

Our Lady's Preparatory School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Elisabeth Linley HMI

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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, 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.^{1, 2}

The inspection of registered provision was conducted under Section 49(2) of the Childcare Act 2006.^{3, 4}

Information about the school

Our Lady's Preparatory School is an independent Catholic school for boys and girls from three months to 11 years of age. The school was founded in 1962 and is located in a residential area of Crowthorne in Berkshire. There are 114 children on roll; 44 attend the school on a full-time basis, 70 attend part time and 36 children are in receipt of government nursery funding. No child has a statement of special educational needs. Of the children on roll, nearly all are in the Early Years Foundation Stage; only three are of school age and access the school's provision for Key Stages 1 and 2. The school is also registered to provide childcare for children under three years of age. Full day care is also provided from 8.00am until 6.00pm for 51 weeks of the year for babies and children from three months to five years. Children of school age can access the day care if required both before and after school and during the school holidays. The childcare provision was set up in 2006 and this is its first inspection. The school was last inspected in 2008. The school aims to 'provide a traditional Catholic education, offering maximum opportunities for the individual child and to develop self-confidence while pursuing academic excellence'.

Evaluation of the school

Our Lady's Preparatory School is successful in meeting its aims and provides a satisfactory quality of education overall, with good teaching that results in children making good progress. The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is satisfactory. However, children's outcomes in the Early Years Foundation Stage are good because of the high quality pastoral care that is evident throughout school and effective partnerships with parents and carers. As a result, children of all ages show good attitudes to learning and their behaviour is outstanding. The school has successfully addressed the regulations identified as not met at the time of the last inspection and now meets most of the regulations. However, there are omissions in

¹ www.opsi.gov.uk/acts/acts2002/ukpga_20020032_en_14#pt10-ch1-pb4-l1g162

² www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2005/ukpga_20050018_en_15#sch8

³ 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.

⁴ www.opsi.gov.uk/ACTS/acts2006/ukpga_20060021_en_4#pt3-ch2-pb4-l1g49

some policies that relate to the school's safeguarding arrangements; as a result, overall provision for children's welfare, health and safety is satisfactory.

Quality of education

The curriculum is satisfactory overall. It is broad and balanced and for the great majority of children follows the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum, while being closely aligned to the National Curriculum for the very small number in Key Stages 1 and 2. Older children also receive lessons in verbal reasoning to help them prepare for Common Entrance examinations. Children's personal, social and health education is covered by a cross-curricular approach, through assemblies and circle time. Long- and medium-term plans are in place for the different subjects that are taught and some are underpinned by commercially produced schemes of work. The school's documentation is not as detailed as it might be to show how children's skills will be developed over time in all the subjects taught. Children benefit from weekly physical education lessons and a termly ten-week course of swimming lessons taught by a specialist teacher. Other specialist teachers visit the school to teach Mandarin and Spanish to children from three months, and French to children from two years of age.

There is some enrichment of the curriculum; for example, children benefit from a weekly movement-based music class taught by a specialist group. Visits out of school, however, are infrequent and are not closely aligned to meet the curriculum demands of the older children. Similarly, there are no extra-curricular activities that children of school age can join although they are able to attend the childcare provision before and after school if required. This facility provides children with the opportunity to complete their homework if they wish while providing positive opportunities for them to socialise.

Provision is well focused for children identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Children benefit from the very small class groups and the support provided by their class teacher and additional support can also be purchased from a specialist teacher.

Teaching and assessment are good. Strengths of the teaching observed, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage, are the effective use of resources, such as interactive whiteboards, and well-focused questioning that promotes children's thinking well. Staff know the children in their group or class very well and respond to their different needs on an ongoing basis. In discussion, one of the older children confirmed that it was the high level of discussion and the very positive relationships that children had with the staff that enabled them to understand their work. Assessment information is gathered from the school's own tests, nationally recognised tests and data from commercially produced assessments, for example in reading and spelling, carried out on a regular basis. Children make good progress from their different starting points and this is confirmed by the school's data; past pupils have attained particularly well when compared to the national average.

