

Inspection report

Oliver House Preparatory School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 212/6409

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 17-20 October 2005

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

Oliver House Preparatory School is an independent, co-educational school for boys and girls aged 2½ to 11 years. It opened in 2004 and is owned by Pact Educational Trust Limited. At the time of the inspection, there were 38 full-time and 20 part-time pupils on roll between the ages of 2½ and 6 years. Admission is non-selective. The provision for 7 to 11 year olds will open in 2006.

The aim of the school is clearly set out in the prospectus to which all staff and parents actively assent. The aim is to *'provide a solid educational foundation that helps children to learn with confidence'*. The school's fundamental commitments include: *'an uncompromising commitment to personal, academic, cultural and sporting excellence, a rich Catholic ethos, a commitment to character development and a partnership with parents'*.

The work of St Josemaria Escriva has been a major inspiration to the school. It follows his belief that parents are the primary educators in their children's spiritual, academic and sporting development.

Summary of main findings

Oliver House Preparatory School is a happy school with a strong family ethos. Pupils are well cared for and are valued as individuals. They are encouraged to achieve well. The quality of teaching is generally good, which enables pupils to make progress. Pupils are eager to learn. Phonics, reading and mathematics form the core of the curriculum and provide pupils with a sound foundation for future learning. However, the absence of a systematic assessment system and the lack of well-considered strategies for those at an early stage of learning English are holding back some pupils' achievements.

What the school does well:

- its pupils achieve well in phonics, reading and mathematics;
- it ensures that the excellent relationships between staff and pupils promote very good behaviour and a good ethos for learning;
- its provision for pupils' spiritual, social and moral development is very good and the school encourages pupils to grow into thoughtful young people;

- it encourages very good behaviour by its pupils; and
- its very good partnership with parents makes a significant contribution to the quality of pupils' learning.

What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:

- enable pupils of compulsory school age to have regular experience of information and communication technology (ICT);
- ensure that the curriculum and the teaching meets the needs of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL);
- put a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and ensure that information from such assessment is used to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress;
- assist pupils to acquire an appreciation and respect for their own and other cultures in a way that promotes harmony between different cultural traditions;
- provide appropriate training for the nominated person for child protection and the staff and
- ensure prior to the confirmation of their appointment all staff at the school have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The school provides a broad curriculum. It is well planned except that insufficient regular attention is given to ICT. Consequently, this subject is less well developed than others.

The school follows the principles of the national guidance of 'Birth to Three Matters' to plan a relevant learning programme to meet the needs of the under-three year olds. The guidance has only been introduced this term and staff are still learning how to implement the document in full. Each of the four development strands is planned and appropriate activities are provided to enable the young pupils to develop as confident learners able to make sense of their ever-widening world.

The school takes account of the national Foundation Stage curriculum to plan an interesting programme of activities appropriate for the age and stage of development of the pupils. The activities offered encourage pupils to investigate, be creative and have fun. All the six agreed areas of learning are taught. Personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and mathematics are planned effectively to form the core of the curriculum. A character development programme supplements the curriculum effectively.

In Key Stage 1, all the subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education are taught. There is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' skills in speaking and listening in all subjects. A high proportion of time is devoted to phonics, reading, handwriting and mathematics, resulting in pupils making good progress in these subjects. Science, history and geography are taught through integrated topics. However, insufficient regular attention is given to ICT. As a result, skills are not introduced systematically so that pupils can build on their previous learning.

In the reception class and Key Stage 1 the curriculum is extended appropriately by the introduction of Spanish, dance, personal, social and health education (PSHE), citizenship and character development.

The PSHE and the character development programmes reflect the school's aims and ethos. The programme for PSHE provides a good range of topics to help pupils develop self-awareness and an understanding of personal responsibility. The character development programme, a notable feature of the school's provision, is designed to develop and foster the study of such virtues as generosity, cheerfulness and service to others.

There are occasional educational visits that complement the subject matter being studied. For example, a visit to a local building site gave pupils an understanding of how cranes work and an appreciation of the need for deep foundations. Regular homework consolidates and extends the pupils' learning in class.

The school's policy for special educational needs has regard to the national Code of Practice. There is an effective system for identifying and assessing the needs of pupils. Records are well maintained and pupils' progress is monitored carefully.

The school has responded positively to the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of pupils with EAL by ensuring that they feel at ease with their surroundings. However, limitations in the assessment and record keeping system mean that the pupils do not always receive a curriculum matched to their learning needs.

The school uses national, commercial and denominational materials to plan the programmes of learning. There are detailed schemes of work for all year groups. These provide teachers with good guidance which promotes the continuity and progression of pupils' learning.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is generally good. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the teaching benefited their children.

