



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Grimsdell, Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School

January 2020



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School's Details

School	Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School - Grimsdell			
DfE number	302/6000			
Registered charity number	1064758			
Address	Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School Winterstoke House Wills Grove Mill Hill London NW7 1QR			
Telephone number	0208 9596884			
Email address	office@grimsdell.org.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Simon			
Chair of governors	Mr Elliot Lipton			
Age range	3 to 7			
Number of pupils on roll	199			
	EYFS	91	Key Stage 1	108
Inspection dates	21 to 23 January 2020			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Grimsdell, Mill Hill Pre-Preparatory School, is an independent co-educational day school in north London for pupils aged between 3 and 7 years. The school was founded in 1995; the nursery opened in 1996, and the head took up post in 2014. It is one of four schools which comprise the Mill Hill Foundation, all of which are overseen by a single governing body, known as the Court of Governors.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has undertaken a full review of the curriculum and introduced a 'Creative Curriculum'. The Foundation has recently appointed a new chief executive officer and Chair of Governors.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's aim is to provide excellence in education and to bring out the best in every individual child. It seeks to develop moral integrity, and the confidence in pupils to be themselves and to nurture them from childhood to adulthood. It strives to build a sense of community and environmental awareness in its pupils.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from professional families with diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds living in London or neighbouring counties. The school's own assessment indicates that the ability of pupils is above average. The school has identified 24 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include social, emotional, cognitive and learning issues, nine of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 11 pupils, whose needs are mainly supported by their classroom teachers. Data used by the school have identified 15 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for five other pupils because of their special talents in creativity, thinking skills, music, performing arts and information and communication technology (ICT).

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a COMPLIANCE ONLY inspection and as such reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. It includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any pupils with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning due to the enthusiasm demonstrated by the highly professional staff.
 - Pupils have strong communication skills and achieve excellent levels of attainment in all areas of literacy.
 - Pupils have high levels of creativity and curiosity strongly enhanced through imaginatively planned activities across the curriculum.
 - The standard of pupils' singing is excellent and they sing with great enthusiasm due to the singing culture of the school and the many opportunities they have to perform.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils have high self-esteem, show mature levels of self-discipline and are extremely confident.
 - Pupils develop a wide range of personal values and skills through the schools' consistent use of strong pastoral guidelines.
 - Pupils build strong relationships with adults and peers through the many opportunities available to them to work across classes and year groups.
 - Pupils' collaborative skills are extremely well-developed.
 - Pupils develop a deep affinity with nature through the outdoor education programme and use of the extensive school grounds.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider making the following improvement:
- Improve opportunities for pupils to present work their chosen way rather than using pre-prepared templates.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 The overall achievement of pupils is extremely strong, especially in all aspects of literacy and music, and demonstrates the fulfilment of the school's aim to provide excellence in education and to bring out the best in every individual child. Pupils make excellent progress in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) due to the rigorous assessment process that highlights areas of strength and weakness which identify children's next steps. The school uses its own assessments to evaluate children's levels of attainment at the end of the EYFS. A very large majority of children reach the levels expected nationally for children at the end of Reception and some exceed them. Collaborative planning and focus on individual pupil needs enable activities to be put in place to support those who need it and to challenge those with particular skills and aptitudes. The school's assessment strategies show that older pupils make especially good progress in reading and writing, and are extremely well prepared in all areas to take on the challenges of the preparatory school. Through the establishment of an effective enrichment register, the school has successfully fulfilled the recommendation from the previous full inspection to ensure that lesson planning in Years 1 and 2 provides work that is matched to the pupils' different starting points.
- 3.6 EYFS children rapidly develop their fine motor control skills as seen in Nursery when they carefully used pincer movements with their fingers to thread breakfast cereal onto a stick. Pupils engage eagerly with all areas of learning through the 'Creative Curriculum' which is highly effective in giving them a broad education through strong thematic links across all subjects. Pupils talked excitedly about

the work they had already completed during the term on the rainforest theme. This included a trip to Kew Gardens, map work showing where the rainforests are, creating pictures in the style of Rousseau and even exploring how creatures move in a game of 'Crabs and Scorpions' in physical education. All pupils show great enthusiasm, confidence and skill in singing, whether in routines at the start and end of the day, in French lessons or as a whole year group. Pupils are extremely proud of the attractive learning journals that document their creditable and varied work in each topic. However, too few opportunities exist for pupils to independently select how to present their work due to the prevalence of teacher-prepared templates on which to record.

