

**Inspection report**

**Bicker Preparatory School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 925/6041**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 13 – 16 November 2006**

## **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**

Bicker Preparatory School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged three years to eleven years, situated in the village of Bicker in South Lincolnshire. It was founded in April 1994 by the present headteacher. It is housed in a Victorian building that has been completely refurbished whilst retaining the atmosphere of a traditional village school. The purpose-built nursery opened in 1999 in response to local demand. At the time of the inspection, there were 51 pupils of compulsory school age, together with 7 Reception children and 4 pupils from the nursery, attending full-time. There were 11 pupils attending the nursery part-time.

Bicker Preparatory School aims to provide a holistic approach to learning that gives pupils the opportunity to develop emotionally, physically, intellectually, aesthetically and spiritually. *'It is through this attention to the detailed development of the young child that [the school] fosters and encourages every child to form positive attitudes to learning which will remain throughout school life and beyond... We offer a school where children are prepared for their future schools in a happy and friendly atmosphere where they are encouraged to be independent, to use their own initiative and to be good mannered at all times.'*

### **Summary of main findings**

Bicker Preparatory School is an outstanding school, led by an inspiring headteacher and a dedicated staff that form a cohesive team. It succeeds in meeting its stated aim of providing a holistic approach to learning. As a result, pupils receive a well-rounded education through a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The teaching is good with some outstanding features and enables pupils to make at least good progress. Bicker Preparatory is a very caring school that pays meticulous attention to pupils' personal development and well-being. This is clearly reflected in pupils' excellent behaviour and the positive relationships they enjoy with staff and their peers. The quality of information provided to parents and other partners is outstanding and parents express very high levels of satisfaction with the academic and pastoral provision. The school complies with all the regulations for registration.

**What the school does well:**

- its staff, who create a very secure, warm family atmosphere that promotes pupils' confidence and self esteem, are exemplary role models of courtesy and respect;
- it teaches a stimulating curriculum that enables pupils to develop enquiring minds and prepares them well for the next stage of their education;
- its teaching is lively and supported by thorough and thoughtful planning that meets individual needs;
- it puts a great emphasis on pupils' personal development; in particular, it provides many opportunities to raise their spiritual awareness;
- it facilitates pupils' transition to secondary school with outstanding care; and
- it forges strong partnerships with parents and others.

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

The school complies with all the regulations.

**Next Steps**

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- continue to extend the range of its resources; and
- continue to develop information and communication technology (ICT) at the end of KS2 and develop the use of ICT across the curriculum.

# COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

## 1. The quality of education provided by the school

### The quality of the curriculum

The school teaches a broad and balanced curriculum and implements it effectively. In the Nursery and Reception classes, it follows the national guidance for the Foundation Stage and a recent Early Years inspection found the curricular provision to be good. From the Reception upwards, the school plans the curriculum with clear references to the National Curriculum through a child-centred, thematic approach. It also takes into account the national literacy and numeracy strategies. In every subject, the themes are planned following a four- or two-year cycle to suit the needs of the present mixed age classes, to ensure continuity and progression of learning and to avoid unnecessary repetition. The thematic approach enables staff to make excellent cross-curricular links, which makes pupils' learning coherent and meaningful. The school ensures that the themes cover all areas of learning by producing flow charts that show what will be learnt through literacy, numeracy, science, ICT, geography, history, physical education (PE), religious education (RE), art, design and technology, French, music, personal, health and social education (PSHE) and citizenship. The older pupils also study classic civilisation and Latin. The provision for PE and ICT is satisfactory. Swimming is offered as a weekly option. The ICT curriculum for Year 6 is being reviewed to extend pupils' learning further. The use of ICT is developing in a number of subjects but has not yet reached its full potential. Music is taught by a specialist teacher and includes instrumental tuition and singing. Pupils' PSHE is effectively promoted through many planned curricular activities and staff guidance throughout the day. The resources are sufficient in quality, quantity and range to support the curriculum and the school continues to build them up through excellent support from the parents' association.

There is a strong emphasis on the teaching of reading, considered to be '*the gateway to learning*,' and there are planned opportunities to hear children read daily in Key Stage 1. There is also a clear expectation that by the end of Year 2, pupils will have developed a legible, joined handwriting style. The teaching of writing becomes more formal as pupils move up the school, with the addition of grammar. This is balanced with a weekly lesson of creative writing which enables pupils to develop a wide range of skills. The school provides very good support to individual pupils who need to improve their reading and writing further. Assessment records and an analysis of pupils' work show that pupils make at least good progress in English, mathematics and science over time. Parents may choose to enter their child for the local education authority's Eleven Plus examination. Whatever the parental preference, the school prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education.

The curriculum is enhanced by daily afternoon clubs that are well attended and well supervised. It is also enriched by educational visits that support all areas of the curriculum.

