

St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School

Independent School

Inspection report

DCSF Registration Number	886/6041
Unique Reference Number	118987
Inspection number	322080
Inspection dates	13–14 May 2008
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes

This inspection of the school was carried out under section 162A of the Education Act 2002 (as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005).

Purpose and scope of the inspection

This inspection was carried out by Ofsted under section 162A of the Education Act 2002, as amended by schedule 8 of the Education Act 2005, in order to advise the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

Information about the school

St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School is a co-educational school for boys and girls aged from 3 to 11 years. There are currently 206 pupils on roll. The school's origins go back to 1899 when the Roman Catholic order, the Sisters of Mercy, opened a school based on religious principles. The school moved to its present site in Gravesend in 1943. The school is non-selective and pupils of all abilities attend it. No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school's aim is: *'To maintain a Christian environment where our children grow and develop into caring individuals, where they learn to discover their individual gifts and strengths secure in the knowledge that each has a role in the school and a valued contribution to make to its life'*. Since the school was last inspected in January 2006, the school has appointed its first lay headteacher. The school is now managed by a board of governors appointed by the Newco Trust.

Evaluation of the school

The quality of education and care provided at St Joseph's Convent Preparatory School is good. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in all subjects, and particularly in English and mathematics. Since the last inspection, the school has made good progress improving the quality of the curriculum and the provision in the Foundation Stage, which are now good. The school meets all but two of the regulations.

Quality of education

The quality of the curriculum is good. The school teaches all the subjects of the National Curriculum in a well organised and effective manner. The school is developing the way in which subjects are linked to enable pupils to practise their skills in many different areas of the curriculum. The provision for teaching basic skills, such as reading, writing and mathematics, is good. There have been many improvements in the curriculum since the last inspection and most significant is the improvement in information and communication technology (ICT). This curriculum is enhanced by an extremely well resourced ICT suite. The school does not ensure equal access for all pupils to personal, health and social education (PSHE).

The Foundation Stage curriculum is good. It is well planned and provides a vibrant and exciting curriculum which fosters pupils' love of learning. It successfully

incorporates all six areas of learning. There are opportunities for pupils to make choices in their activities and work cooperatively with one another. There are good opportunities for pupils to develop their skills in reading, speaking and listening. Pupils are taught to form letters and numbers correctly and this provides them with a firm basis to develop their handwriting skills further.

The curriculum is enhanced by specialist teachers. Pupils learn French, music, sport (including swimming), and speech and drama. The school offers opportunities for pupils to learn a small range of musical instruments. The school has a peripatetic music teacher and two part time teachers for music who successfully involve the children in local music festivals as well as producing concerts. A wide range of enrichment as well as extra-curricular activities, in which many pupils participate, enhance a well-planned curriculum. Pupils make good progress. Pupils in Year 5 make a linguistic and cultural visit to France. There is an annual residential visit for Year 6 pupils, where they experience outdoor activities, teamwork and learn about the environment.

Teaching and assessment are satisfactory. There are strengths. Both good and outstanding teaching were seen in the youngest and the oldest year groups. Teachers have good relationships with pupils and they have very high expectations of behaviour, to which pupils respond extremely well. Where teachers' subject knowledge is good, their enthusiasm for teaching makes a significant impact on the progress that pupils make. Pupils enjoy their learning and respond well to teachers' skilful use of questions, which develop pupils' thinking skills. Teachers know pupils very well and planning indicates which pupils need additional support or reinforcement in their learning. Individual programmes are provided for any pupils with specific learning needs. On some occasions, pupils complete the same worksheets, which limit the level of challenge for some more able pupils. Most work is carefully marked and pupils are aware of what they have achieved. However, marking does not always provide enough guidance to enable pupils to understand what they have to do to improve their work further.

When pupils enter Reception, they have a range of skills and abilities broadly typical of their age. Pupils make good progress from their starting points and achieve well by the time they leave the school. Throughout the school, there are appropriate weekly tests of spelling and multiplication tables and regular assessment tests in other subjects. However, pupils are not fully involved in the assessment of their own learning and they do not all have targets to help them improve; this is particularly so for higher attaining pupils.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

Pupils' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Behaviour of pupils in class lessons and around the school is outstanding. The school sets high expectations. Pupils are articulate, well mannered and courteous. They have very positive attitudes towards their work and really enjoy their learning, as demonstrated

by their good attendance. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced through their participation in drama, and quiet moments for reflection and prayer. Assemblies provide good opportunities to learn about other faiths and cultures and to develop tolerance for others. Pupils have a good understanding of the differences between right and wrong and enjoy opportunities to develop their social skills through discussions. The personal, social and health education curriculum provides limited opportunities for pupils to discuss personal development issues.

Pupils in the Foundation Stage are very well cared for and settle quickly into new routines. They are nurtured and encouraged to express themselves through a variety of experiences. They are learning to become independent, but also benefit from opportunities for working collaboratively with one another.

Pupils make a positive contribution to the community by raising money for charities and singing at the local hospice. The elected school council contributes effectively to the development of roles of responsibility. Older pupils take part in a scheme to help younger pupils to read and act as class monitors for younger pupils. The school has started a peer support scheme. They also develop an appropriate awareness of public institutions and services. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

Welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The school makes satisfactory provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety. Pupils are encouraged to develop active and healthy lifestyles. They are also encouraged to eat healthily. Appropriate arrangements are in place for safeguarding pupils. Pupils are aware of rules to keep them safe, for example when walking to the field for physical education lessons or participating in emergency evacuation practices. There is no separate room with running water where children who are ill or who need treatment after a minor accident may be cared for. The school has an appropriate plan in place to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

Suitability of the proprietor and staff

Effective safeguards are in place that meet requirements. Checks with the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) have been completed for those in regular contact with pupils and these are kept in a single central record.

School's premises and accommodation

The school premises provide a satisfactory and safe environment for teaching and learning. Teaching spaces are sufficient for the size of the groups using them. There are attractive displays of pupils' work and a safe, warm learning environment is created in most classrooms. The school benefits from additional classroom spaces

used for specialist teaching and a heated indoor swimming pool. A large playing field and smaller playground provide sufficient space for sporting and recreational activities. Since the last inspection the school has improved the provision of toilet facilities and now complies with the regulations. There are inadequate facilities to accommodate sick or ill pupils.

Provision of information for parents, carers and others

The school provides parents, carers and others with a comprehensive range of information through the prospectus, pre-school handbook, website and regular newsletters and brochures. It does not provide particulars of the proprietor's address and telephone number. A small group of parents felt that they did not fully understand the school's procedure for dealing with complaints. The school is currently addressing this issue.

Procedures for handling complaints

The school has a complaints policy and a set of procedures, which meet all of the regulations. There have been two formal complaints within the last academic year regarding organisational school issues.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005, with the exception of those listed below.

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the premises and accommodation (standard 5) and must:

- provide appropriate accommodation and facilities for pupils who are ill (paragraph 5(l))

The school does not meet all requirements in respect of the provision of information for parents, carers and others (standard 6) and must:

- provide particulars of the proprietor's address and telephone number of its registered or principal office (paragraph 6(2)(b)).

What the school could do to improve further

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

- improve the quality of teachers' marking to ensure that pupils are clear about how to improve their work
- fully involve pupils in the assessment of their work and setting of targets for improvement
- develop a PSHE scheme of work so that all pupils have equal access to the PSHE curriculum across the school.

School details

Name of school	St Joseph's Convent Independent Preparatory School		
DCSF number	886/6041		
Unique reference number	118987		
Unique reference number (funded nursery education)	EY331261		
Type of school	Preparatory		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	1943		
Age range of pupils	3-11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 92	Girls: 84	Total: 176
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 15	Girls: 16	Total: 31
Number of children receiving funded nursery education	Boys: 23	Girls: 20	Total: 43
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4500		
Address of school	46 Old Road East Gravesend Kent DA12 1NR		
Telephone number	01474 533012		
Fax number	01474 363132		
Email address	headteacher@sjcps.org		
Headteacher	Mrs Carola Timney		
Proprietor	Sisters of Mercy		
Reporting inspector	Wendy Forbes		
Dates of inspection	13–14 May 2008		