

St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School

46 Old Road East, Gravesend, Kent DA12 1NR

Inspection dates

19–21 June 2018

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

Summary of key findings for parents and pupils

This is a good school

- The headteacher, proprietors and governors have secured rapid and substantial improvements in the school's work since the previous inspection.
- Significant developments in teaching have improved pupils' progress dramatically during the past two years, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Pupils behave consistently well throughout the school. Strong relationships ensure that pupils of all ages feel secure and valued.
- The early years leader has made a remarkable difference to the quality of teaching since her appointment in January. As a result, children make much better progress during early years than previously.
- The governing body makes a much stronger contribution to the school's work than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Senior leaders ensure that the independent standards are met in full.
- Parents are very pleased with improvements in the school's work since the previous inspection.
- Middle leaders share the headteacher's ambitious vision for the school's future. However, their roles as middle leaders are at an early stage of development.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to complete longer pieces of writing in English, or to solve mathematical problems. This limits their potential to achieve the highest standards in English and mathematics at the end of key stage 2.
- Teachers' expectations of pupils' work are not always as high as they should be in the national curriculum subjects other than English and mathematics. As a result, the quality of pupils' work varies between subjects.
- Teaching does not equip pupils well enough with spelling skills. Inaccurate spellings often detract from the quality of pupils' written work.

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?

- Deepen pupils' mathematical understanding by giving them more opportunities to solve number problems.
- Ensure that pupils achieve the highest standards in English, by:
 - giving pupils more opportunities to extend their use of English by completing longer pieces of writing
 - improving pupils' spelling skills.
- Ensure that teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' work across the curriculum so that pupils complete work of the same good quality in all subjects.
- Extend and strengthen leadership by developing middle leaders' roles.

Inspection judgements

Effectiveness of leadership and management

Good

- The proprietors and governors have taken concerted and effective action to address weaknesses in the school identified at the time of the previous inspection. The decision to appoint an interim headteacher, followed by the appointment of the current headteacher, has been key to securing the improvements necessary in the school's work.
- The interim headteacher quickly took stock of the school's strengths and weaknesses when she was appointed. She lost no time in addressing omissions in the independent school standards, particularly in relation to safeguarding policies and procedures, so that parents can be confident that their children are safe.
- The current headteacher secured further substantial improvements in the school's work, building strongly on the good start made by her predecessor. She rightly prioritised developments in teaching and learning, providing effective training and support for teachers and teaching assistants and eradicating an element of weak teaching. The pace of pupils' learning picked up quickly as a result. Standards are much higher in all year groups than at the time at the previous inspection.
- One member of staff who completed the online questionnaire commented on the school's remarkable journey since the previous inspection, saying: 'Changes since the previous inspection have been swift and thorough. It has taken two years of hard work by the interim headteacher and the substantive headteacher to ensure that progress and safeguarding are at the forefront of the school's work.'
- The headteacher has established an atmosphere of urgency and ambition in the school. She combines the highest expectations of pupils and staff with compassion, professionalism and good humour and has quickly won the trust and respect of the whole school community.
- All parents who completed Ofsted's online questionnaire, Parent View, or who spoke with inspectors during the inspection, said that they had confidence in the headteacher and her team, noting dramatic improvements in the school since the previous inspection.
- High staff morale reflects the headteacher's success in developing a committed and valued team. Many members of staff referred to the positive impact the headteacher has had on the school's atmosphere and on their aspirations for the future. For example, one member of staff commented: 'Since the change in headteacher we have been encouraged to be the best we can be, while always putting children first.' Another said: 'The headteacher inspires staff and children alike. She is supportive and motivated. She has made such a difference.'
- The headteacher has established consistent and reliable procedures for tracking pupils' progress. Good-quality training ensures that teachers assess pupils' learning accurately. Teachers meet with leaders regularly to discuss pupils' learning and to identify additional support for those pupils who need some extra help.
- The school's values and its religious ethos provide a strong framework for pupils' learning and behaviour. Religious education lessons teach pupils about world faiths, such as Islam and Sikhism, as well as Christianity, helping pupils to be sensitive to the views and needs of others. For example, during the inspection pupils listened attentively to a Bible story

and participated enthusiastically in discussions about the moral of the story, with one commenting: 'Forgiveness helps us to repair relationships.'

