

Bicker Preparatory and Early Years School

School Lane, Bicker, Boston, PE20 3DW

Inspection dates 24–26 June 2015

Overall effectiveness	Outstanding	1
Leadership and management	Outstanding	1
Behaviour and safety of pupils	Outstanding	1
Quality of teaching	Outstanding	1
Achievement of pupils	Outstanding	1
Early years provision	Outstanding	1

Summary of key findings

This is an outstanding school.

- The leaders of the school are totally committed to achieving an outstanding standard of education for all groups of pupils; they have been successful in meeting this aim. They are supported in carrying out their roles by very effective governance arrangements.
- The achievements of the pupils are outstanding. This can be seen in their success in gaining entry to highly selective senior schools. They make consistently strong progress throughout the school.
- The most able pupils make outstanding progress and their needs are met very effectively.
- The standard of teaching is outstanding. All teachers know their pupils very well and are adept of providing challenging work that contributes to their high levels of achievement.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding and a real strength of the school. Pupils are reflective, have a strong sense of right and wrong, and excellent social skills. They have a highly developed knowledge of the society in which they live, and value its cultural diversity.
- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding. Their standard of conduct is impeccable and they have excellent manners. They are highly enthusiastic and motivated learners.
- The school implements its policies for welfare, health and safety rigorously, ensuring there is a safe and secure learning environment for all pupils.
- The early years setting makes outstanding provision for the children, with carefully planned learning activities that ensure that they all make strong progress.
- Pupils benefit from a broad and innovative curriculum. This develops high standards of numeracy and literacy while providing opportunities for pupils to learn about the world around them, the environment and other cultures.
- Parents are highly satisfied by the quality of education provided for their children and value the strong links between the school and home.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

- The school meets the schedule to The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('the independent school standards') and associated requirements.

Information about this inspection

- This inspection was carried out with a day's notice.
- Inspectors observed ten lessons, class assemblies, break times, heard a group of pupils read and carried out a scrutiny of pupils' written work.
- Meetings were held with the proprietor, one of the headteachers and other staff members, including the designated staff member for safeguarding.
- Inspectors also interviewed groups of pupils and analysed the results of an online pupil questionnaire.
- The views of parents were gathered from 28 responses to the online Parent View survey and through meetings at the start of the school day. Almost all staff completed a questionnaire.
- In checking the school's compliance with the independent school standards, a wide range of documentary evidence was scrutinised, including school policies, achievement data, behaviour logs, staff recruitment records and evidence of the monitoring of teaching. The lead inspector viewed the school's website for safeguarding compliance.

Inspection team

Richard Johnson, Lead inspector

Additional Inspector

Lynne Thorogood

Additional Inspector

Full report

Information about this school

- Bicker Preparatory School and Early Years School was founded in 1994 by the current proprietor. It is a day preparatory school for pupils between the ages of three and 11.
- The school occupies the site of a former Victorian village school in the village of Bicker, near Boston, in Lincolnshire. Its facilities include a specialist music teaching area and a purpose-built nursery unit. The school uses an adjacent playing field for sport and has access to a nearby environmental area. The school also owns a nature reserve that is used as a field study centre.
- The school aims to 'provide an approach to learning that gives pupils the opportunity to develop emotionally, physically, intellectually, aesthetically and spiritually'. The school sets out to foster and encourage every child to form positive attitudes to learning, and pupils are prepared for their senior schools by encouraging independence and good manners'.
- There are 16 children in the early years setting, eight of whom attend on a part-time basis. Fifteen of these receive government funding for three and four-year-olds. The proportion of disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs is lower than that found nationally.
- Pupils travel to the school from across a wide area, and come from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds that reflect those of the locality. Five speak English as an additional language.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provider.
- The school was last inspected in July 2009, when its quality of education was judged to be outstanding.

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Raise pupils' achievement still further by providing more opportunities for pupils to apply their mathematical skills to solve practical problems.
- Make more effective use of the outdoor area in the early years setting to provide additional opportunities for creative play and learning.

