

Inspection report
St. Peter's Independent
School

Independent school
DfES ref no: 884/6007

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 20 - 23 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

St. Peter's Independent School is a co-educational school with pupils from 4 to 18 years. It is owned by St. Peter's School Trust which is a non-profit making body. At the moment there are 140 pupils on the roll including 78 boys and 62 girls. The school population consists of a rich mixture of cultures. It is a mixed ability school and pupils are admitted after being interviewed. There are presently two pupils with statements of special educational needs. There are eight full-time teachers, including the headmaster and nine part-time teachers.

It is a Christian school but it embraces humanism and all other faiths. It was opened in response to local demand for a low fee paying school stressing Christian values, within a family atmosphere. The school opened in 1979 in the Abington Church rooms in Park Avenue North, Northampton. In 1983 it moved to the present site in the eastern part of Northampton adjacent to Lingswood Park. Since this time, the school's accommodation has significantly developed and improved.

The aim of the school is to provide a broad and balanced curriculum within a caring family-orientated environment so that each child reaches his or her full potential. The school aims to offer an all-round education for all children regardless of attainment, heritage or religion. The academic and practical areas of education are considered to be of equal importance, with an emphasis placed on meeting the needs of the individual.

Summary of main findings

St Peter's Independent School is a good school and is successful in its aim of providing a good all-round education for pupils with a wide range of abilities. There is outstanding provision for the personal development of pupils and as a result most youngsters develop self-confidence and a belief in their own talents. Pupils are well-behaved and polite. There is a real emphasis in the school on the development of the whole person in preparation for life. Pupils flourish in the supportive environment of the school. The school curriculum is good with excellent opportunities for enrichment activities. The headmaster has a clear vision for the school and tries to find the best in every pupil. Teachers work effectively as a team and are clearly committed to the school and the well-being of the pupils. They know the pupils well and subsequently, there is an atmosphere of learning in the school. Pupils are encouraged to be self-motivated and independent learners. There are a number of issues that the school must address in order to comply with the regulations.

What the school does well:

- its staff are committed to providing a supportive environment for all pupils;
- it challenges all pupils to celebrate their personal strengths by developing their self confidence and personal qualities, that prepare them well for life in a multi-cultural society; and
- it provides a wide range of extra-curricular activities, both academic and enrichment including drama, music and sport.

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

- ensure that there is a clearer whole curriculum policy for the school ;
- provide additional careers guidance for secondary age pupils ;
- provide additional facilities for pupils who are ill;
- ensure that the paving stones on the pathways do not provide a health and safety risks for the pupils on the school site;
- ensure that appropriate medical checks are carried out on all staff before their appointment as indicated in section 4 and record keeping is robust;
- ensure that the classrooms and other parts of the school are well maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state;
- provide additional information in the school prospectus as detailed in section 6; and
- ensure that the formal complaints procedures comply with regulations as detailed in section 7 of this report.

Next Steps

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

- develop a more consistent approach to tracking pupils' progress throughout the year;
- develop further a structure for the provision of health education; and
- improve the quality and provision of toilets in the school.

.COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum provision is good and is in keeping with the distinctive characteristics of the school. Schemes of work for each subject are detailed and build effectively on pupils' previous learning and attainment. However, the school does not have a clear, over-arching statement detailing its curriculum policy. A strong feature of the school is the diversity of extra-curricular activities.

All core and foundation subjects of the National Curriculum are taught and where appropriate in specialist accommodation. However, there is a lack of structure in the provision of personal, social and health education. The school strives to teach these sensitive subjects using a more subtle approach through literature and science. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop self-confidence and skills to achieve future economic well-being. There is insufficient careers guidance for secondary age pupils although there is some informal support on an individual basis. The school has improved its use of information and communication technology as a tool for learning which was raised as an area for improvement in the previous inspection.

Each subject is planned in detail for every age group including the pre-prep, prep and main school. Basic skills are reinforced through the different subject areas. Opportunities for speaking, listening and writing are part of most lessons while numeracy is used effectively in science and technology. Schemes of work include appropriate activities for pupils who experience specific learning difficulties. Teachers know their pupils well and this ensures that careful attention is given to the topics and resource materials that support learning.

Pupils enjoy the subjects studied at school and are proud of their achievements. They experience and develop language, logical thinking, social, physical, aesthetic and creative skills. Every pupil is encouraged to discover and develop their special skills and talents.

The curriculum is enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular activities which focus on both academic and personal development. Most pupils in Years 10 and 11 volunteer for extra classes after school. A homework club in the library encourages independent learning and study skills. There are many opportunities in drama, music, art and sport for pupils to develop their creative and athletic abilities. School productions such as George Eliot's 'Silas Marner' give scope for pupils to extend their confidence, self-esteem and performance techniques. There is a range of musical activities and school musicians perform regularly in assemblies. Visits to places in the locality such as Manor House Museum in Kettering and the wider world, such as London provide additional experiences for the pupils. Opportunities for inter-house and inter-school sports activities develop a healthy approach to competition and fitness.

The quality of teaching and assessment

The overall quality of teaching is good and as a result pupils make significant progress during their time at the school. Lesson planning takes account of the previous learning and interests of the pupils. Teachers ensure there is an atmosphere conducive to learning in most classes. Support staff are used effectively to assist pupils who need extra help with their work. Teachers have good subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils. They work closely as a team and are clearly committed to the school and the well-being of the pupils. However, there are limited opportunities for the professional development of teachers.

Good teaching is characterised by lively lessons that support effective learning. For example, in drama 'hot seating' was used to challenge individual pupils to reflect on the profile of the character they were portraying. Teachers use good question and answer techniques to probe understanding and also develop pupils' curiosity to know more. Pupils are encouraged to be self-motivated and independent learners. In art this resulted in outstanding work through the pupils' use of good research techniques and manipulation of images using computers. A key feature of good lessons is that pupils are encouraged to take an active part in the class activities and learning process. In less successful lessons teachers spoke for long periods and there was limited scope for pupil participation or engagement. Display work is used appropriately to celebrate pupils' success and to demonstrate the standard of good work. Excellent behaviour contributes to effective learning and progress.

Assessment is satisfactory although it is currently at a developmental stage in the school. It is well developed in the pre-prep and prep school where termly testing and weekly teacher assessments inform lesson planning and identify the extra support required by the pupils. Plans are in place to continue this in the secondary part of the school but at the moment there is not a consistent approach to tracking pupils' progress in the different subjects throughout the year. Music, drama and art are beginning to make good use of peer and self-assessment to engage pupils more closely with how they might improve. There are good examples of marking in English and history with detailed, diagnostic comments. However, marking is not consistent across the school and does not always show how the pupils can improve their work.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most of the requirements for registration.

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 school has a curriculum policy set out in writing and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work, and implements it effectively (paragraph 1(2))*
- *provide appropriate careers guidance for secondary age pupils (paragraph 1(2)(g))*

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

There is outstanding provision for the personal development of pupils and as a result most youngsters develop self-confidence and a belief in their own talents. There is a real emphasis in the school on the development of the whole person in preparation for life. There is a strong, happy family atmosphere in the school that is greatly appreciated by the parents and pupils.

Spirituality is a core value of the school and at the heart of all learning. Assemblies are a special enrichment feature of the school. They underpin the school's commitment to support the personal development of pupils within the context of the Christian faith. Assemblies are inspiring opportunities for reflection and celebrating individual talents. Topics covered during the inspection included the role models of the Nobel Prize winners and the need for empathy towards the migrant Polish workers to the town. Pupils enjoy the two daily assemblies because there are opportunities to take part.

The school is successful in its approach to moral education. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and understand their role within the school community. Good manners, telling the truth and supporting peers is a feature of the school. One pupil commented that *'the school had made me a better person, with better manners and a better outlook on life'*.

The unique style and size of the school gives pupils exceptional opportunities to cultivate a wide range of social skills. Pupils are well behaved and well mannered. They are encouraged to enjoy the fair play and competition of sports. There is a school council, although this is still coordinated by staff rather than pupil representatives. The success of mixing pupils from kindergarten to sixth form at break and lunch time helps the pupils to cooperate and support each other.

Art, geography, music, religious studies and modern languages give pupils a good opportunity to explore cultures from across the world. Pupils describe how their own cultures and religions are respected and celebrated within the school. They develop empathy, tolerance and an understanding of the values and beliefs of others. The school challenges all pupils to celebrate their personal strengths by developing their self-confidence and personal qualities that prepare them well for life in a multi-cultural society.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils are satisfactory. The school maintains a high level of care for pupils. They feel free to discuss issues of concern openly and without anxiety. Pupils display great consideration for each other and their teachers.

The school has due regard to the safety of the pupils. Policies are comprehensive and include procedures for child protection, anti-bullying strategies, First Aid, health and safety issues and fire safety. Staff do not tolerate bullying of any kind and pupils feel very well supported by them. Risk assessments take place particularly for practical lessons and out of school activities. However, some of the paving stones on the pathways are uneven and cracked, thus providing a potential health and safety risk for pupils. Fire safety precautions are carried out regularly, at different times of the day and systematically recorded. Equipment is serviced at least annually and there is regular contact with the fire services. Alarms are subjected to routine checks, at least weekly. Electrical checks are comprehensive and are recorded efficiently. The school has clear First Aid procedures and a designated qualified First Aider.

Pupils are knowledgeable about the value of healthy eating and taking exercise. There is a reasonable choice of sports available to both the girls and boys. Older pupils feel that there could be more discussion on health education topics. The arrangements for the registration of admissions, and attendance, meet the requirements fully. There is a good organisation of staff ensuring adequate supervision at all times in the building, outside in the grounds and on school trips. Rare incidents of misbehaviour and subsequent sanctions are recorded.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school complies with all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *have regard to the DfES guidance: 'Health and Safety: Responsibilities and powers' and ensure that there are no health and safety risks for the pupils (paragraph 3(4)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

The headmaster ensures a clear vision for the school and the emphasis on the success and development of all children. He is well supported by the headmistress and two deputy headteachers who have clear responsibilities in the school. The school's board of management meets regularly with the headmaster and has an important role in the strategic and financial management of the school. All staff are subject to appropriate checks on their suitability to work with children. Enhanced checks are made with the Criminal Records Bureau. The school has satisfactory procedures for recruitment but these do not always include a sufficiently detailed medical fitness check, or written references from at least two referees. The school is looking at systems to improve the organisation and storage of information on staff.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets all but one of the requirements.

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

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

- *ensure that, prior to the confirmation of their appointment, additional checks are carried out on applicants for posts regarding their medical fitness and experience. (paragraph 4(c)).*

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The standards and suitability of accommodation is good, and generally meets the educational purposes of the school. The main school is housed in an impressive modern building, which includes a hall, and most classrooms including a computer room, science laboratory, art room, food technology room and workshop. A drama theatre with full facilities was built as an extension to the building in 2006. The prep and pre-prep classes are housed in mobile classrooms. There are plans to build a new primary block in place of the mobile classrooms. However, the school lacks a separate medical room so that pupils who are ill can be offered privacy.

There is no graffiti and no litter in the school. The pupils have adequate access to outside play areas and the sports fields in Lingswood Park. The grounds of the school are attractive and well maintained. The classrooms are generally of an appropriate size, while corridors and classroom walls are made attractive by well presented displays of pupil's work. The provision of toilets for the pupils is barely adequate, although there are plans to extend these facilities. The school has a clear strategy to further improve the maintenance and furnishings of the buildings and the classrooms. Cleaning in the main building, particularly of the floors, is inadequate and requires further improvement. The school continues to address the issue of cleaning and is making positive progress in this area.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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:

- *provide appropriate, purpose-built facilities for pupils who are ill in accordance with the education (School premises) regulations (paragraph 5(l)); and*
- *ensure that classrooms and other parts of the school are maintained in a tidy, clean and hygienic state (paragraph 5(n))*

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

A school prospectus provides details of the expectations and routines of the school as well as the necessary contact phone numbers. While it contains most of the necessary information, it lacks some important additional information to completely meet requirements. The headmaster writes regular information letters to parents ensuring that they are kept up to date about the school and its activities.

Detailed handwritten reports on pupils' effort and attainment are provided twice a year. There are formal parents' evenings once a year when progress of the pupils can be discussed with the subject teachers. Parents are highly supportive of the school and clearly appreciate the support for their children.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

The school meets most but not all of the requirements.

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 provide parents of pupils and of prospective pupils with additional information:

- *a statement of the school's religious ethos and aims (paragraph 6(2)(d));*
- *particulars of the school's policy on and arrangements for admissions (paragraph 6(2)(e)); and*
- *particulars of educational and welfare provision for pupils with statements and for pupils for whom English is an additional language (paragraph 6(2)(f)).*

In addition, the school should make it clear to parents of pupils and of prospective pupils that they may request the following information:

- *particulars of policies relating to child protection, health and safety, and sanctions adopted in the event of pupils misbehaving (paragraph 6(2)(h));*
- *details of the complaints procedure adopted by the school, together with details of the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year (paragraph 6(2)(j)); and*
- *the number of staff employed at the school, including temporary staff, and a summary of their qualifications (paragraph 6(2)(k)).*

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

The school has details of the complaints policy in the school prospectus. There have been very few complaints by parents and the headmaster and teachers are usually able to resolve any concerns in an informal manner. Parents have ready access to teachers on a daily basis. They can, therefore, discuss and resolve any issues that may arise. However, a number of parents mentioned that they did not fully

understand the school's procedures for dealing with complaints. The present complaints policy is very brief and has some important procedures missing.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Not entirely.

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 if parents are not satisfied with the response to a written complaint, that there is provision for the establishment of a hearing before a panel appointed by the proprietor of at least three people who have not been directly involved in the matters detailed in the complaint (paragraph 7(f));*
- *make sure that the complaints procedure provides for the panel to make findings and recommendation, and stipulates that the complainant, proprietors and headteachers, and, where relevant, the person complained about, are given a copy of any findings and recommendations (paragraph 7(i));*
- *ensure that written records are kept of all complaints indicating whether they were resolved at the preliminary stage, or whether they proceeded to a panel hearing(paragraph 7(j)); and*
- *ensure that the procedure provides for correspondence, statements and records of complaints to be kept confidential (paragraph 7(k)).*

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	St Peter's Independent School
DfES Number:	884/6007
Type of school:	Day school
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	4– 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 78 Girls: 62 Total: 140
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 1 Girls: 1 Total: 2
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3,300
Annual fees (boarders):	N/A
Address of school:	St Peter's Independent School Lingswood Park Blackthorn Northampton NN3 8TA
Telephone number:	01604 411745
Fax number:	01604 411745
Email address:	independent@stpetersschool.fsbusiness.co.uk
Headteacher:	Mr G.J. Smith
Proprietor:	Mr G.J. Smith
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Stephen Walker
Date of inspection:	20 - 23 November 2006

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