- 3.7 All pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills which they successfully apply to all areas of learning. They listen carefully to instructions and confidently ask questions. The youngest children develop keen listening skills through appropriate strategies to gain their attention such as counting down from three and rhythm-clapping. Reception children have an excellent grasp of the sounds that letters make and can quickly identify new sounds that occur in their names. Pupils have a great appetite for books, fiction and non-fiction, largely due to the emphasis senior leaders placed on books being at the heart of learning. Free access to the well-stocked library and classroom reading baskets, carefully matched to pupils' ability levels, give them an element of choice and the opportunity to follow their interests. Pupils have excellent writing skills, many using mature descriptive vocabulary when writing in a number of genres. Younger pupils successfully created a dramatic phrase when writing kenning poems to successfully convey one key word using two, for example 'fire' being 'light giver' and 'forest burner'. They demonstrated higher order skills when summarising a book on the rainforest using clarifying, predicting and questioning techniques to gather information.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages develop strong skills in numeracy. Nursery children enthusiastically counted 12 beads in a dish, the result of their vote to find out which book had been chosen to be read. Older pupils confidently wrote 'stories' for their number sentences, and explained clearly how a variety of strategies could be used to solve number problems. Pupils routinely used non-standard measures such as fingers, cubes and sticks to estimate and measure height, and they have excellent mathematical vocabulary. A group of mixed-age pupils discussed the best size and shape of three-dimensional objects to put on weighing scales using terms such as spheres, pyramids, prisms and cubes. The pupils' learning is greatly enhanced when mathematical concepts are used in topic-related study as seen when younger pupils were elated as they realised what the middle section of Venn diagram could be used for when sorting leaves. Pupils develop firm foundations in manipulating number through the school's new approach to numeracy.
- 3.9 Pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) effectively to support their learning in many subject areas. Reception children confidently used the interactive white board to answer questions on size, and the class computer for a mathematical programme dividing pizzas into halves and quarters. Pupils are skilled in being able to present their work creatively in different ways for different purposes. For example, pupils enthusiastically used tablets to investigate barcodes on t-shirts to explore how lungs work, and programmable robots to navigate a map of the local area. Older pupils skilfully manipulated the size of pictures and moved text boxes to create useful information pages on different medicinal plants from the rainforest following a trip to Kew Gardens. They can competently manipulate images, for example, importing their own face onto a picture of Samuel Pepys. The school has successfully fulfilled the recommendation from the previous inspection to raise the pupils' achievements and skills in ICT and enable their application regularly across the curriculum.
- 3.10 Pupils of all ages and abilities develop a strong range of study skills and show natural curiosity. They are inspired by the open-ended, cross-curricular topics they investigate in the excellent creative curriculum. Nursery children demonstrated excellent skills of deduction in using clues to work out who was 'Star of the Day'. Highly skilled staff plan activities both inside and outside that require problem-solving skills to be applied and encourage pupils to come up with their own ideas and solutions. Reception children displayed a high level of curiosity and determination to investigate the problem of how to free a dinosaur from a block of ice, and suggested a range of imaginative solutions using hot

water, a hammer and salt. The school's soft toys identified with particular learning qualities, encourage pupils to think in different ways to solve problems. Younger pupils displayed great self-belief when hypothesising on how to measure the height of a tree, for example, by climbing it, using a step, or putting metre rulers on top of each other. They confidently classified leaves by analysing their properties and gave perceptive reasons for suggesting which ones grew in the rainforest.

- 3.11 Pupils' academic and other successes are outstanding. Pupils' achievements in music, drama and the arts are significant for their ages and they have a record of success in local and national singing festivals. In external speech and drama examinations all pupils passed with the vast majority gaining distinction. Pupils' creative art work is well-developed for their age, and they relish chances to take an active role in school productions. A Reception class confidently presented to an audience of parents during an assembly, speaking, dancing and singing with great pride and skill. Pupils are well prepared for performing and competing in a range of activities by the time they leave the school.
- 3.12 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning, fostered through carefully planned imaginative topics that appeal to their enquiring minds. In the questionnaire, all parents felt that pupils display positive behaviour and attitudes towards others. Strong leadership and enthusiastic teaching ensures pupils are highly motivated and excited to learn. Children in the EYFS develop positive attitudes through regular praise and the ever-present aspiration of being able to ring 'the bell of awesomeness' when they have done something really well. Older pupils show an excellent attitude when getting themselves organised at the start of the day: they independently organised their belongings for the day ahead, talked with great enthusiasm about the books they were reading and cheerily sang their registration responses, showing real positivity in their interactions. The school's culture of reflection impacts positively on pupils' attitudes. Pupils regularly reflect meaningfully on their work and share with peers how well they have performed a task, what they got out of it and how they could have performed even better. The school has successfully fulfilled the recommendation from the previous inspection to provide more opportunities for all pupils to use their initiative and to work collaboratively as a team.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils of all ages demonstrate high levels of self-understanding and the school successfully meets its aim to develop confidence allowing pupils to be themselves. They rapidly grow in self-belief through the school's culture of praise and celebration, and are enormously proud of earning 'smileys', house points and mentions on the WOW board for their achievements. Pupils sensibly take calculated risks and persevere when things get tough. They clearly understand that getting things wrong is part of learning because they learn from their mistakes. Pupils respond positively to challenging activities that are designed to enable them to understand their emotions: in an activity where older pupils were asked to draw with their feet, they showed an excellent understanding of what triggered the frustration they felt and how they could deal with it. They understood how to refocus their thinking to make it more positive, and the effect this would have on their learning. All pupils develop strong self-discipline through the many opportunities to take a lead in their learning, regularly working with different teachers and peers. The positive 'have a go' culture promoted by staff enables children to develop self-understanding, and they are well prepared for their next stage of their lives.
- 3.15 Pupils of all ages make sensible decisions in their behaviour and learning due to the strong focus on pupil choice and decision-making. Pupils understand the importance of making the right decision and know that choosing the right path, even if it is the hardest, will bring them the most success in the future. Reception children make excellent choices from a range of worthwhile activities in the outdoor learning environment, guided carefully by adults: whether to play an imaginative rocket to the moon game, explore the different tree trunks or create dinosaur footprints from natural materials. Younger pupils clearly understand how decisions affect their lives and related this to the story of *Jack and the*