Inspection judgements

The leadership and management are outstanding

- Leaders show great determination in ensuring the school maintains outstanding standards in all areas. They are excellent role models, enabling all staff and pupils to understand clearly its positive and caring ethos. As a result, staff are very committed to carrying out their roles to the best of their ability and the school is highly successful in meeting its aims.
- The school development plan has been strengthened and formalised, in line with the recommendation of the previous inspection. It now includes targets that clearly identify how all aspects of the school can develop further. This allows leaders and the proprietor to monitor progress and allocate appropriate resources.
- One area of the development plan presently being implemented is a change to the leadership structure. There are currently joint headteachers, who work closely together ensuring that all aspects of the role are covered. They each have clearly defined areas of responsibility, including the management of different areas of the school. Nevertheless, the school has identified that staff and parents would prefer a single point of contact, and new arrangements are currently being put in place to enable this to take place. These revised arrangements will create additional time for leaders to monitor and support teachers and provide further opportunities for staff training.
- Leaders have successfully established systems to ensure the safety of pupils and staff. They make sure that all staff are familiar with school policies, and that procedures for welfare, health and safety are followed conscientiously. The school's safeguarding policy meets the latest requirements and is implemented rigorously.
- The outstanding behaviour of the pupils reflects the high expectations of the school's leaders and their effective promotion of values of mutual respect, politeness and tolerance.
- The arrangements to monitor the quality of teaching are successful in ensuring high standards are maintained. A variety of formal observations take place, which are then reviewed and rigorous targets are set to secure continuous improvement. In addition, teachers receive much informal support from leaders and there are regular opportunities to share good practice in staff meetings. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire and in meetings, teachers said they were both challenged and supported effectively, and felt the school is led and managed very well.
- The high standards of achievement reflect the leaders' ambition for all pupils to gain entry into their first choice of senior school. Leaders are not complacent. For example, they have identified that the achievement of some pupils in mathematics, although well above national averages, were not as high as those in English. They are taking steps to address this through staff training and changes to the curriculum to increase the focus on more practical activities.
- This is a small school with no middle leaders. However, the senior leaders, including the early years leader, carry out the role of subject leadership effectively. They have developed clear and detailed programmes of study which take into account the recent changes to the national curriculum.
- The school provides an outstanding curriculum. It covers all of the required areas of learning and successfully promotes high standards of numeracy and literacy. A topic-based approach also provides many opportunities for pupils to apply their knowledge and skills across other subjects. It makes effective use of the school's environmental study areas to develop a strong scientific and ecological awareness, and makes excellent provision for pupils' personal development. All pupils develop proficient language skills through the study of both French and Spanish.
- The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding and a notable strength of the school. Pupils show their spirituality in their daily prayers and have a strong moral outlook. This can be seen in their high standards of behaviour and mature awareness of environmental issues. They have excellent social skills and display kindness and empathy towards those around them. They enjoy finding out about other cultures.
- The school actively promotes the fundamental values of individual liberty, the rule of law and democracy, tolerance and respect. Pupils are very well-prepared for life in British society through topics and assemblies which cover aspects such as the law, Parliament, future career choices and the role of the emergency services. An older pupil had researched the social benefits system and presented her findings to her class. Pupils study other religions, show respect for different religious beliefs and enjoy celebrating major festivals. One pupil explained how they had learned to value diversity. There is no evidence of any form of prejudice in pupils' behaviour and attitudes.
- Parents are highly positive about the school's leadership and management. In the online survey and in meetings with inspectors, all parents indicated they would recommend the school to others. The school establishes outstanding links with home; parents are provided with detailed reports on their children's

progress. Staff are accessible and approachable. An active parent association provides parents with a varied calendar of social and fundraising activities.

■ **The governance of the school:**

is effective in ensuring that pupils achieve high standards in all areas. The school still reflects the proprietor's strong educational vision that led to its original foundation.

is strong because the proprietor has an excellent understanding of the school. She visits regularly and chairs weekly management meetings. This ensures that she is fully apprised with all issues and can provide strong support and challenge for the leadership team.

is also effective because the proprietor is highly visible and known well by all staff and pupils in this small school. The staff all indicated that they value her support and guidance. In providing this, she is able to ensure the school's core values and ethos are maintained, and it is successful in meeting its aims.

ensures that finances are managed carefully, ensuring that staffing and resources are allocated prudently.

