areas; an improvement since the last inspection. However, as a stand-alone subject, ICT is not as well organised as other subject areas. Staff have extensive curriculum knowledge and are therefore able to deliver it effectively. Pupils have an enthusiasm for learning because the curriculum is really exciting. For example, the living eggs project in the Nursery each year enables children to watch eggs hatching into chicks. The curriculum is enriched by an unusually wide range of extra-curricular activities that extend opportunities for pupils' personal and academic development, for example: guitar, choir, dance, badminton, tennis, computers, art and gardening. Pupils clearly benefit from the breadth provided and are proud of their achievements.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and sometimes it is outstanding. Staff have high expectations for both behaviour and standards of work. Lessons are mostly well planned. The learning objectives for each lesson are clearly and consistently identified, which is an improvement since the last inspection, and these are in line with national expectations for all year groups. Planning, however, does not sufficiently account for younger pupils' stage of development in physical education (PE), where the sessions are too long. A particular strength is staff's continual checking on pupils' progress so that they understand where pupils require more support and identify where work necessitates further repetition or consolidation. This ensures that pupils are always well prepared for their next steps in learning right across the school. Staff ensure that pupils are allowed to work things out for

themselves and develop good thinking skills. Wherever possible, pupils learn in enjoyable and practical ways. Here, there is a real buzz of enthusiasm and excitement in lessons. The needs of the more able pupils are planned for very well.

Children make good progress towards the early learning goals for the Early Years Foundation Stage, which they are likely to exceed by the end of the Reception Year, and in all the other subject areas further up the school. Pupils make exceptional progress in their reading, writing and numeracy. This is because of the strong emphasis given to these core skills and the high quality individual support each pupil receives. Staff have the same high expectations for consistent standards in writing and presentation in all subject areas. Pupils' work in books is thoroughly marked and they are given time to make corrections and improve. The marking gives good quality guidance to pupils for how to improve and is again an improvement since the last inspection. Pupils are beginning to assess their own learning in lessons. Rigorous assessment shows that pupils are usually ahead of national norms in English and mathematics by the end of Year 2, and are even further advanced by the end of Year 6, with a high proportion of pupils gaining the higher levels in standardised tests. The school is particularly successful in preparing pupils for the next stage of their education and it has an exemplary record for pupils gaining entry to their chosen secondary school.

### Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. Pupils have many opportunities to discuss their feelings and opinions, for example, through class assemblies and in circle time for younger children. They delight as they develop a knowledge and understanding of the world around them and are highly motivated and interested in what they are learning. They have a good awareness of public services and institutions, for example, through visits to the school from the uniformed services and parents in professional roles, such as the father who worked on an oil rig.

Pupils are taught to respect each other and the adults in school. All learn to work harmoniously alongside others. Through the school's strong moral framework, tolerance of different beliefs and cultures is promoted. The school is welcoming to all. A sense of caring for each other is nurtured and there is much mutual support across all year groups. Pupils' cultural understanding is supported through the curriculum and celebrations from different faiths. This has been much improved since the last inspection. Pupils successfully engage with the wider world as a special link is forged with a home for street boys in Tanzania. Community cohesion has been strengthened with pupils participating in local charitable causes and developing links with other schools through sporting events, such as a tag rugby tournament at Wembley.

Pupils make a significant contribution to their own school community, for example, through special monitoring roles and as form captains. Expectations, including those for pupils' behaviour, are made clear and pupils understand these. They respect the

orderly school environment and its resources. Behaviour is very well managed and is therefore outstanding right across the school. Pupils usually display kindness and consideration to each other. Any spitefulness is swiftly dealt with and talked about, and stories, for example about bullying, reinforce the right choices to make. Pupils are aware of keeping themselves and others safe as they move around the school sensibly.

The school provides a good quality hot meal at lunchtime and pupils eat healthy snacks at break time. They have free access to water and the youngest children may also have a drink of milk each day. Pupils understand the importance of looking after their bodies and the contribution that physical exercise makes to this. The pupils have many varied opportunities to be physically active. In all such ways, including outstanding and consistent attention to pupils' basic skills, there is good preparation for their future general and economic well-being.

### Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school makes outstanding provision for children's welfare, health and safety. All required policies and procedures are in place and up-to-date. Staff reinforce safety at every opportunity, and through the curriculum, so pupils are becoming increasingly aware of looking for potential hazards themselves. Extremely thorough risk assessments, with daily checks in the Nursery, ensure that staff identify any necessary improvements. Risk assessments for outings and residential visits are well thought through and risk is minimised. Fire safety is given a high priority, and there are regular checks and fire drills. Pupils' attendance levels are slightly above the national level with very few unauthorised absences. The take-up of extra-curricular sport and the meal choices that pupils make indicate that they are very healthy and weekly swimming lessons contribute well to this. Pupils are aware of the importance of eating well, taking regular exercise and being outside in the fresh air. There is rigorous record keeping for monitoring pupils' welfare, health and safety. There is a suitable policy for first aid, and staff training, including for emergency medical treatment and for protecting children, is up-to-date. Pupils in the school and children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are safeguarded in line with current requirements. There is an appropriate staff register in place which shows that all the necessary checks have been made, including checks with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school is fully inclusive and meets the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002. It plans exceptionally well for all pupils.

### Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effective leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage results in good quality provision. Both learning and development and welfare requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage are met well. There are no gaps in any of the records inspected during the inspection, including in the recording of accidents, which was a requirement from the last Early Years inspection. Staff are

particularly rigorous about the procedures for booking children in and out to ensure children's continued safety and that the correct staffing ratios are continually adhered to. This was also a requirement from the previous inspection. Monitoring is effectively rigorous in the Nursery. It is developing in Reception and for out-of-school provision, as these are now incorporated within the Early Years Foundation Stage. The use of Montessori equipment alongside other good quality resources ensures that the curriculum effectively builds on children's interests and reflects the six areas of learning. There is extensive outdoor space available, with a special enclosed safe play area for the Nursery, although there are limited opportunities for children to choose whether to work inside or outside and it is not used sufficiently well to promote all six areas of learning. Children have good access to technological equipment, which was a recommendation from the previous inspection.

Planning in the Early Years Foundation Stage is good and has improved since the last inspection. It takes account of the part-time children and their wide variety of attendance patterns very effectively. Children settle quickly into established daily routines, soon becoming confident and enthusiastic learners. The children respond well to the praise and encouragement they receive and their behaviour is excellent. Careful and regular observations are made of children as they go about their work. They are offered an appropriate balance of adult-led and child-initiated activities, which are pitched appropriately to meet their needs and interests. Observations are integral to the assessment process. These are most useful where staff have identified what children have gained from an experience, rather than simply noted their participation in it. There are improved systems of assessing children's progress in place, including for the youngest children. From these, staff accurately identify children's next steps for learning. The manageability of these systems in different areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage is a little inconsistent, although the information the records contain is mostly informative. Parents are well informed about their child's progress towards the early learning goals. Links with parents are a strength of the school.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

## What the school could do to improve further

While not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- further develop the organisation and the use of resources for ICT
- review the arrangements for PE for the youngest pupils.

Early Years Foundation Stage:

- consistently promote children's free access to outdoor learning and use the outdoor area more effectively as an extension to the classroom and to promote all six areas of learning.

## Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

### The quality of education

Overall quality of education	√			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	√			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs		√		
How well pupils make progress in their learning	√			

### Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	√			
The behaviour of pupils	√			

### Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	√			
--	---	--	--	--

### The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?		√		
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?		√		
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	√			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	√			
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?		√		
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?		√		

## School details

Name of school	Downham Preparatory School and Montessori Nursery		
DCSF number	926/6143		
Unique reference number	121251		
EY URN (for registered childcare only)	EY 305661		
Type of school	Preparatory and Nursery		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1984		
Age range of pupils	2–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 64	Girls: 45	Total: 109
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 27	Girls: 26	Total: 53
Number of pupils aged 0-3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 27	Girls: 26	Total: 53
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need	Boys: 1	Girls: 0	Total: 1
Number of pupils who are looked after	Boys:	Girls:	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,600		
Annual fees (childcare)	Varies according to attendance patterns		
Address of school	The Old Rectory Lynn Road Stow Bardolph King's Lynn Norfolk PE34 3HT		
Telephone number	01366 388066		
Fax number	01366 388066		
Email address	down.mont@talk21.com		
Headteacher	Mrs Laffeaty-Sharpe		
Proprietor	Mrs Laffeaty-Sharpe		
Reporting inspector	Jane Melbourne HMI		
Dates of inspection	12 March 2009		