

# St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School

Independent school standard inspection report

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Reporting inspector	Stephen Dennett

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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.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## **Information about the school**

St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School is a Roman Catholic co-educational school for boys and girls. It admits pupils from the term before their third birthday to the age of eleven years. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in separate Nursery and Reception classes. There are currently 151 pupils on roll, including nine who attend part-time. The school's origins go back to 1899 when the Sisters of Mercy (a Roman Catholic religious order) opened a school based on religious principles. The school moved to its present site in Gravesend in 1943. It is now managed by a board of governors in association with the proprietors. The school is non-selective. Ten pupils have been identified with special educational needs and/or disabilities, mainly for language, literacy and social development. However, there are no pupils with statements of special educational needs. The majority of pupils are from a White British background, with significant minorities of Asian and African origin. Five pupils speak English as an additional language, with two in the early stages of acquisition. The school runs before- and after-school care managed by the governing body that was inspected at the same time.

The school's aim is: 'To maintain a Christian environment where our children grow and develop into caring individuals, where they learn to discover their individual gifts and strengths secure in the knowledge that each has a role in the school and a valued contribution to make to its life'. The school was last inspected in May 2008.

## **Evaluation of the school**

St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School provides a good quality of education for all its pupils and meets its aims successfully. Pupils clearly enjoy their education and say they feel safe in school. The school's safeguarding arrangements are robust. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and provision for their welfare, health and safety are good. Pupils are making good progress in their learning and their attitudes and behaviour are also good. The school has improved since its last inspection and now meets all the regulations for registration.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2002/32/contents).

<sup>2</sup> [www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/contents).

## Quality of education

The good curriculum enables pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage, to make good progress. A strong emphasis is given to developing pupils' literacy and mathematical skills. The curriculum is broad and good opportunities are provided for pupils to develop their skills of literacy, numeracy, and information and communication technology across different subjects. All pupils learn French, which further develops their linguistic skills. The school's physical education programme includes football, gymnastics, rugby, hockey and dance, as well as swimming in the school's own pool. There is also a good emphasis on drama and music. Personal, social and health education are good and provision effectively tackles issues such as bullying, healthy lifestyles and keeping safe. Pupils particularly enjoy investigative and problem-solving tasks that are both challenging and demanding. Pupils of all ages participate in many after-school clubs that include sport, ballet, art and craft, music and many other worthwhile enrichment activities. In addition, educational visits and outings to art galleries, museums, theatres, farms and outdoor activity centres all form an integral, important and enjoyable part of learning at St Joseph's. Pupils benefit from regular visits to France and an outdoor pursuits centre.

The quality of teaching and assessment is good and contributes much to pupils' good academic progress. The progress of boys and girls is equally good and pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities make similar rates of progress to their classmates. The few pupils who speak English as an additional language also make good progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and this is used well to motivate and enthuse pupils to learn at a good rate. Relationships between adults and pupils are positive and the high levels of mutual respect help to create an effective learning environment where pupils thrive. In most lessons, teachers set high academic and behavioural expectations to which pupils are very ready to respond. Learning objectives are shared with pupils, and teachers use assessments at the end of the lesson to gauge what has been learnt. In the most effective lessons, work is matched closely to the ability levels of all pupils, questioning is open-ended but incisive, and opportunities are provided for pupils to investigate, find things out for themselves and take initiative for their own learning. However, these features are not always promoted consistently. In one lesson, the slow pace and insecure behaviour management meant that pupils made only satisfactory progress.

Good procedures are in place for assessing and tracking pupils' progress and these demonstrate the good strides in learning that pupils make. Teachers carry out regular assessments across the range of subjects and generally use the information well to guide and inform future planning. The outcomes of assessments are shared with pupils. Most pupils understand these assessments and set their own targets for improvement. This understanding makes an important contribution to the good progress they make. Teachers mark pupils' work on a regular basis and often provide comments that clearly state what pupils need to improve to achieve at a higher level. Discussions with pupils indicate that they value these comments and readily act upon them.

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

Provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Pupils' behaviour is good and there is a tangible sense of pupils caring and looking out for one another. Older pupils show maturity in their dealings with younger children and provide good role models. Pupils are courteous and demonstrate good attitudes to learning; they are keen to do well. Very occasionally, younger pupils call out and engage in irrelevant chat, which detracts from their learning. During their time at school, pupils develop a good understanding of right and wrong and demonstrate a strong sense of justice and fair play. Pupils' enthusiasm for school and learning is reflected in good attendance rates. From an early age, children in the Early Years Foundation Stage show a readiness to work with and support one another, and readily share resources.

Pupils raise significant amounts of money for a range of different charities, and show a deep and genuine empathy for those less fortunate than themselves. The school has house captains and buddies. The school council has been instrumental in bringing about improvements to facilities and resources. Pupils have a voice that is listened to and respected. Pupils have a good knowledge of public institutions; for example, their knowledge of the electoral system was enhanced by the elections held for the school council.

Pupils develop a good knowledge and understanding of the different faiths, cultures and traditions represented in the school. Much of this is acquired through visits to various places of worship and through visitors to the school who have different faiths. Pupils' spiritual development is also enhanced by the sessions provided to prepare them for their first communion. Pupils show high levels of respect and understanding for others' beliefs and values and this is reflected in the harmony that permeates the school.