The behaviour and safety of pupils

are outstanding

Behaviour

- The behaviour of the pupils is outstanding and they have excellent manners. They are confident and friendly, and keen to make visitors feel welcome. They show tolerance to the views of others and value diversity. They wear the school's distinctive uniform smartly, displaying a tangible pride in their school.
- In interviews, the older pupils were keen to stress that they had an important responsibility to set a good example to the younger ones in their behaviour and appearance. Pupils who are new to the school settle in quickly and often make rapid progress as a result.
- In lessons, pupils learn enthusiastically. They are keen to challenge themselves and are able to work independently. They respond promptly to instructions and settle quickly to tasks they are set, meaning that no time is wasted. Younger pupils are proud that they can organise their own possessions.
- A scrutiny of the school's behaviour records and meetings with pupils indicate that sanctions are rarely required. Pupils report that bullying is very rare and are confident if any bullying occurred it would be addressed swiftly. Attendance is high and any absences are followed up promptly.
- Pupils benefit from outstanding pastoral support. Staff know their pupils extremely well in this small school and are able to address any issues and concerns swiftly. Pupils feel that there is always somebody to turn to if necessary. Pupils also show a strong awareness of the need to adopt a healthy lifestyle. The school makes good provision to ensure that older pupils are prepared for the transition to senior school.

Safety

- The school's work to keep pupils safe and secure is outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are strong and all statutory requirements are met, including providing a compliant copy of the school's safeguarding policy on the school's website.
- The school diligently carries out all of the relevant checks to ensure the suitability of all staff and volunteers. All staff show an outstanding awareness of potential safeguarding issues and know what action to take if concerns arise.
- The policies to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils and staff are thorough and detailed; they are implemented conscientiously. Risk assessments are completed for all activities that take place on and off the school site, and staff show a strong awareness of potential dangers. For example, thorough procedures are in place when they use the adjacent play area and sports fields during their break times. The school site is very secure, and visitors are managed and supervised well.
- The school takes all necessary steps to reduce the risks from fire and other hazards. There is a robust system to ensure that the necessary checks and maintenance of equipment takes place. Fire evacuation drills take place at appropriate intervals. The school buildings and facilities are maintained to a high standard. Medical provision is good. Staff have the requisite first aid training, the school has suitable facilities to care for pupils that are injured or unwell, and the very few accidents that take place are carefully recorded and reported to parents.
- In interviews, pupils said that they feel very safe at school, and are appreciative of the steps the staff take to ensure this. They show a strong awareness of potential risks from deep water, fire and road traffic. All parents who responded to the online questionnaire said that they felt their children were safe and cared for well.

The quality of teaching is outstanding

- The quality of teaching is outstanding and this is reflected in the high levels of achievement of the pupils. Teachers take great care when planning their lessons, so that the activities are matched to the ability and needs of all pupils.
- When pupils complete their set work, they are encouraged to move on to more challenging tasks, ensuring that they make the best possible progress. Where additional support is required, pupils report that teachers are quick to explain work or suggest new learning strategies. In subjects such as mathematics, they place emphasis on learning a variety of different methods of calculation, so that the most appropriate can be used according to the circumstances.
- Teachers use assessment information effectively and supplement this with targeted questioning that probes pupils' understanding as well as their knowledge. Marking is carried out conscientiously and according to the school's policy. Feedback is provided, either in writing or orally; this almost always tells pupils how to improve their work in future. In interviews, they stated that they found this very helpful in increasing their learning. Pupils also showed a strong awareness of their individual targets and the steps necessary in order to achieve them.
- Teachers know their pupils very well. Effective support is provided for pupils with disabilities, those with special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language, ensuring that they make strong progress. Teaching assistants are fully aware of their needs and take an important role in the planning and delivery of lessons for these pupils.
- Due to teachers' consistently high expectations, standards of handwriting and presentation are very high, and pupils' work is well organised.
- Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their literacy skills in other lessons. The cross-curricular nature of the topics around which the curriculum is planned allows them to apply these in a variety of contexts and reinforce their knowledge of grammar and spelling. However, opportunities to apply their numeracy skills to solve practical problems are more limited.
- Reading is given a high priority. Pupils are given many opportunities to read and derive much enjoyment from this, which is reflected in their excellent progress. They are supported in this by the effective teaching of phonics (the sounds that letters make), which allows pupils to approach unfamiliar words with confidence.
- Homework tasks are well planned to extend current learning or to provide opportunities for pupils to undertake additional research. Staff have a very strong knowledge of their subject and make effective use of learning resources.
- Teaching is enhanced by a wide range of educational visits, which are linked well to their current topics. Pupils were recently visited by a local councillor and their Member of Parliament to discuss the general election. Teachers are careful to present a balanced view of topics and to emphasise the need to value the opinions of others. There is no evidence of the promotion of partisan or extremist views.