Children also sit Common Entrance examinations in Year 6 and many children have been successful in gaining entrance to the schools of their choice.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The children's spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good overall. Children are polite and courteous and their behaviour is outstanding. It is clear that children enjoy school and this is confirmed by their high level of attendance. Children are caring towards others less fortunate than themselves and are involved in their church's support of, for example, the children who live at the Immaculate Conception home in Hmawbi, Myanmar. Children learn about institutions in England through the curriculum and assemblies. To this end, the school focuses on people who help them such as nursing staff, the fire brigade and the police; this is because most of the children who attend the school are of Reception age and younger. There are limited planned opportunities for the older children to develop a wider understanding of the public institutions in England. Children play and work together very well and develop a deep understanding of the Catholic faith and a clear respect for others and their different beliefs and cultures. However, children's understanding of other faiths, while satisfactory overall, is underdeveloped. Very good relationships are evident throughout the school and this in turn helps to boost children's self-esteem and confidence. Children are pleased to take on responsibilities such as tidying up, and this is an important feature of the Early Years Foundation Stage routines. Older children are mindful of their responsibilities in looking after the younger ones and in this respect they are successful; however, their responsibilities do not include any additional roles or opportunities. Nonetheless, given their effective personal development and the development of their good basic skills, children are well prepared for the next stage in their school life.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of the children is satisfactory. In most respects, the school's work is effective; for example, the school's fire safety procedures are in place and fire risk assessments and testing are carried out as required. The school's procedures to prevent bullying do not have regard to the required and latest guidance provided by the Department for Education. Also, the school's policy for child protection does not include procedures to be adopted if allegations should be made against a member of staff. Staff confirmed in discussion, however, that they are clear of the action to be taken should they have any concerns about the safeguarding of any child. Similarly, the headteacher is knowledgeable about the action to be taken should an allegation be made against a member of staff. The pastoral care provided, including for those children in the registered childcare provision and the Early Years Foundation Stage, is of high quality. Parents comment positively on the nurturing and family atmosphere provided for their children. As a result, children feel safe in school and are happy to go to any member of staff for help. All children stay for a school lunch that is prepared on site. The school offers balanced snacks and lunches and there is a clear focus on keeping fit

through lessons in physical education and swimming. Children understand the importance of keeping fit and healthy and know how they should do this through a well-balanced diet and regular exercise.

The school meets all of the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as amended.

Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors

The school has implemented the appropriate checks for the appointment of staff to ensure that they are suitable to work with children. The checks are recorded in a single central register as required.

Premises and accommodation at the school

The school provides suitable premises that enable children to work and play in a safe and secure environment. The building includes a number of specialist rooms, for example, a pottery room and an information and communication technology suite. Rooms for the childcare provision are appropriately set up to cater for the different age groups of the babies and children who attend from three months to five years of age. The medical room, providing appropriate facilities for children who are ill, now includes a hand-wash basin and this is an improvement since the last inspection. However, hand-washing provision is not sufficient in nursery rooms to support good practice and the prevention of infection spreading. In preparation for snack and lunchtime, babies and younger children wash their hands in a communal bowl of water. Similarly, in the creative room for children aged two and three, a communal bowl of water and cloth towel was observed to be the only resource available for children to wash their hands.

Provision of information

The school provides a broad range of information for parents and carers through, for example, the prospectus and the school's website. All but one of the school's policies are available upon request; the school does not currently make available its policy for safety on educational visits.

Manner in which complaints are to be handled

The school's procedures for handling complaints do not meet all of the regulations. Where parents or carers are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, the procedures do not include provision of a panel hearing and all the associated requirements. In addition, the procedures do not mention that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The effectiveness of the setting, including the registered childcare provision for children under three years of age, is satisfactory overall. The childcare provision meets the requirements of the Early Years Register with the exception of the safeguarding children policy, which does not include the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff. Even so, the headteacher, nursery manager and staff are fully committed to promoting high quality care. The ratio of adults to children is high and key workers are assigned to ensure that the children's welfare needs are met effectively. Staff have completed first-aid and child protection training as required and risk assessments of the environment are rigorous. Equality and diversity are consistently promoted well throughout the nursery and there is a strong commitment to fully inclusive provision. Strong partnerships are established with parents and carers, and good opportunities are provided for children to access creative activities with supporting resources such as sand, water, dough and paints. Extra activities extend children's learning, such as pottery, French, Spanish, Mandarin and music. As a result, outcomes are good. For example, babies up to 18 months used their senses to explore textures, materials and different resources and laughed out loud, clapped hands and showed pleasure when they were rewarded with sounds. During outside play times, younger children aged one and two years showed responsibility and awareness of safety; they knew that they must not touch the gates and understood why they lined up before going inside. Children from three to five talked confidently about computers and how they work. Although there is stability of staff at a senior level, the recent turnover of other staff has led to some inconsistencies in practice. As a result, provision for child-initiated and uninterrupted activity is, on occasions, limited and this sometimes restricts children from developing their own play and ideas. The outside area is not used effectively to enhance children's learning and development. This is because the procedures for curriculum planning are not used consistently by all staff to enable activities to be based on children's own interests and abilities. Similarly, the use of assessment to inform planning is variable in quality and activities are not always closely linked to children's individual needs. As a result, provision overall is satisfactory. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Procedures for self-evaluation are not robust and monitoring procedures have not fully identified the shortfalls in curriculum planning and assessment procedures. The headteacher is aware of inconsistencies in the use of the outside play provision and recognises that not all staff have completed sufficient up-to-date training for the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 (‘the Regulations’), with the exception of those listed below.⁵

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of provision for welfare, health and safety of pupils (standards in part 3) and must:

- ensure that the child protection policy includes procedures to be adopted if allegations are made against a member of staff and should include the name of the designated child protection officer (paragraph 7)
- ensure that the school’s procedures to prevent bullying have regard to the DCSF guidance *Safe to learn: embedding anti-bullying work in schools* (DCSF-00656-2007) (paragraph 10).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information (standards in part 6) and must:

- make available for parents and carers the policy for safety on educational visits (paragraph 24(1)(b)).

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the manner in which complaints are to be handled (standards in part 7) and must:

- make reference to the formation of a hearing panel as required, and how requirements related to this are followed, in the event of parents or carers not being satisfied with the response to a written complaint (paragraph 25 (f), (g), (h), (i), (j)).
- ensure that it is clearly stated that correspondence, statements and records of complaints are to be kept confidential (paragraph 25(k)).

In order to meet the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006, those who provide the registered provision for children under the age of three must:

- ensure that the safeguarding children policy includes the procedure to be followed in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff.

⁵ www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2010/1997/contents/made

What the school could do to improve further

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

- provide more opportunities for enrichment of the curriculum and ensure that such opportunities link well to the curriculum for older children and allow them more responsibilities where appropriate
- ensure that all children develop an increased understanding of faiths and cultures that are different from their own.

Early Years Foundation Stage:

- improve planning for the Early Years Foundation Stage to include opportunities for learning outside that cover all six areas of learning
- increase training opportunities for staff in the Early Years Foundation Stage to develop and improve their knowledge, particularly of outdoor provision and learning
- develop systems that enable leaders and managers to monitor planning and assessment procedures that in turn contribute effectively to the school's self-evaluation.

Inspection judgements

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
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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			✓	
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The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage		✓		
The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage			✓	
The effectiveness of leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage			✓	
Overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage			✓	

School details

School status	Independent		
Type of school	Catholic Nursery and Preparatory School		
Date school opened	1962		
Age range of pupils	3 months–11 years		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 25	Girls: 19	Total: 44
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 36	Girls: 34	Total: 70
Number of children aged 0–3 in registered childcare provision	Boys: 36	Girls: 38	Total: 74
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,530-£7,605		
Annual fees (childcare)	£5,496-£10,788		
Address of school	The Avenue, Crowthorne, Berkshire RG45 6PB		
Telephone number	01344 773394		
Email address	office@olps.co.uk		
Headteacher	Mrs Helene Robinson		
Proprietor	Trustees of the Church of the Holy Ghost		