## **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The quality of teaching and assessment is good with some outstanding features across the age range, and enables pupils to achieve well. Planning throughout the school is thorough. Teachers plan lessons conscientiously to match tasks to pupils' abilities closely. This enables each pupil to work at an appropriately challenging level. Each lesson is evaluated and this information is used when planning for future lessons. Teaching in all areas of learning is good, particularly in reading. As a result, most pupils read at levels above those expected for their age group by the end of Year 6.

Teaching is lively and interesting, and provides many opportunities to develop good speaking and listening skills. This motivates pupils and maintains their enthusiasm for their tasks. Teachers give clear introductions with appropriate explanations of tasks. Challenging questioning promotes pupils' understanding. In the most successful lessons, challenge is consistently maintained throughout. Pupils are well extended in their learning and they respond by asking more and more complex questions. A good pace is maintained in lessons and teachers and classroom assistants give excellent support to individuals. Very good use is made of the available quality resources, including the outdoor environment, for a wide range of interesting activities.

In a small minority of lessons, introductions are too long and insufficient time is left for the pupils to record their findings fully. On occasion, learning objectives are not explained to pupils explicitly enough and conclusions do not sufficiently explore if all the learning objectives have been achieved. Pupils enjoy this detective work – 'What have we found out?'

All staff are exemplary role models of courtesy and respect. They have caring attitudes and pupils say that they know that the staff look after them well. For example, pupils' work is displayed creatively in classrooms, which indicates that their efforts are valued. Teachers have very high expectations and pupils respond with excellent behaviour and positive attitudes. Teachers manage their classes skilfully and sensitively and establish excellent working relationships with their pupils and their colleagues. This promotes effectively pupils' self-confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline, as observed in mixed age classes when the teacher focuses on one year group as the other pupils work independently, quietly and with application.

Procedures for the assessment of pupils' progress are good. There is continuous assessment based on teachers' good knowledge of their pupils' abilities. Effective questioning at the end of lessons is used regularly by teachers to assess pupils' understanding. Most teachers give pupils immediate feedback on their work that is both instructive and encouraging. Teachers write constructive comments in exercise books to help pupils improve their work. They involve pupils in self- and peer-assessment. Comprehensive records are kept of the pupils' results in end of topic tests and on their personal development. Assessments undertaken during the year are used to inform the planning of future work and discussions with parents. At the end of each key stage, pupils take the national assessment tests that are marked internally by the class teachers. The results are not externally validated and cannot be reliably compared with national standards. Class teachers compile for each pupil

an annotated portfolio that charts the pupil's progress over time and is shared with parents. Reading records provide detailed, ongoing assessment and a vital link between school and home.

Teachers are well qualified, have good subject knowledge and regularly attend training to keep up-to-date in educational developments. The heads of lower and upper schools manage their areas of responsibility effectively.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

The provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is outstanding. The attention given to pupils' spiritual development enables them to acquire a set of values and beliefs and make them more aware of their own inner resources. The school provides all pupils with regular opportunities to develop their self-knowledge and respect for others. All teachers plan a moment for reflection at some time during the school day. This is usually linked to a current issue or an aspect they have discussed with the class. In one session, the older pupils were taught to relieve their stress by experiencing the benefits of stillness and contemplation of the beauty of autumn leaves. Pupils develop a sense of awe and wonder for the natural world as, for example, when they observe the changing seasons, or have practical experience of feeding new lambs and caring for kittens. They grow plants and vegetables to further their understanding of living things.

Pupils visit the local church for services for Christian festivals. Recently, they went to the Harvest festival and their baskets were distributed to the sick or elderly in the community. The local vicar takes monthly assemblies at the school and pupils have worthwhile recollections of her visits.

The school's provision for moral development is commendable. It promotes an excellent understanding of moral principles that allows pupils to tell right from wrong. Good work and behaviour, effort and helpfulness are rewarded in a 'good marks' assembly each week. Staff choose stories carefully to illustrate particular moral issues in literacy and PSHE lessons. This helps pupils to develop a clear awareness of the effect their actions have on themselves and others. The teachers and classroom assistants value what pupils have to say. They encourage them to listen to and respect the views of others.

Pupils gain knowledge of public institutions and services in Britain mainly through 'People who help us' topics and some citizenship units in Key Stage 2. For example, the older pupils discuss rules and laws, local and central government. Their understanding is further enhanced by visits to local places of interest, such as the war memorial and from professionals who visit the school. For example, recent visitors include a fire fighter, the police, a doctor, a nurse and local residents who shared their childhood memories of the Second World War.

Pupils' social development is exemplary. Behaviour throughout the school is excellent. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to co-operate and they are very willing to take on class responsibilities, performing their duties diligently. Older pupils are road safety officers and hold six-weekly competitions. Pupils in Year 6 serve the youngest children at lunchtime and all pupils are responsible for keeping the school tidy. There is a buddy system in place at break time to ensure that no-one will be left out of play. Furthermore, the emphasis placed on speaking and listening helps pupils develop good communication skills and prepares them well for the next stage of their education.