Beanstalk when Jack made the wrong decision to steal the hen. The school has successfully fulfilled the recommendation from the previous inspection to provide more opportunities for all pupils to make decisions in a wide variety of situations.

- 3.16 Pupils have an extremely positive outlook on life. Senior leaders ensure they develop a deep appreciation of non-material aspects through the many opportunities in the creative curriculum that raise their curiosity and spark their interest both indoors and out. Pupils demonstrate a clear appreciation of nature and are able to explain clearly how being outside makes them feel calm. Reception children coherently explained how they like to sit outside and listen to the birds. Younger pupils expressed amazement as to how a small sapling can grow into such a huge oak tree. Pupils engage positively in mindfulness exercises which the school has successfully introduced to help pupils reflect.
- 3.17 From the earliest age, children develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. The school successfully meets its aim to develop moral integrity in its pupils through consistent positive behaviour strategies and the staff's high expectations. They negotiate their own sensible class rules, understand the need for boundaries and accept responsibility for their behaviour. They play well together and understand that playground rules are there to make sure that everyone is safe and happy. In after school care, pupils of all ages were mindful of the needs for others and showed patience when wanting to use apparatus that was already being used. Excellent behaviour was seen in karate club as pupils understood the behaviour protocol. Pupils state that the *Grimsdell Way* message, 'to be kind, embrace challenge and try our best' provides them with a clear code of behaviour, and other strategies enable them to change their behaviour if they are feeling less positive.
- 3.18 Pupils of all ages develop a high level of social awareness and establish strong relationships with their peers. Pupils collaborate well to solve problems and achieve common goals. Nursery children worked as a group to make a pond for a frog by pulling tightly on a parachute. Reception children worked collaboratively as they built machines and houses out of construction materials. Excellent teamwork was seen as younger pupils explored possible solutions to measure the height of a tree. Pupils are aware of being part of a big school team and they work effectively alone, in pairs and small groups. They build high levels of trust and communicate effectively, as seen when Reception children guided a partner with their eyes closed around the woodlands. Older pupils shared ideas and negotiated patiently when preparing an information leaflet about the rainforest. The school has successfully fulfilled the recommendation from the previous inspection to provide more opportunities for all pupils to work collaboratively as a team.
- 3.19 Pupils of all ages take seriously the responsibilities they have to help around the school. Nursery children are encouraged to engage in meaningful conversation with staff as they take the register to the office. Older pupils thrive through taking on formal positions of responsibility such as house captains and the school council that allow them to contribute positively to the school community. They proudly explain that the role of librarian is more important than a book monitor, as by sorting out the books, they are helping everyone in the school. Pupils also take seriously the opportunities they have to be involved in the local community. They are immensely proud of the school choir that entertains local groups, and, when the local elderly people come to the school for tea, they plan carefully a number of questions to help them make interesting conversation. Pupils take an active part in national and local fund-raising events, especially those that link in with topics they are studying, such as raising money to plant new trees and for the Australian bush fire disaster relief. The school's successfully meets its aim to build a sense of community and environmental awareness in its pupils.
- 3.20 Pupils are very accepting of those from other cultures and backgrounds, and in the questionnaire, all parents felt the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Through thematic work, assemblies and special days, such as celebrating different religious festivals, pupils grow in their understanding of living in one world, and are proud that their friends come from different cultures. Older pupils joined in wholeheartedly when singing African chants. They knew the

story of *Rosh Hashanah* and carefully drew Rangoli patterns on the computer during Diwali. They recalled with interest how they had a Jamaican story-teller speak to them during Black History Week.

- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe in a variety of situations, including online. Nursery children can explain why it is important to sleep, and they know why they need to point scissors downwards when walking with them. Reception children know what road signs mean and demonstrate how to cross the road with care. Pupils have an excellent understanding of factors that contribute to keeping healthy, and make good choices in terms of their diet and opportunities to exercise. They know why they must wash their hands after handling leaves and tree trunks because this will stop germs getting to their mouths when they eat. Pupils understand why it is good to have quiet times to reflect. They are aware of how being mindful can positively impact on their well-being and talk enthusiastically about mindfulness classes with their parents. The creation of mental health first aiders who wear special badges ensures pupils understand why it is important to stay healthy mentally as well as physically.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended an assembly. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Dr Wendy Bowring

Reporting inspector

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