There is a clear focus in the school on helping pupils achieve their personal best. The staff are caring, enjoy excellent relationships with their pupils and encourage them to behave well and act responsibly. The small classes enable teachers to give all pupils individual attention throughout the day. Teachers' subject knowledge is secure and they show an enthusiasm for their work.

Lessons are thoughtfully planned and a productive working atmosphere is established from the outset. High expectations of work are accompanied by the setting of appropriate tasks to support the intended learning in almost all lessons. Teachers' explanations are clear and concise. In the most successful lessons, skilful questioning is used well to review past work, to probe pupils' knowledge, to invite speculation and to develop thinking. Time and resources are used to best advantage as pupils cover a lot of work each day. Pupils benefit most when teachers and teaching assistants have well-defined roles and areas of responsibility set out for the lesson. In lessons where teachers choose and direct most activities for the pupils there are insufficient opportunities for them to make decisions about their learning or develop independence in their work.

Teachers support EAL pupils and ensure that they understand and eventually use unfamiliar vocabulary. However, support is not always targeted precisely enough on pupils' needs. Teaching is most effective where visual images, tactile responses and good models of extended language are used to develop pupils' linguistic competence. It is less effective where pupils are offered whole-class activities, followed by worksheets setting the same task more competent users of English are expected to complete.

Sensitive and constructive oral feedback is offered to pupils on their progress during lessons, instilling in them confidence and raising their self-esteem. However, at present the school does not have procedures to track individual pupils' progress

objectively through the school. In the upper nursery and reception class pupils' achievement is not being measured against the early learning goals. Similarly, in Key Stage 1, attainment is not measured in comparison with National Curriculum levels. The headteacher has plans to introduce relevant assessment schedules as soon as possible. The school recognises the need to develop specific assessment strategies for EAL pupils.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that pupils of compulsory school age have regular experience in ICT (paragraph 1(2)(a)(ii));*
- ensure that there is a framework in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and ensure that the information from assessment is used to plan teaching so that pupils can make progress (paragraph 1(3)(g)); and*
- ensure that teachers provide an education which enables EAL pupils to make progress (paragraph 1(4)).*

2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral and social development is very good. It is a strength of the school. Each of the three strands has an important impact on pupils' attitudes and behaviour. The provision for cultural development is satisfactory.

The attention given to pupils' spiritual development is a strong influence on their acquisition of a set of values and beliefs. Through daily assemblies and the character development and religious education lessons opportunities are provided which develop pupils' self-knowledge and respect for others. A well-chosen range of music is used effectively in assemblies to create a calm and reflective atmosphere. Such an atmosphere helps pupils to focus on spiritual issues. Pupils develop a sense of awe and wonder of the natural world as they explore and examine plants and fruits in the school grounds. The school is successful in cultivating pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence from the early years through teaching approaches which encourage pupils to engage in dialogue and ask questions. A Catholic priest visits regularly and provides the opportunity for parents and their children to worship together in the school.

The school promotes a very good understanding of moral principles that allow pupils to tell right from wrong. There is an accepted moral code. Sanctions and rewards are made explicit and pupils know the system well. Good work, good behaviour and helpfulness are rewarded. Staff chose stories, in lessons and assemblies, to illustrate particular moral issues. Pupils are well behaved in and around the school.

They play together harmoniously at break times. Pupils believe there is no bullying. They develop a clear awareness of the effect their actions have on themselves and others.

Social skills are fostered effectively. The school has a strong sense of community. Relationships are excellent and pupils are kind and considerate to others. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to co-operate and share responsibilities. Pupils are willing to be monitors in class and they perform their duties diligently. Lunch-time is a pleasant social event when pupils and staff share a meal in a comfortable, family-like environment.

The provision for pupils' cultural development has many positive aspects. However; the multi-cultural aspect is less well developed. A rich variety of musical experiences is offered in assemblies, dance and music lessons. As a result, pupils are developing an awareness of the characteristics of music and an appreciation of the work of different composers. In art, pupils are gaining an understanding of a variety of techniques and styles. Pupils participate in the richness of world cultures through geography, Spanish and assemblies. Some books, posters and musical instruments reflect positive images of different races of people around the world. However, there is not a whole-school approach to raising pupils' awareness of the diverse range of cultures in present society.

Suitable opportunities are provided to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of citizenship through topics such as 'People who help us' and 'Remembrance Day.' The school's charity work highlights the role the pupils can play in the local and wider community.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that opportunities are planned across the curriculum subjects for pupils to deepen their understanding of their own and others' cultural heritage (paragraph 2(e)).*

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes good provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils. All parents who responded to the questionnaire endorsed this. There is a caring and family atmosphere in the school and relationships are excellent. The parents believe their children are treated fairly and with respect. Pupils are at ease in the positive ethos.

There are comprehensive policies in place for all aspects of care, health and safety. The policies take account of national guidance and set out appropriate procedures for staff. They are implemented effectively.

