



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

VERNON LODGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Vernon Lodge Preparatory School

Full Name of School	Vernon Lodge Preparatory School and Kindergarten
DfE Number	860/6021
Address	Vernon Lodge Preparatory School School Lane Stretton Stafford Staffordshire ST19 9LJ
Telephone Number	01902 850568
Fax Number	01902 850568
Email Address	info@vernonlodge.co.uk
Headteacher	Mrs Pat Sills
Proprietor	Mrs Dorothy Lodge
Age Range	2 to 11
Total Number of Pupils	82
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (54 boys; 28 girls;)
Numbers by Age	2-5 (EYFS): 23 5-11: 59
Head of EYFS Setting	Mrs Lesley Smith
EYFS Gender	Mixed
Inspection dates	14 Jun 2011 to 15 Jun 2011

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 May 2007.

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 Vernon Lodge Preparatory School aims to provide a secure and stimulating environment in which pupils are encouraged and challenged to fulfil their potential both academically and physically, so that they gain an appreciation of the world in which they live. The school aims for high academic standards, brought about by knowledge of individual pupils' needs, and is committed to providing maximum opportunities for pupils to excel. The school is proprietorially owned and does not have a governing body.
- 1.2 This small day school, for boys and girls from two to eleven years of age, is housed in the premises of the old village school at Stretton in Staffordshire. Additional buildings provide further classrooms, a hall and an office block. The school has its own outdoor play areas and playing fields. Since the previous inspection, a new senior management team has been formed consisting of the proprietor, head and key members of senior staff.
- 1.3 At the time of the inspection, there were 82 pupils on roll, 54 boys and 28 girls, 23 of whom were in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The pupils are drawn from a wide geographical area and from a variety of backgrounds and faiths. The school has no pupils with statements of special educational need and eight children have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). Since 2008, the school has not entered pupils for national tests, but uses standardised tests in English and mathematics. The ability profile of the school is generally in line with or above the national average. However, cohort sizes are small with the average ability varying from year to year, and some cohorts have a wide range of abilities.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table.

Early Years Foundation Stage Setting

School	NC name
Kindergarten	Nursery
Lower Prep	Reception

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 The quality of the pupils' overall achievements is good, in line with the school's aim to provide a good, rounded education in a caring environment in which the pupils are happy in the company of others and feel valued as individuals. The pupils demonstrate high levels of general knowledge and understanding and can express opinions cogently. They develop good skills in literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) and use these well in other areas of the curriculum. By Year 6, pupils are able to make very effective use of their literacy and ICT skills when they are asked to work collaboratively or independently. This was attested by their projects about monkeys, capital cities and the work and life of William Shakespeare. They demonstrate good skills and understanding across different subjects of the curriculum and achieve successes in extra-curricular activities, including music, sport, drama, dance and ballet.
- 2.2 Pupils' attainment cannot be measured in relation to average performance against national tests, but on the evidence available it is judged to be above national age-related expectations. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. The school identifies pupils who are gifted and talented, as well as those with LDD and is improving its provision for such pupils, although it recognises that more needs to be done in this direction. Those pupils with LDD are well supported and make good progress in their learning. On leaving the school, an increasing number of pupils proceed to local selective schools, often with scholarships. Pupils' attitudes to their work are highly positive. They are keen to answer questions and are diligent, putting much effort into work and wanting to do well. They also listen in a respectful manner to each other. Behaviour around school is excellent, founded on the positive relationships that exist between the pupils and reflecting the efforts made by the staff to promote friendship and understanding. The pupils place great esteem on being entered into the 'Golden Book' for good work and deeds, and on receiving praise from the headteacher.
- 2.3 The curriculum is broad and thorough and supports the aims and ethos of the school. At a whole-school level, it is planned in a manner which facilitates effective progress to be made by all pupils, including for pupils with LDD, and in Year 6 is enhanced by the top-of-the-school programme (known as TOPS). The varied programme of extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' educational experiences, which they very much appreciate.
- 2.4 The quality of teaching in the school is satisfactory and, at its best, makes a significant contribution to the achievements of the pupils. Interesting learning environments are created, which make good use of the space available and generate an encouraging atmosphere. However, some lessons were overly directed by the teacher with too much reliance on oral questioning. Such lessons did not encourage the pupils to think for themselves or to engage with the ideas and opinions of others. Classrooms are well resourced and the recent installation of interactive whiteboards has helped enhance the learning opportunities available for pupils. Teachers have an appropriate level of subject knowledge which enables pupils of all abilities to make good progress. Pupils' work is thoroughly marked, with written advice as to next steps being a regular feature. Pupils are set clear,