## **Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

The arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils are good. There are robust procedures for safeguarding and other aspects of health and safety including appropriate training for all staff. Good-quality policies are in place to promote good behaviour and to tackle any instances of bullying. The effectiveness of these policies is reflected in pupils' good behaviour and pupils' assertion that any occasional bullying is dealt with quickly and effectively by staff. Pupils state that the school is a safe place to learn and that there is always someone to talk to about any worries or concerns. Pupils have a good awareness of what is needed to follow a healthy lifestyle and to keep safe. Appropriate risk assessments are carried out for visits out of school. The school's before- and after-school provision is well run and meets all safeguarding requirements. There is an adequate number of trained first aiders on site, policies relating to first aid are secure and all staff follow the guidance for administering medicines appropriately. Fire risk assessments have been carried out

and any identified areas for improvement have been addressed. Routine checks and fire drills are undertaken and recorded on required aspects of fire safety. School policies are reviewed on a regular basis. The school has an accessibility plan which meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

## **Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors**

All of the required checks on the suitability of staff and the proprietor are completed appropriately to ensure the safe recruitment of personnel. Details of all checks are recorded in a suitable single central register as required.

## **Premises and accommodation at the school**

The school premises provide a safe and effective environment for learning. It is located in a Victorian three-storey house and extensive purpose-built accommodation, which includes a large hall, adequate classrooms and extensive grounds. The school has a designated information and communication technology suite and specialist rooms are used well to support and enhance learning. There is an appropriate outdoor area for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage. The school makes good use of the on-site swimming pool and playing field for physical education. Appropriate facilities are provided for those who are ill. The school kitchen meets hygiene requirements and provides pupils with a daily hot meal.

## **Provision of information**

The school provides, and makes available, all of the required information for parents, carers and others in the school prospectus and on its website. It is clear, accurate and up to date. Parents and carers are regularly notified of the availability of all the required policies and how they can access them. Information relating to the progress of children is good. Parents and carers receive informative annual reports outlining the attainment of their children and the progress they are making.

## **Manner in which complaints are to be handled**

The school's arrangements for the management of any complaints meet regulatory requirements.

## **Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

The overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage is good because outcomes, provision, and leadership and management are all good. The curriculum covers all of the six areas of learning with a strong emphasis given to the early development of children's reading and mathematical skills. Teaching is good and enables children to acquire key skills swiftly, to make good progress from their starting points, and to keep themselves safe and healthy. Adults are effective at tracking children's progress and they use ongoing assessment well to plan daily

activities and to identify the next steps in children's learning. There are, however, times when children are not provided with enough opportunities to use the outdoor area when selecting activities themselves. Nonetheless, children are enthusiastic, confident and eager learners who behave well and demonstrate good levels of concentration and perseverance. Good leadership ensures that the welfare of children is given a high priority. Teachers know each child and their families well, and create a welcoming atmosphere that enables all children to settle quickly into school routines. The Early Years Foundation Stage leaders have a good awareness of the strengths and areas for development in provision. Teaching and learning are monitored effectively. Very good relationships have been established with parents and carers, and a strong partnership between home and school adds to the quality of children's learning. One parent commented, 'I would highly recommend the nursery as the staff are fantastic and they do so much with the children'.

## **Compliance with regulatory requirements**

The proprietor has ensured that the school meets The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, schedule 1 ('the Regulations').

## **What the school could do to improve further**

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

- Ensure that all teaching is to the high standards expected by the school.
- Make better use of the outdoor area so that children in the Early Years Foundation Stage have access to a wider range of activities from which to select.

## 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

<b>School status</b>	Independent		
<b>Type of school</b>	Preparatory		
<b>Date school opened</b>	1943		
<b>Age range of pupils</b>	3–11		
<b>Gender of pupils</b>	Mixed		
<b>Number on roll (full-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 64	Girls: 78	Total: 142
<b>Number on roll (part-time pupils)</b>	Boys: 5	Girls: 4	Total: 9
<b>Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs</b>	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
<b>Annual fees (day pupils)</b>	£4,107 – £6,555		
<b>Address of school</b>	46 Old Road East Gravesend Kent DA12 1NR		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01474 533012		
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@sjcps.org		
<b>Headteacher</b>	Carola Timney		
<b>Proprietor</b>	Sisters of Mercy		

**This letter is provided for the school, parents and carers to share with their children. It describes Ofsted's main findings from the inspection of their school.**



11 December 2011

Dear Pupils

**Inspection of St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School,  
Gravesend, DA12 1NR**

Thank you for making us so welcome when we visited your school. We greatly appreciated the opportunities to talk with you and a special thanks to the members of the school council who met with us to discuss their views. It was good to hear how much you like school and all the activities that are on offer, both during and after the school day. It was also good to hear how safe you feel.

St Joseph's provides you with a good quality of education. The curriculum is fun and exciting with lots of opportunities, such as to learn French, play musical instruments and visit many places of interest. The good teaching provided by your teachers helps to make sure that you make good progress and reach high standards by the time that you leave school. The school is good at helping you lead healthy lifestyles and keeping you safe.

Even schools that provide a good quality of education can improve. We have asked the headteacher and staff to ensure that all lessons are challenging and make sure you concentrate all the time. You can help by following the class rules by putting up your hand to answer a question and not talking about things which are nothing to do with the lesson. We have also asked the school to make sure the outside area for the Nursery and Reception classes is better used to provide more interesting things for you to do. We know that you will all want to play your part in continuing to make St Joseph's a success by working hard and making the best of every opportunity to learn. We wish you every success in the future.

Yours sincerely  
Stephen Dennett  
Lead inspector