The child protection policy has clear guidelines to raise staff's awareness of child protection issues. However, it is not fully implemented. The school has a nominated child protection person who has not attended the appropriate training. Also staff have not received training.

Risk assessments are routinely carried out and every aspect of the school's provision is thoroughly checked. Fire appliances are checked annually. Each half term a fire drill is carried out with an appropriate log kept of practices. A satisfactory fire report was issued following the fire officer's visit in 2004.

The policy for First Aid is implemented well, with details of accidents and treatments carefully recorded. There are sufficient staff with up-to-date qualifications in First Aid. Parents are made aware of the policy regarding the administration of medicines during the school day. Pupils who are ill are well looked after until they are collected from the school.

The behaviour policy is implemented fully and consistently. Pupils understand the school rules and know what constitutes acceptable behaviour. They are very well behaved. A system of sanctions to deal with incidents of inappropriate behaviour is in place if required. Movement around the school is safe and orderly. Pupils are well supervised at all times both indoor and out-of doors. Suitable arrangements are made for their care during inclement weather.

Admission and attendance registers are maintained in the required format. Attendance is good and there are no unauthorised absences.

The school has produced a draft three-year plan action plan concerning the admission of pupils with disabilities. It is recognised that the building would prove difficult for pupils with limited mobility.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- ensure that the nominated person for child protection receives appropriate training every two years and that staff receive training every three years (paragraph 3 (2)(b)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The procedures to verify the experience and qualifications of new teachers and support staff are comprehensive. However, not all staff have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

No.

What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?

In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that prior to their appointment, staff have been subject to a check with the Criminal Records Bureau to confirm their suitability to work with children (paragraph 4(b)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The premises and accommodation are suitable for their purpose. The school is housed in a substantial Grade 2 listed building which was purchased fifteen months ago by Pact Educational Trust Limited.

The conversion of the ground and first floor is complete. Work on the final phase is scheduled for the summer break of 2006. A class of seven year olds will occupy one of the four new classrooms on the second floor. It will be 2009 before the school has its full complement of pupils.

The four classrooms and conservatory currently in use provide very good learning environments. They have appropriate furniture, fittings and floor coverings. The interior decoration is immaculate. Classrooms are well organised and enlivened by displays of pupils' work and information to support learning. In addition, on the ground floor, a large room is used for assemblies, dance, music and school performances. The school library is a useful size for book browsing and individual violin lessons taught by a visiting specialist. The administrative office completes the suite of rooms on the ground floor. There are sufficient washrooms for pupils and staff. In the basement the facilities for food preparation and dining are very good. The kitchen and equipment are maintained in a hygienic state.

The large playground at the front of the school provides ample space for physical educational lessons and for recreational activities with wheeled toys and other large equipment. The small playground has a well-designed climbing frame appropriate for the age group attending the school. The garden area with its safe water feature, herbs and other textured and scented plants provides pupils with a variety of worthwhile tactile and sensory experiences.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school emphasises in its brochure its commitment to fostering '*a practical working partnership with the family of each child, so that parents and teachers together share together the endeavour of educating children they can be proud of.*'

The school successfully meets its aim.

The school's good communication system is a key factor to this success. The new school brochure is a useful document that is a convenient point of reference for new parents. It provides detailed information about the curriculum and is illustrated with photographs showing pupils enjoying a variety of activities. The Parents' Handbook gives further details including the school's procedures, policies and rules. Regular newsletters are sent to parents on a variety of topics. Parents have the opportunity to contact the school via its email address. In the class with the youngest pupils, the notice board prominently displays information to help parents understand the experiences offered to their children. They have an opportunity to review it twice each day.

There are very good opportunities for parents to meet staff at the beginning and end of each day to exchange information informally. Parents are invited to visit the school whenever they have any concerns. There are consultation meetings when teachers and parents enter into more detailed discussions. The two written reports parents receive each year provide valuable information about their children's attainment and progress.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints

The school has a written complaints procedure which meets the requirements. It is available to parents and sets out clear time scales and procedures the school will follow in the management of a complaint. The school has received no complaints requiring a panel meeting to date.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Oliver House Preparatory School			
DfES Number:	212/6409			
Type of school:	Preparatory			
Status:	Independent			
Age range of pupils:	2½ - 6 years			
Gender of pupils:	Mixed			
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 26	Girls: 12	Total: 38	
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 11	Girls: 9	Total: 20	
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0	
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,900 - £8,520			
Address of school:	7 Nightingale Lane Clapham London SW 4 9BG			
Telephone number:	020 8772 1911			
Fax number:	020 8675 0958			
Email address:	enquiries@oliverhouse.org.uk			
Headteacher:	Miss Sara Cronin			
Proprietor:	Pact Educational Trust Limited			
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Pauline Hoey			
Date of inspection:	17 - 20 October 2005			

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