curriculum-specific targets in English and mathematics, but this is yet to become a regular part of teaching within the school. The school recognises this and has put in place training initiatives to improve both individual and collective target-setting and to link this in with on-going pupil assessment.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.5 Pupils' personal development is excellent and is a significant strength of the school. Pupils of all ages are friendly and confident and openly engage in conversations with each other and adults. They are keen to share their views in a polite and considered way. Relationships within the school, between pupils and adults and amongst pupils of all ages are excellent. Pupils are extremely proud of their school and the friendships that they have developed. The personal, health and social education (PHSE) programme is effectively interwoven into the curriculum. Pupils enjoy sharing their talents in assemblies and show appreciation for the talents of their peers. This was demonstrated during an infant assembly about being a good friend, where the children re-told the story of the 'Three Billy Goats Gruff'. Pupils enjoy taking on positions of responsibility, such as being house captains, library monitors and helping to supervise the younger pupils. Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong, have opportunities to reflect and explore their faith, whilst displaying tolerance and understanding of the multicultural world in which they live. They respond well to finding out about their local area and visiting museums and places of interest, which enhances their cultural development. The school councillors are elected by the pupils and have increasingly had influence upon school decision making, for example changing the uniform for pupils in Year 6. Pupils feel the school listens to them. They enjoyed planning charity days and raising money for a range of good causes.
- 2.6 Supporting the pupils' excellent personal development is the strong quality of pastoral care and the effective arrangements for their welfare, health and safety. They feel very happy and secure at school and believe that they have an adult to turn to when needed. Suitable policies safeguard pupils and staff are appropriately trained in child protection. All appropriate measures have been taken to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards. Attendance and admissions registers are properly maintained. There are an appropriate number of qualified first-aiders and suitable risk assessments are undertaken for off-site visits. The school has an effective plan for improving educational access for pupils with particular learning needs and/or disabilities.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.7 The governance of the school is satisfactory and has improved since the last inspection. The proprietor and headteacher have a close working relationship that has been strengthened by the enlargement of the management team and the involvement of key staff in the school's strategic planning. There has been a thorough overhaul of policies and practice to ensure the school is fully compliant with the required regulations.
- 2.8 The quality of leadership and management of the school is good. The aims of the school are effectively promoted and the children leave the school with good core skills and are successful in gaining places at a range of local maintained and independent senior schools. A new approach to subject leadership, encouraging whole school review and co-operation between classes has begun to promote greater continuity and progression of subjects between classes. This approach has

been well received by the staff, although it is not yet sufficiently established to impact upon the quality of teaching and learning. There are limited opportunities for staff to benefit from professional development opportunities and share good practice. The school has appropriate arrangements in place to ensure that suitable checks are carried out when recruiting and appointing staff, including keeping a centralised register of appointments. The use of space has been maximised, converting a cloakroom into a sick-room when required, and providing a well-equipped computer suite in an attic classroom. A large school sports field adjacent to the school grounds is well used by staff and external sports coaches to maximise the children's opportunities for physical exercise and sport.

- 2.9 The school has excellent links with parents and the local community. The response to the parents' pre-inspection questionnaires indicated a high level of satisfaction with the school, the information they receive and the avenues of communication open to them. The reports the school sends to parents are detailed and useful. Parents have access to all the information to which they are entitled and this is of good quality. Communication with the parents is efficient and makes some effective use of electronic mail, which parents use to communicate information as necessary. Parents' concerns or complaints are properly dealt with. Sufficient opportunities are available for parents to become involved in the life of the school. The Friends of Vernon Lodge Association actively supports and raises funds for the school; a recent example of this is the provision of interactive whiteboards in all classrooms.

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) Recommendation(s) for further improvement

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

1. Share good practice in teaching to ensure all lessons encourage pupils' independent learning and thinking skills.
2. Embed the recent initiative on curriculum co-ordination to ensure consistently high standards of learning across all areas of the curriculum.
3. In the EYFS, further improve the outdoor provision to facilitate its use in all weathers.

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 This is a good setting, with some outstanding features and a warm, welcoming, family atmosphere. The small numbers in each group enable the staff to know the children very well, value their unique qualities, and meet their individual needs through a broad range of activities. This results in children making at least good, and in some areas outstanding progress in their learning and development. Staff have an accurate understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the provision and are taking effective steps to further improve it, whilst creating a colourful environment where children feel valued and safe. The high expectations of the staff and their well-informed understanding of young children, enable significant progress to be made.

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

4.2 The setting benefits from good, and in some respects outstanding, leadership and management. Safeguarding procedures are robust, with efficient and comprehensive policies and risk assessments firmly implemented. All adults have been suitably checked, are well qualified and appropriately trained. All records, policies and procedures necessary for the efficient management of the setting are in place. Children achieve well, irrespective of background, ability, or need, because of the staff's strong commitment to promoting equality. Staff are enthusiastic and share a clear vision about the future of the setting, for example when planning to further improve the outdoor provision to facilitate its use in all weathers. The effective use and good management of resources strongly support children's progress. Relationships with parents are excellent, as was reflected in the pre-inspection questionnaire and in their supportive and appreciative comments. Daily communication and excellent use of e-mail also helps to forge close links with parents.

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

There is good provision for children's learning and development. Nursery and Reception classes work in bright, stimulating classrooms and they have regular access to their play area and grounds. Assessment through observation is thorough and is used effectively to guide planning and target next steps. Children learn and develop very well through stimulating play and a good balance is maintained between adult-led and child-initiated activities. Staff ask challenging questions to develop thinking skills. Teachers quickly identify when a child needs extra help and offer support promptly. Children's welfare is effectively promoted, with safe and clear routines. Good health and well-being are emphasised and healthy snacks and lunches are encouraged.

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

- 4.3 Children make good and sometimes outstanding progress in relation to their starting points and abilities, and are on course to meet all the Early Learning Goals by the end of Reception, with many likely to exceed them. In literacy, Reception children exhibit good listening skills and are able to write using good, legible script, developing their ideas and formulating simple sentences. In numeracy, when using the computer, children are able to put bears on to weighing scales and arrange them in weight order. Children are inquisitive, enthusiastic and self-motivated, relating well to one another and to adults. They co-operate well in their learning and begin to make choices and decisions. Children respect and trust their teachers. They understand the importance of healthy eating. They are provided with secure foundations for their future well-being in all aspects of their learning.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a small 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, 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

Mr Keith Morrow

Mr David Harris

Mrs Lynda Boden

Reporting Inspector

Head of Junior Department, HMC School

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector