

Bicker Preparatory and Early Years School

School Lane, Bicker, Boston, Lincolnshire PE20 3DW

Inspection dates

15–17 May 2018

Overall effectiveness	Good
Effectiveness of leadership and management	Good
Quality of teaching, learning and assessment	Good
Personal development, behaviour and welfare	Outstanding
Outcomes for pupils	Good
Early years provision	Outstanding
Overall effectiveness at previous inspection	Outstanding

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met.
- Leaders have created a nurturing environment where pupils grow to be confident learners who make good progress.
- The whole staff team actively promotes the school's strong values. The school's high expectations are evident in the daily life of the school.
- Good teaching and excellent relationships help pupils to achieve good standards across a wide range of subjects.
- Pupils' personal development and behaviour are outstanding. Pupils are confident and responsible. They are exceptionally polite to each other and to adults.
- School leaders have created a rich curriculum that reflects the school's vision of nature and nurture. Pupils enjoy and benefit from regular outdoor learning in the school's nature reserve.
- Children in the early years receive an excellent start to school. They settle quickly, make rapid progress and achieve high standards.
- Staff put pupils' care and safety as their highest priority. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained and vigilant for the pupils' welfare.
- Attendance is above the national average. Pupils enjoy coming to school. They arrive with smiles and great enthusiasm for the day ahead.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have made improvements to mathematics teaching. This is not fully established across all classes.
- The headteacher is developing an assessment and tracking system to match the school's curriculum. The development of this work is at an early stage and remains a priority for the school.
- The school has a strategic plan for improvement but it lacks some effectiveness in securing the desired improvements.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

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

Full report

What does the school need to do to improve further?

- Further improve the quality of teaching so that pupils in key stages 1 and 2 make better progress by:
 - embedding the new mathematics curriculum across all classes and sharing the most effective practice
 - ensuring that assessment is accurate and assessment information is used more effectively to plan lessons, especially for the most able.
- Improve leadership and management by:
 - refining the school improvement plan so that it is more effective in securing the required improvements
 - developing the new tracking system so that leaders use it to ensure that pupils make even better progress from their starting points.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietor and school leaders have ensured that all independent school standards are met. The school's management team has developed strong systems and clear guidance for the safe and effective day-to-day running of the school. Staff follow the guidance so that the school runs safely and efficiently.
- The headteacher leads the school by example. She provides leadership that is firmly focused on ensuring that pupils are very well cared for, happy and achieving well. The headteacher is supported by a strong and hard-working staff team. Everyone is committed to providing the best for pupils and improving all aspects of school life.
- The headteacher has begun to develop the expertise of the staff through linking with other schools and attending training. These links have underpinned the recent improvements in the early years provision and are also supporting developments in mathematics teaching.
- The curriculum is well planned and provides for broad, balanced, rich and engaging learning opportunities. As a result, pupils develop good, and sometimes high, levels of knowledge in a range of subjects. The school's nature reserve and study centre area provide a rich learning resource for all pupils. Through carefully planned visits, pupils have first-hand opportunities to learn about the natural world, including plant and animal life cycles.
- The school's curriculum also provides pupils with comprehensive opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Pupils learn about different religious beliefs, explore the art of different cultures and debate moral issues. As a result, pupils are respectful towards others. During the inspection, pupils on the school council explained how they had organised house assemblies and posters to promote respect. Pupils have a good understanding of British values and are well prepared to be responsible young adults.
- The curriculum is enriched by visiting specialist teachers. Pupils told the inspector how they enjoy working with the sports coaches. Pupils explained the coaches help them to learn to play tag rugby well because 'they are experts and can demonstrate it'.
- Pupils also enjoy and benefit from a wide range of visits and extra-curricular activities. For example, as a result of a visit to a sports centre, pupils learned about the role of the heart in pumping oxygenated blood to the body and deoxygenated blood to the lungs.
- The headteacher has a good understanding of the priorities for the school's improvement. To this end, she has begun to adapt the school's approach to assessment and the system for tracking pupils' progress so that the school's approaches match the national curriculum. The headteacher has rightly identified that more work is needed to ensure that assessment is accurate and that leaders can pinpoint pupils' progress from their starting points.
- Leaders have an ongoing plan for school improvement but it is not as effective as it might be in ensuring that everyone is sharply focused on priorities and their responsibilities.

Governance

- The proprietor is passionate in her vision for pupils' academic success, as well as their physical, social and emotional well-being.
- The proprietor makes weekly visits to the school. She meets with leaders, pupils, parents and carers and staff to celebrate success and to check that standards are maintained. She also checks that policies, including for behaviour, handwriting and presentation, are implemented consistently.
- Members of the proprietorial board make a strong contribution to the school's effectiveness through sharing their expertise, for example in safeguarding. The board is committed to ensuring that the school premises and resources are appropriate for pupils' needs.
- The proprietor encourages pupils to be responsible. Pupils vote for a school council who play an active part in the running of the school. For example, pupils explained to the inspector how they listened to the views of their peers and, as a result, they helped to secure more opportunities for gymnastics lessons.