Provision for pupils' cultural development is good. They participate in the richness of world cultures through history, geography, RE and PSHE. For example, later in the term, the pupils in Years 3 and 4 will study life in Kenya. Pupils study the major world faiths, and have recently looked at festivals such as the Passover, Eid and Divali. Pupils in Key Stage 1 learn about the clothes and foods of other cultures. The school has a growing bank of multi-cultural books and resources to support this area of the curriculum.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

The school promotes the welfare, health and safety of its pupils very effectively. A good range of useful policies that aim to minimise risks incurred by pupils at all times is in place. The school has suitable First Aid procedures. Its procedures for child protection are in line with the latest legislation. It meets all fire safety regulations. Pupils, staff and parents report that they appreciate the safe, caring, family environment provided by the school. They feel that the school helps pupils settle in well when they join the school. The procedures in place to facilitate the transition of pupils to secondary school show outstanding care. The school strives to promote healthy living and eating and ensures that all pupils have fruit snacks and nutritious lunches.

The behaviour policy reflects the school's ethos and is implemented consistently in and out of lessons. Staff are excellent role models and have very high expectations. As a result, pupils are very well behaved, self-disciplined and show consideration to others. Pupils are closely supervised throughout the day, in and out of school. Owing to the day-to-day level of care provided by class teachers, problems are addressed very quickly and there has been no need for serious sanctions. One pupil said, '*teachers sort out any problem!*'

The school keeps admission and attendance registers in conformity with the regulations. It has sensible plans to improve accessibility to the premises for disabled people and has thought how it would make the curriculum accessible to pupils with a disability.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff**

The school has recently updated its recruitment procedure and has rigorous procedures in place to carry out all the necessary checks on staff prior to their employment to verify their suitability to work with children.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The premises and accommodation are fit for purpose. The school is housed in an attractive Victorian building that was originally a school for poor children. It has been adapted successfully into an appropriate setting for primary age pupils. It provides a colourful and attractive learning environment. The accommodation is compact and the school makes the best use of what is available. The nursery and classrooms are suitable in size for the number of pupils on roll. The small group of reception pupils are taught in the entrance hall. This is not ideal, but the area is well organised. In addition, the reception children assemble every morning in a small area in the nursery where they also eat lunch. This is a good transition strategy to ease the move from nursery to reception. Carpeting and new furniture throughout the school have improved the provision for both staff and pupils. The school is well maintained, clean and tidy. There are sufficient toilets and hand-washing facilities.

There is a small hard-surfaced area to the front of the school which is used for break times, PE and games. At the rear, there is an attractive area with paving and grass used for similar activities. There are mature trees to provide shade in summer and seating provided by the parents' association. A further asset to the provision is the use of an environmental area nearby for creative work, environmental studies and sports. When the weather is inclement, the pupils have PE or dance in their classrooms. In practice, this works well but involves staff in furniture removal.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school's range of information for parents and other partners is outstanding. The school recognises the crucial role which parents play in their children's education and provides them with explicit details of topics to be taught each term and a weekly overview of the programme of study. A home/school planner, in use throughout the school, provides important two-way communication with parents who cannot come into school on a regular basis. The prospectus provides parents with all the information required by the regulations. An informative termly newsletter, supplemented by occasional letters from the headteacher, keeps parents well



informed of the life of the school. Letters are sent periodically to reinforce some of the school's policies such as the encouragement of good attendance.

There are two well-attended meetings for parents, in the autumn and the spring, at which pupils' progress is discussed. An annual report for each pupil, indicating academic and personal progress, is provided in the summer term. Parents can request a meeting to discuss their child's annual report. The vast majority of parents feel they are kept well-informed about their child's progress, are very positive and praise the work of the school. The headteacher keeps the community fully informed about the school with a monthly written contribution to the parish magazine.

Through its very good community links, the school helps parents make informed choices about their children's next school. The information supplied to secondary schools and parents when pupils transfer is outstanding. It includes exemplary information on both the pupil's academic achievement and personal development.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

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

The school has effective procedures for handling complaints. As a result of its outstanding partnership with parents, there has been no need for parents to raise complaints over the last few years.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Bicker Preparatory School
DfES Number:	925/6041
Type of school:	Preparatory Day
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 – 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 28    Girls: 34    Total: 62
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 5    Girls: 6    Total: 11
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 1    Girls: 0    Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,435 (nursery full-time), £22.00/day or £13.00/session (nursery part-time), £3,540 (Upper School)
Address of school:	School Lane Bicker Nr. Boston Lincolnshire PE20 3DW
Telephone number:	01775 821 786
Fax number:	01775 821 786
Email address:	bickeprep@fsmail.net
Headteacher:	Mrs Sheila A Page
Proprietor:	Mrs Sheila A Page
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Michèle Messaoudi
Date of inspection:	13 - 16 November 2006

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