- Numerous opportunities for pupils to visit places of worship, such as a gurdwara and the local church, contribute well to pupils' understanding of different faiths and beliefs. Their appreciation of different cultures and their respect for different viewpoints prepares them very well for life in modern Britain.
- The school follows the national curriculum throughout the school. The curriculum provides broad, balanced and interesting learning experiences for pupils of all ages. As a result, pupils enjoy school, learn well and attend regularly.
- Regular physical education and swimming lessons contribute well to pupils' personal development and to their fitness. Pupils regularly participate in a wide range of sports, such as tri-golf, football and gymnastics, and often achieve notable success in local competitions and tournaments.
- The diocesan education commission provided valuable advice for proprietors and the governing body after the previous inspection. The commission's support during the process of appointing a headteacher ensured that governors and proprietors were equipped with the knowledge and confidence to choose wisely.
- Leaders have prioritised improvements well since the previous inspection, making sure that the teaching of English and mathematical skills is secure and effective. They recognise that they must now ensure equal success across the wider curriculum.
- Middle leaders share the headteacher's aspirations for the school and its pupils. They are enthusiastic, knowledgeable about teaching, and keen to contribute to the school's work. In recent months they have completed training to develop their leadership skills, and demonstrate an increasing understanding of their roles. However, their leadership skills are currently at an early stage of development.

Governance

- The role played by the governing body has been overhauled in the past two years. Well-focused training has substantially improved governors' understanding of key aspects of the school's work, including safeguarding. As a result, governors hold leaders to account much more rigorously than at the time of the previous inspection.
- The appointment of several governors with particular expertise, including in education and finance, has strengthened the governing body's effectiveness in the past two years.
- Governors are acutely aware of their responsibility for pupils' safety and achievement. One governor said: 'Governors take their responsibilities for the school's performance a lot more seriously than at the time of the previous inspection!'
- The headteacher makes sure that governors are fully informed about the school's performance. She completes detailed reports well ahead of governors' meetings so that they have the time to consider the information fully and are able to formulate questions and queries to be followed up during meetings.
- Governors complete a range of activities which help them to check the school's work successfully. For example, they visit the school regularly to see teaching in action and to talk with pupils, teachers and leaders.

- Teachers welcome governors' increased presence in the school and the contribution governors make to the school's work. One commented: 'Governors' frequent visits help me to feel part of the team.'

Safeguarding

- The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.
- During the past two years, both the interim headteacher and current headteacher have systematically and successfully addressed each of the shortcomings in the school's safeguarding procedures identified at the time of the previous inspection. They have revised policies, updated procedures, and improved the school premises.
- Leaders have established a culture of shared responsibility for pupils' safety, making sure that everyone is clear about the role they play in keeping pupils safe. The school provides pupils with a safe and attractive learning environment as a result.
- The school's safeguarding policy meets statutory requirements. It is easily accessible on the school's website and provides staff, parents and governors with clear safeguarding information.
- Adults are well qualified and knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. They know pupils very well and are alert to their needs.
- The headteacher has introduced a more open and outward-looking atmosphere in the school, so that parents, staff and pupils feel that their views will be counted. She takes any concerns about pupils' safety very seriously, acting swiftly and appropriately wherever necessary.

Quality of teaching, learning and assessment

Good

- The quality of teaching has improved substantially since the previous inspection. Confident, stimulating and engaging teaching throughout the school supports pupils' learning well.
- The updated curriculum has renewed both teachers' passion for teaching and pupils' enthusiasm for learning. Teachers plan activities which are often set in everyday situations, so that learning is purposeful and relevant. For example, during the inspection pupils in Year 3 spoke animatedly about mathematical activities completed during 'healthy eating week', such as estimating and weighing ingredients for a recipe.
- Policies and schemes of work introduced since the previous inspection provide teachers with a secure framework for teaching across the curriculum. As a result, teaching builds more securely on pupils' learning than at the time of the previous inspection.
- Teachers take great care to plan work at an appropriate level of difficulty for pupils of all abilities, including for the small number of pupils who have special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. They make sure that pupils have plenty of scope to tackle more challenging tasks, particularly in English and mathematics.
- Teachers and teaching assistants check and evaluate pupils' understanding well during lessons. For example, during a Year 3 mathematics session, teaching helped pupils to reinforce their knowledge of horizontal, vertical, parallel and perpendicular lines, while in

Year 4 pupils explored their understanding of 'The prodigal son'.

