

Bicker Preparatory and Early Years School

Independent School

Inspection Report

DCSF Registration Number	925/6041
Unique Reference Number	130283
Inspection number	334292
Inspection dates	8 July 2009
Reporting inspector	Joanne Harvey

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).

This document may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that the information quoted is reproduced without adaptation and the source and date of publication are stated.

Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London WC2B 6SE
T 08456 404040

www.ofsted.gov.uk



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.

This was a light touch inspection (LTI) which focused principally on the quality of education provided by the school; its provision for the pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; the arrangements for safeguarding pupils and the improvements the school has made since its last inspection.

Information about the school

Bicker Preparatory School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged three to 11 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 62 pupils of compulsory school age, including nine Reception children and 20 pupils in the Nursery, four attending full time, and 16 part time. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage are organised into one Nursery and one Reception class. The school accommodates children with a range of additional needs, though there are no children on roll with identified learning difficulties and/or disabilities at the present 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.'

Evaluation of the school

Bicker Preparatory School, including its Early Years Foundation Stage, provides an outstanding quality of education. It offers a rich learning environment where all pupils are highly valued and given the opportunity to shine, whatever their needs, talents and interests. The school is exceptionally well led by the headteacher, in partnership with her very able heads of upper and lower school. With the support of all staff they ensure an extremely caring and positive ethos throughout the school and achieve their stated aims outstandingly well. The school was judged to be outstanding at the time of the last inspection and leaders demonstrate their lack of complacency in the way they have continued to maintain extremely high standards

and made other improvements since then. Much work has been done, for example, to improve the outdoor environment and the provision for information and communication technology (ICT) in support of learning across all areas of the curriculum. The school complies with all the regulations. Pupils and parents quite rightly express a high level of satisfaction with the school where pupils become very well rounded and mature individuals. One said, 'No school could have done more for our son than Bicker.' This view sums up the many overwhelmingly positive responses received by inspectors.

Quality of education

The curriculum is outstanding. It is supported by detailed planning and has many exemplary elements which help to ensure that, over their time at the school, all pupils make exceptionally good progress. It helps to ensure that most pupils attain very high standards in English, mathematics and science and a range of other subjects, including art and ICT. Pupil's personal development is also excellent. Consequently, they are prepared very well for the next stage of their education and for their future lives. The vast majority of pupils are successful in gaining entry to the school of their choice.

Pupils take part in a range of high-quality studies where several subjects are taught through a stimulating topic theme. Often these activities are planned around a literacy theme, using a fictional or historical novel. Such topics always feature an array of first-hand and practical experience of the natural and made world which provide lasting memories for pupils and effectively bring their learning to life. The impact of this approach can be seen in the extremely good outcomes in science, art and creative writing. For example, pupils were keen to share their vivid recollections of holding chicks in their hands as they hatched in the classrooms. A highly effective environment for learning is provided. The school is compact, but all areas are used very well to support the curriculum. The large environmental area situated in the headteacher's extensive garden, with its own study room, provides very good opportunities for pupils to experience the natural environment. All pupils are given time to explore here and to investigate, supported and encouraged by staff. Curriculum planning is very detailed for each subject and year group and to meet the needs of those who find learning more difficult, or who have a particular gift or talent. The planning is underpinned by comprehensive schemes of work that are evolving all the time, either in response to national initiatives or to meet the changing needs of the pupils.

A good degree of parental involvement is encouraged. Excellent communication passes between home and school about school life, and staff go the extra mile to interest, involve and utilize the talents of parents to further enhance the pupils' experiences. The curriculum is further enriched by afternoon clubs, visits out to places of interests and visitors who come to school. At the time of the inspection, pupils were eagerly anticipating end of term trips to ride in the Spalding Water Taxi or to visit Belton House to experience first hand the setting for the filming of *Moondial*, the novel they are currently enjoying reading together. Pupils are

encouraged to undertake extended study and independent research, for example through exploration of the 'web site of the week'. There is also an opportunity for pupils to study French.

Speaking and listening skills are particularly well developed. Through the debate of quite challenging subjects and through public performances, high levels of confidence and self-esteem are developed. The programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education is comprehensive and continues to be developed in line with national strategies.