The achievement of pupils is outstanding

- The achievement of pupils is outstanding. A large majority of pupils are successful in gaining entry to highly selective senior schools.
- The results of the school's own assessments also reflect outstanding levels of achievement. Pupils' attainment at the ages of seven in both English and mathematics is above national expectations. At the age of 11 it is well above, indicating that they make outstanding progress throughout the school. This assessment information is supported by evidence from the lessons observed and a scrutiny of written work.
- Although standards in both English and mathematics are both high and well above expectations, there is a small disparity between them, as attainment in English is often the higher of the two subjects. The school has recognised this and is taking effective steps to address it. This reflects the school's commitment to ensuring the best possible outcomes for pupils.
- Pupils with disabilities, those who have special educational needs and those who speak English as an additional language also make outstanding progress. This can be seen in the rapid progress made by these pupils that are new to the school, as they benefit from targeted individual support. They almost all reach levels of achievement above national expectations.
- The most-able pupils make strong progress, so that their achievements reflect their potential. They produce individual research work of a very high standard and can express their opinions and ideas with great clarity. They undertake challenging extension work, sometimes in conjunction with similar pupils from other schools.
- Pupils' learning skills are highly developed. Standards of numeracy and literacy are outstanding throughout the school. Their reading levels are well above the expectations for their age and these are supported by excellent phonic strategies. Their achievements in science are particularly strong due to the many opportunities to undertake practical tasks in the school's outdoor study areas. They have excellent language skills and show creativity and imagination in their art work. They enjoy the opportunities provided for them to learn independently and their project work is detailed and informative.
- Pupils' achievements in a range of activities are outstanding. For example, they are all involved in the school's musical programme, which includes the opportunities to learn various musical instruments and to sing in the choir. All take part in plays and concerts. Parents commented on the high standards they achieve and the confidence shown by pupils as they perform in public. Pupils participate eagerly in the wide and varied sports programme, which includes tennis, hockey and football, and show that they value their physical fitness.

The early years provision is outstanding

- The leadership and management of the early years setting is outstanding. Leaders have a clear understanding of the setting and how it can be further developed in the future. All staff demonstrate effective teamwork skills and are excellent role models. Parents value the very strong links that are quickly established between home and school, the opportunities to contribute towards assessments and the regular feedback they receive on their children's progress.
- The behaviour, safety and positive relationships within the setting are outstanding. Children behave very well, both in groups and individually. The children have highly positive attitudes to learning, showing curiosity, enthusiasm and perseverance when engaged in their activities. Children cooperate with each other, share well and respect others and their property. There are high levels of supervision. Staff are highly committed to ensuring that there is a safe learning environment and an outstanding awareness of the needs of individuals. All necessary checks and risk assessments are carried out diligently.
- Leaders ensure that activities are well-matched to the needs of all learners. High quality planning underpins all activities in the setting and provision is closely matched to children's needs. Teachers monitor progress closely through regular and detailed assessments and planning is constantly adjusted in the light of these. Adults have high expectations of behaviour and the children respond well to these. High quality phonics teaching lays down strong foundations for children's future progress in reading.
- At present, limited use is made of the outdoor area, restricting some opportunities for creative and imaginative play. The school has already recognised this and plans were seen to improve this area and increase the resources available.
- Children enter the setting with levels of development broadly in line with age-related expectations. By the time they leave, all have achieved a good level of development. Many children exceed this, indicating that they make at least good, and sometimes outstanding, progress during their time in the setting. This

includes those children with disabilities, and those who have special educational needs or who speak English as an additional language, who make strong progress due to the high levels of support provided for them. The most able also make excellent progress and have the opportunity to learn alongside older pupils in order to extend their learning further.

- The children are prepared very well for their transition to Year 1. They show high levels of independence because they are expected to make choices and decisions within a structured context. They are particularly proud of their ability to organise their own possessions.

What inspection judgements mean

School	
Grade	Judgement
Grade 1	Outstanding
Grade 2	Good
Grade 3	Requires improvement
Grade 4	Inadequate

Detailed grade characteristics can be viewed in the *Non-association independent school inspection handbook* which is published on the GOV.UK website: www.gov.uk/government/publications/non-association-independent-school-inspection-handbook.

School details

Unique reference number	130283
Inspection number	462917
DfE registration number	925/6041

This inspection was carried out under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008, 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.

Type of school	Day
School status	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	78
Number of part time pupils	8
Proprietor	Sheila A Page
Headteachers	Wendy Bell and Julie Miles
Date of previous school inspection	8 July 2009
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,205
Telephone number	01775 821786
Email address	office@bickerprep.co.uk

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