

Inspection report

Bury Catholic Preparatory School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 351/6000

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 27 - 30 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

Bury Catholic Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between 3 and 11 years. There are 73 boys and 62 girls on roll, twenty of whom are in the nursery. Two pupils have statements of special educational need. The school was founded by a religious order in 1943 as a preparatory school for girls. The school is selective and welcomes pupils of other denominations. It is situated close to the centre of Bury and serves Bury, Bolton, Rochdale, Rossendale and Manchester and is unique as a Catholic preparatory school in this area.

The school aims *'to educate all our children in a secure and loving environment, working together to ensure that we provide the positive experiences of success that give confidence and motivation for future learning.'*

Summary of main findings

Bury Catholic Preparatory School provides an outstanding quality of education which is due, in no small measure, to the inspiring leadership given by the headteacher. She ensures that the school is successful in meeting its aims. Curriculum provision is excellent and teaching is extremely good, with many outstanding features. This enables pupils to make good or better progress as they move through the school. The happy family atmosphere promotes the pupils' personal development successfully. Pupils become mature, responsible young people. Their behaviour is exemplary and they value each other and their teachers. Parents appreciate their positive relationships with staff and speak very highly of the school.

What the school does well:

- it provides a wide-ranging and interesting curriculum;
- its teachers are hard-working, committed and enthusiastic, and are therefore highly effective;
- it gives pupils clear spiritual guidance;
- it encourages the pupils' exemplary behaviour and sense of responsibility;
- it places great emphasis on the pupils' welfare, health and safety ; and

- it keeps parents fully informed about and involved in the life of the school.

Next Steps

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

- develop the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) further and promote its use in all subjects; and
- analyse more rigorously the information gained from assessments to evaluate pupils' progress over time.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

Bury Catholic Preparatory School provides an outstanding curriculum. It is planned most effectively and offers a broad range of subjects with a careful balance of time given to each. As a result, pupils make good or better progress as they move through the school. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, the vast majority of parents state that their child is making good progress.

The school takes full account of the curriculum guidance for the Foundation Stage to plan a most interesting and imaginative programme of activities totally appropriate for the age and stage of development of pupils in the nursery and reception class. The activities encourage pupils to investigate, be creative and have fun. All the six nationally recommended areas of learning are taught. Personal, social and emotional development, communication, language and literacy and mathematical development are planned effectively to form the core of the curriculum. Planning for knowledge and understanding of the world and creative and physical development are thoughtfully woven into daily activities so that pupils are actively involved in their learning in a stimulating environment. The vast majority of pupils exceed the early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1.

In key stages 1 and 2, all subjects of the National Curriculum and religious education (RE) are taught. Whenever possible there is a strong emphasis on developing pupils' key skills, such as speaking and listening and numeracy. A high proportion of time is devoted to phonics, reading, handwriting and mathematics, resulting in pupils making at least good progress. Currently the school has a particular focus on writing, in order to raise the quality of this important skill. In Key Stage 2, the pupils learn French and also have the opportunity to have swimming lessons. Appropriate emphasis is given to pupils using technical language in ICT, mathematics and science. Parents agree that regular homework consolidates and extends the pupils' learning in class. Subject co-ordinators conscientiously monitor planning, teaching and the use of resources for their subjects.

The school places great importance on creative development. For example, singing is promoted and the whole school is involved in musical productions. There is specialist music teaching in the Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1. Provision for art is good and the school is working towards an *Artsmark* award. Each classroom has two computers which are used effectively to support most, but not all, subjects. Specialist coaching is provided for games from Years 1 to 6.

The school's programmes for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship clearly reflect its aims and ethos. The school has the Healthy Schools Award. Pupils have a good understanding of the importance of a healthy diet through a 'healthy eating week' and the 'healthy tuck shop', suggested by the school council. They are developing a good understanding of how to keep themselves fit and safe and are keen to take responsibility for their actions. The school is helping them to be

confident learners, able to make sense of their ever-widening world. Topics such as 'People who help us' provide suitable opportunities for the younger pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding of citizenship. Older pupils learn about law and order and how the electoral system works through relevant activities such as voting for the school council.

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 all pupils. There are good procedures for those pupils who need extra support. All the requirements of their statements of special educational need are fulfilled conscientiously for the two pupils concerned.

There is a very good range of lunch-time clubs which include badminton, chess, computer and flute. A fencing club takes place before school and after school pupils can join in netball, ballet, football, choir and cookery. There is a new gardening club. Boys in Year 4 have been running their own 'Rocks and Soil' club for those with an interest in fossils and history. Educational visits complement the pupils' studies. For example, pupils in Year 6 visit Blackburn Rovers' ground at Ewood Park each autumn to take part in science and ICT within a sports context. Pupils visit a national ballet production followed by workshops. A residential visit for the pupils in Year 6 provides opportunities for active pursuits and confidence building.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The quality of teaching is extremely good and has many outstanding features. The teachers plan their lessons carefully and thoroughly, identifying what the pupils will learn and sharing this with them at the beginning of the lesson. They follow this up with checking what the pupils have learnt at the end.

The teachers are well informed, enthusiastic and committed. They successfully convey this enthusiasm to the pupils. They know the pupils very well and use this information wisely to plan the activities which the pupils will do in the lesson. This enables pupils to increase their knowledge, understanding and skills. Teachers plan interesting work, which matches the pupils' capabilities and which, in many cases, they can do independently. This encourages the pupils to think for themselves and build upon their previous learning. It also helps prepare them well for the next stage of their education. Pupils report that teachers help them to learn and explain things clearly.

The teachers set a good pace to lessons, which start and finish promptly. The school day runs smoothly. Pupils know what they will be doing next and get themselves organised. They find the pictorial lesson timetable useful. The classrooms are attractively decorated with well-mounted examples of pupils' work, celebrating their achievement.

Pupils know they are in school to learn and to work hard, they need little reminding to do so with only the occasional '*keep your noses to the grindstone*', used in a humorous way to encourage them to complete their task. Staff set high expectations

for both work and behaviour and pupils respond by working hard and behaving very well. There is a friendly, relaxed, yet purposeful working atmosphere in lessons.

Pupils are currently set termly targets for writing and half-termly targets for mental mathematics. They know their targets, record them in their books, share them with their parents and review them regularly with their teachers. The use of these short-term targets is proving effective. It helps pupils to begin to judge their own work. Pupils work well together in pairs and small groups and they enjoy the opportunity to discuss the work with their classmates. Homework is used effectively from Year 1 to extend the pupils' learning. Pupils are grouped within the class for literacy and numeracy, this ensures that the work given to them by the teachers matches their ability. Pupils respond readily to the challenges set. They are confident to ask questions if they do not understand and they show perseverance in their work. The teachers challenge the more able pupils with appropriate work. The class teachers and assistants give very good support to those pupils who need additional help.

Resources are plentiful and are used effectively to support the pupils' learning. ICT is used well for the teaching of specific skills and pupils use it effectively when playing educational games or checking for information. The school does not yet have sufficient computers and this limits their use in all subjects to support learning.

There is conscientious and effective assessment of pupils' learning. Teachers use effectively targeted questions to check if pupils understand the lesson. They undertake a wide range of assessment procedures including the Foundation Stage profile, diagnostic tests, end of unit tests and national test levels to give an accurate picture of each pupil's progress. Currently this information is analysed but as pupils move through year groups their progress over time does not receive a sufficiently rigorous analysis. This information is shared with parents at regular intervals through consultation evenings and detailed informative reports. The pupils in Year 6 are well prepared for the entrance exams to local independent schools. All the pupils are successful at gaining a place at the school of their choice.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school makes an outstanding contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils. They grow in self-confidence and take pride in themselves as they move up through the school. Parents say that their children really enjoy coming to school and the pupils agree. One pupil states: *'I like my school. It is fun. We do fun things, but not dangerous – we don't make fireworks'*. Through the school's Catholic foundation pupils are given clear religious and moral guidance with which to make choices in their everyday lives and in their relationships with others. The attention given to pupils' spiritual development is a strong influence on their personal development.

The pupils are taught to value their own culture and that of others of different backgrounds. Study of world faiths and other cultures in RE, assemblies, history, geography and French is given a high profile and the pupils have a growing awareness of their place in a multi-cultural world. The 'World Religions Study week' culminated in the pupils sharing food, stories, music and an understanding of the festivals that take place. Music lessons make a good contribution to their development and in art, pupils gain an understanding of a variety of techniques and styles from renowned artists.

Fund-raising for charities here and overseas, is a regular feature of school life, often organised by the pupils themselves. They are fully aware that there are those less fortunate than themselves. All pupils are provided with regular opportunities to develop their self-knowledge and respect for others. They develop a sense of awe and wonder when, for example, they observe the changing seasons or successfully make a buzzer work from an electrical circuit in science.

Pupils' social development is excellent and they develop into mature and responsible young people. Teachers provide regular opportunities for pupils to co-operate and they are very willing to take on class responsibilities, performing their duties diligently. Each class has roles of responsibility for pupils, culminating in Year 6 pupils playing an important part in the day-to-day smooth running of the school. The emphasis placed on speaking and listening helps pupils to develop good communication skills and prepares them well for the next stage of their education. The school council provides pupils with a voice in the management of the school. They have produced an informative booklet for new pupils and have made several relevant suggestions for improvement to the headteacher, such as the 'healthy tuck shop' and litter collection. After-school clubs provide pupils with good opportunities to play and work together harmoniously.