- The quality of phonics teaching has considerably improved during the past two years. A consistent approach to teaching phonics skills ensures that pupils develop competent reading and writing skills.
- Leaders have recently introduced a systematic approach to the teaching of spelling. As a result, teaching builds more successfully on pupils' early reading and writing skills than was the case in the past. However, it is too soon for improvements to have made a full impact on pupils' spelling. This is particularly the case in key stage 2, where historic weaknesses in teaching mean that some pupils have gaps in their spelling knowledge which hamper their progress in English.
- Teachers make sure that pupils learn how to write competently for a wide range of purposes and audiences. However, pupils have too few opportunities to extend their English skills by writing at greater length.
- The teaching of mathematics supports pupils' learning well. The introduction of new long-term plans for teaching mathematics across the school has ensured a more consistent approach. Teachers successfully combine a range of different strategies to support and develop pupils' understanding. However, there are too few opportunities for pupils to use their growing mathematical knowledge to solve problems.
- Teachers do not always have the same high expectations of pupils' work in subjects other than English and mathematics. As a result, the standard of pupils' work in subjects such as history and geography varies.

Personal development, behaviour and welfare

Good

Personal development and welfare

- The school's work to promote pupils' personal development and welfare is good.
- Pupils are polite, friendly and welcoming. They are kind to each other and get on very well together.
- Pupils love school and attend regularly. They take on positions of responsibility, such as those of house and sports captains, willingly and maturely.
- Pupils feel extremely safe in school. They have a sensible view of some of the steps they can take to help to keep safe, including when using the internet.
- Pupils are clear about what bullying is and the harm it can cause. They understand the part they can play in ensuring that it is not an issue in school by, for example, reporting any concerns to an adult.
- Pupils say that there is no bullying in school, a view supported in discussions with leaders and parents and by the school's behaviour records. Pupils feel that adults in school take good care of them and that any worries are quickly sorted out.
- Most pupils work hard and are keen to succeed. However, some do not complete work with as much care as they should.

Behaviour

- The behaviour of pupils is good.
- Pupils behave well in the classrooms and when moving around school. Teachers and teaching assistants provide skilful support for the small number of pupils who find it hard to behave well during lessons.
- Most parents who completed the online questionnaire, or who spoke with inspectors, feel that pupils behave well.
- Lunchtimes are positive, enjoyable occasions. Pupils enjoy chatting to their friends while eating their lunch. They participate enthusiastically in lunchtime activities and games, such as football and climbing on the trim trail. Pupils get on well together and play sensibly and safely.
- Pupils respond quickly to adults' instructions. For example, during the inspection they lined up quickly at the end of the lunchtime break, sensibly collecting their belongings on the way in, so that afternoon lessons started promptly.
- Most pupils behave well during playtimes. However, occasionally the silly behaviour of a few spoils playtime for others.

Outcomes for pupils

Good

- Improvements in teaching have ensured that pupils make much better progress than at the time of the previous inspection. Pupils of all abilities, including the most able and those who have SEN and/or disabilities, make strong progress and learn well.
- Standards at the end of both key stages are much higher than at the time of the previous inspection. In 2017, outcomes at the end of Year 2 and Year 6 were above the national average in reading, writing and mathematics.
- Carefully planned work and effective teaching during lessons ensures that pupils of all abilities, including the most able, are interested in the work set for them and learn well. For example, during the inspection a group of pupils identifying the angles and characteristics of more complex shapes during a mathematics lesson explained that they were enjoying the work because 'it makes you think'.
- Pupils make strong progress in English and develop competent reading and writing skills. They learn how to read fluently, and often complete high-quality written work for a range of different purposes and audiences. However, opportunities for pupils to complete longer pieces of written work are too few, hindering their potential to achieve the highest standards in writing.
- The recent introduction of a more consistent approach to the teaching of spelling has already improved pupils' written work, particularly in the younger year groups. However, some of the older pupils have gaps in their spelling knowledge, caused by historic weaknesses in teaching, which hampers their progress in English.
- Recent improvements in the teaching of mathematics have made a considerable difference to the quality of pupils' work and to their progress. Pupils learn how to use a wider range of strategies than at the time of the previous inspection to help them to complete mathematical tasks successfully, including in using practical equipment. As a result, pupils develop a more secure and confident knowledge of number. However,

pupils have few opportunities to tackle challenging mathematical problems, and so their problem-solving and reasoning skills are less well developed than other aspects of mathematics.

- Increased expectations, and improvements in teaching, ensure that pupils work with increasing care and pride in English and mathematics. However, the quality of pupils' work in other subjects is not always of a similar good standard.