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- Senior leaders have very clear procedures which provide all members of the school community with guidance to ensure that pupils are safe in school. The school's safeguarding policy reflects the latest government guidance. The policy is available to parents on the school's website.
- The school's safeguarding guidance for staff and documentation are of high quality. School staff follow the school's expectations and policies consistently and have pupils' welfare and safety at the forefront of all they do.
- Senior leaders invest well in ensuring that staff are well trained. As a result, staff show a very good understanding of how to keep pupils safe from many different risks, including when online, female genital mutilation and extremism.
- Where staff have concerns about pupils, incidents are recorded carefully. Leaders work closely with families and outside agencies to ensure that pupils and their families have the support they need to thrive.
- Leaders and staff carry out regular and rigorous assessments of any risks pupils may encounter when taking part in activities on or off the school site. Staff take appropriate action to reduce risks and help pupils in taking responsibility for keeping themselves safe. For example, even the youngest children understand how to protect themselves from the sun with hats and protective cream.
- Pupils told the inspector they are confident that all staff will help them if they have a concern. All parents who expressed a view during the inspection highly commended the school on the levels of care and support provided for their children.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching across the school is consistently strong and secures good progress across a range of subjects.
- The foundation for this good progress is the very good relationships between staff and pupils. These strong relationships promote very positive attitudes to learning. Pupils feel confident to take risks, to ask questions and to put forward ideas. Teachers plan lessons that pupils find exciting and interesting.
- Teachers have strong subject knowledge, especially in grammar and punctuation. They use their knowledge well to help pupils to improve their writing. Teachers ensure that pupils practise writing at length. Starting points for writing are often linked to other subjects and so pupils practise skills while learning about other subjects. For example, when pupils were studying 'Our wonderful world', they wrote non-chronological reports about polar animals and practised using technical vocabulary, the present tense and stylistic features of non-chronological reports.
- The teaching of phonics and reading is a strength of the school. Staff place a high priority on this area, so pupils read regularly and have access to a wide range of good-quality texts, including the classics.
- Teachers place great emphasis on ensuring that all pupils speak and listen well. From the early years, children are introduced to challenging vocabulary. For example, while learning about Red Riding Hood, the youngest children learned the collective noun for wolves. All pupils are encouraged to express themselves clearly and build their confidence through opportunities to perform in plays and other events.
- Teachers have good questioning skills. They probe in order to check pupils' understanding and they provide additional support where needed.
- Teachers set and monitor regular homework activities, in line with the school's policy. Homework becomes more demanding as pupils move through the school and helps pupils to secure their understanding of what they are studying. Some parents commented to the inspector that the school's guidance about helping their child to learn at home was very helpful.
- Teachers told the inspector they are keen to improve teaching in mathematics and are successfully trialling some new resources. Pupils told the inspector that the new way of working makes them think hard and 'learn from each other'. The inspector saw this working well where the most able pupils explored the use of decimals in real life, while another group of pupils used number cards to help with dividing whole numbers by 100 and to understand the relationship between whole numbers and decimals.
- Pupils' books show that assessment is less well developed, especially in mathematics. As a result, the most able pupils do not have sufficient activities to challenge their thinking and achieve at higher levels.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Outstanding

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is outstanding.
- Pupils really value the support from staff and the welcoming atmosphere. A typical comment was 'although there aren't many people, you make friends with everyone; teachers give you lots of time and notice you'.
- The very strong relationships in school help pupils to become confident and independent learners. This not only helps them to achieve well in school, it also prepares them well for their secondary education.
- Pupils receive a variety of opportunities to help them to understand how to be safe. As a result, they have a very good understanding of different risks. During the inspection, pupils explained to the inspector how they can keep themselves safe when using the internet, about road safety, what to do in a fire and the risks associated with drugs.
- Pupils know about different types of bullying, including prejudiced-based bullying. They said they feel very safe and 'there are lots of assemblies to stop bullying'. Pupils understood that, if they see bullying, they 'don't just stand around, they do something'.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is outstanding.
- The school environment is very calm and well organised. It provides a very positive and productive learning atmosphere. Pupils move around the school responsibly and settle very quickly to their learning.
- Pupils are exceptionally polite to each other and to all adults. The proprietor and senior leaders expect and ensure that all members of the school community demonstrate good manners. Many parents who expressed a view during the inspection commented on pupils' very good manners.
- Incidents of poor behaviour are very rare indeed. On the very few occasions where a pupil has found it difficult to manage their behaviour, staff have provided very effective support and worked closely with parents. This ensured that the pupil was able to adapt their behaviour appropriately. There have been no exclusions from the school.
- Pupils enjoy coming to school and absence is rare. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and are quick to follow up any concerns so that no pupil goes missing from education.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Pupils make good progress in reading, writing and mathematics, and in a range of other subjects. Almost all pupils leave school achieving standards that are at or above national expectations. As a result, pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
- Pupils who have lower starting points, including those who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities, make similar progress to their peers.
- Standards in reading in all key stages are in line with or above the national average. From their first days in Nursery, children have a good foundation in phonics and learn to love

