

St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School

46 Old Road East, Gravesend, Kent, DA12 1NR

Inspection dates

8 February 2013

Reason for inspection

This unannounced emergency inspection was made at the request of the Department for Education to check whether the school meets the regulations for continued registration as an independent school in respect of its arrangements for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils and its procedures for handling complaints.

Conclusions

The school's written policies for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils reflect current guidance and meet regulatory requirements. Staff have received the required training in safeguarding and first aid, and appropriate records are maintained.

The school's complaints procedure meets some, but not all, of the regulatory requirements. The school's website indicates the availability of the procedure to parents, carers and others. The procedure allows for complaints to be made and considered informally before proceeding, if required, to a formal written complaint. Although provision is made for a panel hearing, the procedure does not specify that one member should be independent of the management and running of the school, as required. The procedure allows for parents to attend the panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied; however, the procedure specifically states that the person(s) accompanying the parents may not speak at the panel hearing. This clause is inappropriate as it limits the capacity of the complainant to present their case and respond to the panel's questions and comments. While the procedure provides for the governing body and headteacher to have access to the panel's findings and recommendations on the school premises, it does not provide similar access for the proprietor as required. The procedure specifies timescales at certain stages but, contrary to requirements, these are neither set out for all stages nor sufficiently clear. The procedure makes provision for written records to be kept of all complaints, indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing, and addresses the requirements relating to confidentiality.

This inspection visit found that the school's leaders do not implement the existing procedure with sufficient diligence, including the rigorous maintenance of written records. The school has been slow to deal with a recent formal written complaint.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school requires improvement and must take action to meet schedule 1 of The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010, as amended by The Education (Independent School Standards) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2012 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Ensure that the complaints procedure sets out clear timescales for the management of the complaint. (paragraph 25(c))

Where there is a panel hearing of a complaint, ensure that there is provision that one person on the panel is independent of the management and running of the school. (paragraph 25(g))

Ensure that the procedure allowing for parents to attend the panel hearing and, if they wish, to be accompanied, does not impose any limitations on who may speak. (paragraph 25(h))

Ensure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendations and that the procedure stipulates that a copy of the findings and recommendations: (paragraph 25(i))

- is provided to the complainant and, where relevant, the person complained about

and

- is available for inspection on the school premises by the proprietor, governing body and the headteacher.

Inspection team

Michael Best, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Information about this school

- St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School is a Roman Catholic co-educational school for boys and girls. It admits pupils from the term in which they are three-years-old to the age of 11 years (Year 6). Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are taught in separate Nursery and Reception classes.
- There are currently 143 pupils on roll, including 14 who attend on a part-time basis. There are 23 children entitled to funding through the government's nursery education.
- The school's origins go back to 1899 when the proprietor, 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 governing body in association with the proprietors.
- The school is non-selective. Fourteen pupils have been identified as disabled or having special educational needs, mainly for language, literacy and social development. There are currently 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. Six pupils speak English as an additional language, with two in the early stages of acquisition. The school runs before- and after-school care; these provisions are managed by the governing body.
- 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 December 2011 when it was judged to meet all the requirements for continuing registration as an independent school.

School details

Unique reference number	118987
Inspection number	419909
DfE registration number	886/6041
Type of school	Preparatory
School status	Independent School
Age range of pupils	2–11 years
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	143
Number of part time pupils	14
Proprietor	The Sisters of Mercy
Chair	Mario Ciantanni
Headteacher	Carola Timney
Date of previous school inspection	9 December 2011
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,107 to £6,555
Telephone number	01474 533012
Fax number	01474 363132
Email address	headteacher@sjcps.org

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