Early years provision

Good

- The early years leader is knowledgeable about the early years curriculum and understands children's needs exceptionally well. She has improved the quality of teaching and learning substantially since her appointment earlier this year. As a result, children are increasingly well prepared with the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to ensure successful learning in the next stage of their education.
- The proportion of children achieving a good level of development at the end of early years was higher than the national average in 2017, with a further increase in 2018.
- All members of the early years team plan and work effectively together. They provide engaging and stimulating activities which appeal to children's curiosity. For example, during the inspection, children in the Reception class were intrigued by a mathematics activity, working intently to solve addition and subtraction tasks so that they could work out which of the numbered keys would open a padlock.
- The early years leader has transformed the outdoor area since the previous inspection, so that children can play and learn in an attractive, stimulating and well-organised environment. Carefully planned activities, such as the 'builders' yard', inspire children to explore and investigate tools and materials in safety, and contribute well to children's coordination, mathematical and writing skills.
- Adults use a wide range of activities and everyday objects well to reinforce children's understanding and to make learning purposeful. For example, during the inspection, children in the Nursery class practised counting to 10 using oranges, pegs and blocks, while children in the Reception class used toys and number lines to help them to add two numbers together.
- Strong relationships, clear expectations and well-established routines ensure that children behave well and feel secure. Adults continually reassure and praise children for their successes. As a result, children rapidly grow in confidence and are keen to succeed. Parents are pleased with the way their children have settled into school life.
- The early years leader gives children's safety an appropriately high priority. She has reorganised and updated the classrooms and outdoor areas since her appointment, so that children can move freely and safely between activities. The early years leader makes sure that all aspects of the independent school standards are met.
- Adults regularly remind children about good hygiene and safety habits throughout the day. For example, they check that children wash their hands before lunchtime and make sure that children sit down to eat their snacks.
- Children develop effective personal skills which support their learning well. For example, they listen carefully to adults, concentrate well on activities, and persevere when tasks

are tricky.

- The early years leader has secured rapid improvements in early years provision in a relatively short period of time. She is ambitious for the school's future and is very clear about plans for future developments. However, she is wisely focusing on making sure that recent improvements are fully and consistently established throughout early years before introducing any further changes.

School details

Unique reference number	118987
DfE registration number	886/6041
Inspection number	10047026

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	3–11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	108
Number of part-time pupils	8
Proprietor	Sisters of Mercy
Chair	Greg Thompson
Headteacher	Denise Buckley
Annual fees (day pupils)	£6,150 to £8,070
Telephone number	01474 533012
Website	www.sjcps.org
Email address	secretary@sjcps.org
Date of previous inspection	25–27 May 2016

Information about this school

- St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School is a Roman Catholic independent co-educational day school which was registered in 1957. The last standard inspection took place in May 2016, when the school was judged to provide an inadequate standard of education. A progress monitoring inspection subsequently took place in November 2016, when the school was deemed to have met all of the independent school standards checked during the inspection.
- An interim headteacher was appointed following the previous inspection. The substantive headteacher was appointed in September 2017.

- The early years leader was appointed in November 2017.
- The school is managed by the governing body in association with the proprietors.
- The school is non-selective. It aims to provide an education based on mutual respect, so that pupils grow into caring individuals. The school aims to work with children to help them to find their talents and to learn how to use them well. It aims to enable pupils to be happy and healthy independent learners for life.
- Pupils come from three main ethnic groups: Asian, Black African, and White British.
- The school teaches the national curriculum. All pupils have a class teacher who teaches most subjects, including English and mathematics. Pupils are also taught by specialist teachers in some subjects, including French and physical education.
- The school provides a breakfast club and an after-school club, both of which are managed by the governing body.
- The school does not make use of alternative providers.

Information about this inspection

- Inspectors observed learning during 10 lessons. Five of these observations were carried out jointly with the headteacher.
- The inspection team analysed a range of pupils' work and records of pupils' achievement.
- Inspectors toured the school and its classrooms at different points during the inspection with the headteacher. An inspector also visited the school's breakfast club.
- Inspectors spoke with leaders, staff, pupils and parents during the inspection. They analysed 42 responses to Ofsted's online survey, Parent View, and 27 responses to the staff questionnaire.
- Inspectors met with four governors, including the chair of the governing body, one of the proprietors and a representative of the diocesan education commission.
- Inspectors talked to pupils at different times during the inspection, including a more formal discussion with a small group of pupils, to gather their views of the school.
- Inspectors listened to pupils reading during the inspection.
- The inspection team reviewed a wide range of school documentation regarding the quality of education, safeguarding arrangements and the school's compliance with the independent school standards.

Inspection team

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Ofsted Inspector

Teresa Davies

Ofsted Inspector

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