reading. As pupils move through key stage 1, they become confident readers who can decode simple texts independently. In key stage 2, pupils read much more widely. They have a good, and sometimes very good, understanding of what they read because the school's curriculum provides them with a wide general knowledge.

- Standards of writing are also strong across the whole school. In the early years, children quickly develop the grip needed to hold a pen or pencil properly, the ability to form letters correctly and the knowledge to combine letter sounds to write simple words. By the time pupils leave the school, they are confident writers who have a good grasp of spelling, punctuation and grammar and of how to write for different purposes and audiences.
- Pupils have a secure grounding in basic number facts and calculation strategies. However, pupils' books show that problem-solving and reasoning skills are less well developed across the school, especially for the most able.

Early years provision

Outstanding

- Children flourish and make rapid progress in the nurturing and vibrant early years provision. The proportion of children who achieve a good level of development and exceed early learning goals is well above the national average. Children are very well prepared for Year 1.
- Early years staff work closely with families and encourage parents to contribute to children's assessment. Staff take careful account of assessment information to provide activities which are well matched to children's needs and interests. As a result, the children have fun and make excellent progress.
- The early years staff track children's progress carefully to ensure that no child falls behind. They ensure that the most able are provided with the challenges they need to be motivated and achieve well. Staff seek help and support from specialists if children need additional support. School records show that the additional support ensures that all children achieve well.
- Throughout the Nursery and Reception classes, the school's high expectations of behaviour and routines are very well embedded. Consequently, children are confident and respond very well to instructions and requests from adults. Children are responsible in their behaviour towards each other. They listen well, take turns and share.
- Since the last inspection, leaders have ensured that children learn extensively outdoors. Recently, staff have been trained to teach in the school's nature area, where the children learn to stay safe, manage their behaviour, work responsibly with each other and build their knowledge of the natural world.
- Leaders ensure that all statutory requirements for safeguarding and the early years welfare requirements are met.

School details

Unique reference number	130283
DfE registration number	925/6041
Inspection number	10048632

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	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	57
Number of part-time pupils	11
Principal/Proprietor	Mrs S A Page
Headteacher	Julie Miles
Annual fees (day pupils)	£5,655
Telephone number	01775 821 786
Website	www.bickerprep.co.uk
Email address	office@bickerprep.co.uk
Date of previous inspection	24 June 2015

Information about this school

- Bicker Preparatory and Early Years School is a small independent school.
- A very small proportion of pupils have SEN and/or disabilities. No pupils have an education, health and care plan. A small proportion of pupils speak English as an additional language.
- Since the last inspection, the leadership arrangements have changed from a shared headship to a single headteacher. Two new members have joined the board of proprietors.
- The school offers before- and after-school care and clubs.

Information about this inspection

- The inspector undertook a tour of the school site to check facilities against Part 5 of the independent school standards.
- The inspector reviewed the school website and a range of documentation relating to the school's provision, including the school's self-evaluation and improvement plans, records of pupils' attainment, achievement, behaviour and attendance, documentation relating to the quality of teaching, the accessibility plan and safeguarding checks.
- The inspector checked the school's recruitment procedures and records on new staff and volunteers.
- The inspector observed teaching in all year groups. She undertook observations jointly with the headteacher. These included observing outdoor learning in the school's environmental area.
- The inspector scrutinised pupils' mathematics books with the headteacher. The inspector carried out a separate scrutiny of pupils' writing and topic workbooks.
- The inspector carried out a walk of the school with the headteacher to review the breadth of curriculum provision.
- The inspector met with the headteacher, the school business manager, other leaders and teachers. The inspector met with the proprietor and a member of the proprietorial board.
- The inspector carried out a formal discussion with pupils and informal discussions during playtime and lunchtime.
- The inspector observed pupils' behaviour at playtime, lunchtime, in lessons and around the school.
- The inspector heard four pupils read and discussed provision for reading with the pupils.
- The inspector spoke informally to nine parents. The inspector also took account of parents' views through considering 25 responses to Parent View and 21 responses to the free-text service.
- The inspector took account of 11 responses to the staff survey. There were no responses to the online survey for pupils.

Inspection team

Carol Smith, lead inspector

Ofsted Inspector

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Manchester
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