Good work, good behaviour and helpfulness are rewarded. Staff choose stories carefully, for example, in assemblies, to illustrate particular moral issues. This helps pupils to develop a clear awareness of the effect their actions have on themselves and others. The school promotes a very good understanding of moral principles that allows pupils to tell right from wrong. Parents agree unanimously that pupils behave well in school and that staff expect their children to work hard and do their best.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school has made outstanding provision for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. The school is a safe place in which to work and learn. There is a range of carefully thought out policies, which have been implemented effectively; these include anti-bullying, the welfare, health and safety of pupils on visits outside school, behaviour and child protection. The named child protection officer is well informed and all the staff are up-to-date with current training. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to managing behaviour and the pupils' behaviour is

exemplary both in lessons and around the school. All pupils' activities both on and off the school site have had thorough risk assessments.

The school is vigilant in ensuring fire safety, all fire risk assessments have been carried out thoroughly; fire appliances are checked annually and regular fire drills are carried out conscientiously and carefully documented. Good provision is made for First Aid with trained staff and well-stocked First Aid boxes located where needed. Pupils are very well supervised at all times when they are on school premises. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act and has commissioned an independent survey to ensure that it has done all it can to meet the requirements.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The school is run as a limited company. All staff have been subject to satisfactory clearance with the Criminal Records Bureau. For new staff, the school carries out appropriate checks on identity, previous employment history and qualifications.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school's premises and accommodation are suitable for its purpose. It is housed in a large Victorian house with several single storey buildings across the playground. This provides suitably sized classrooms and a spacious hall. The Nursery and Reception class make effective use of part of these buildings. Recently, the school acquired land on which to build a new school, subject to planning approval. The directors have assured parents that the present school will function until the new school is ready for occupation. The beautiful stained glass in the present building is to be incorporated in the new premises.

Suitable arrangements for emergency evacuations are in place. There is an appropriate number of classrooms for the current numbers on roll. The 'Busy Bees before and after-school club' takes place in the hall, which is also used effectively for assemblies, physical education and school productions.

The school provides a colourful and attractive learning environment. The accommodation in both buildings is enhanced by stimulating displays of pupils' work. The school is well maintained, clean and tidy. There are sufficient toilets and hand-washing facilities. Provision for pupils who are ill is suitable.

Outdoor play provision is very good for Nursery and Reception pupils. They have their own enclosed, attractive, soft-surfaced area. The playground for older pupils is spacious with seating provided around the area. The Arden garden is highly thought of by pupils who are timetabled to spend time there for reading and other quiet pursuits.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

The school provides an excellent range of information for parents and prospective parents. There is an attractive, detailed prospectus, which gives a very good flavour of life at the school; this is reinforced by the informative school website. Parents have regular newsletters not only from the school but also from the chair of the directors keeping them up-to-date with developments. There are informative notice boards and many attractive photographic displays of pupils' activities around the school. There is an active parents' association which helps to raise funds for the school and to organise social events for both the parents and pupils, such as the recent 'treasure hunt'. The school values the contribution that parents make and is successful in its efforts to communicate well with them and involve them in their children's learning. Parents are given two reports each year and have opportunities both at formal consultation evenings and through informal meetings with staff to know the progress their children are making. Parents are invited to introductory evenings on aspects of the curriculum, such as the Foundation Stage curriculum before their child joins the nursery or reception class. The school provides helpful guidance as to which school each pupil would be most suited to transfer to after they leave at the end of Year 6. In addition, parents are given helpful guidance such as an explanation of the testing system used by the school and how it relates to national tests. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their child's education. The school has also sent out its own questionnaires to parents and pupils, and after careful analysis, it puts into practice some useful suggestions for improvement, such as requested guidance in Year 5 on options and transition to senior school.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The procedures comply fully with the regulations and specify clear time scales for the informal and formal stages of any complaint.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	Bury Catholic Preparatory School
DfES Number:	351/6000
Type of school:	Primary Day School
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 - 11 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 73 Girls: 62 Total: 135
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 2 Girls: 0 Total: 2
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 2 Girls: 0 Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,720
Address of school:	Arden House Manchester Road Bury Lancs BL9 9BH
Telephone number:	0161 764 2346
Fax number:	0161 764 2346
Email address:	admin@burycatholicprepschool.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mrs Anne Dean
Proprietor:	Bury Catholic Preparatory School Ltd
Reporting Inspector:	Mrs Cecile Corfield
Date of inspection:	27 - 30 November 2006

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