The quality of teaching and assessment is outstanding overall, but never less than good. It results in pupils who thrive and enjoy learning. Extremely strong and trusting relationships are promoted. Teachers display excellent subject knowledge and plan meticulously to meet the needs and interests of the pupils. They demonstrate a real passion for education and for the pupils of Bicker, ensuring that they are given the best possible opportunities to do as well as they can. Adults and children alike are highly motivated and extremely hard working.

Lessons are well planned and learning objectives are made extremely clear, along with success criteria. Targets are set for pupils which are challenging yet achievable, and pupils are well aware of what they need to do to achieve them. The pace of lessons is good and pupils' enjoyment is in no doubt. Teaching is regularly observed and monitored. Verbal feedback and pointers for improvement are given and these are acted upon. However, little is recorded formally. This is also the case for the extensive plans for further improvements across the school, with the exception of the detailed documented planning to improve premises and accommodation. Assessment has an outstanding impact on the rate at which all pupils make progress. A variety of suitable assessments are used, including reading and spelling tests. Very good use is made of the national tests to keep a check on performance. The small class sizes and the commitment of the staff to get to know each individual pupil extremely well often results in individual tuition to accommodate every need and ability. Ongoing rapid and individual feedback also helps to ensure rapid progress is made.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

It is no coincidence that at the heart of the school's work and throughout the curriculum there is a strong and highly successful emphasis placed on ensuring pupils' outstanding spiritual development. There is an array of pupils work on display, along with photographic evidence and the responses' from the pupils themselves which evidence the fundamental impact of the time and space they are given to reflect in peace on the awe and wonder present in the world around them.

Observations and discussions with adults and pupils during the inspection confirm the high levels of enjoyment both within lessons and at social times. Attendance is high subsequently and pupils are highly motivated to make the most of all that the school has to offer. Their behaviour is outstanding and they are extremely polite, respectful and demonstrate that they genuinely care about the well-being of others. They understand very well the importance of harmony and tolerance, and learn a great deal about the lives and cultures of others who may be different to themselves.

They are also confident to express their preferences and opinions, and early on, develop an excellent understanding of public institutions, their place in the world and the contribution they can make to sustaining and improving it. They follow the excellent role models that all adults consistently offer them. They say that they feel extremely safe and very well cared for. They also confirm that there is always someone to turn to who will help them with any concerns, and their ideas are always listened to. They say there is little or no bullying because 'everyone here is very kind and we are all friends'. They are proud to take on responsibilities which they take very seriously, whether as monitors or looking after the lunch tables for example. They confirm that 'everybody helps!' They work extremely successfully in teams to win house points both for their academic and personal achievements, or to raise money for a range of charities.

Safeguarding pupils' welfare, health and safety

The school takes all reasonable steps to minimise risks to pupils and provides an outstanding level of care for them. At the time of the inspection, all essential risk assessments, policies and records were in place and regularly reviewed. There were robust procedures, for example, for recruiting staff and safeguarding children which comply with requirements. There is a single central record in place which records that all the necessary checks have taken place. Staff are appropriately trained and aware of their duties and procedures. They demonstrate vigilance in ensuring pupils' safety and security around the building and the environmental area. Pupils themselves are confident about safety procedures and are well aware of how to keep themselves and each other safe. For example, they organise their own regular road safety quizzes across the school and are highly competitive in their desire to know the most! They demonstrate an excellent understanding of how to maintain a healthy lifestyle through eating the most appropriate food and taking regular exercise. They are supported by parents who send in healthy options in lunch boxes. Great care has been taken to ensure that the building is fully accessible to all and that everyone is included.

Effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage

The quality of provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage is outstanding. Children enjoy a vibrant curriculum delivered through topic themes which allows them to revisit their learning in different ways and to enjoy lots of hands-on and practical activities. This secures their outstanding enjoyment of every minute of every day. They enjoy working hard whilst having lots of fun. As a consequence they make rapid progress, from whatever their starting points, in all areas of their learning, both academically and in their personal development. By the time they enter Year 1 the vast majority have exceeded the levels of knowledge and skills expected for their age and many considerably so. Children learn to behave exceptionally well as staff insist on this and provide consistently good role models. There are lots of opportunities to develop speaking and listening skills and to develop an early understanding of phonics, which lays the groundwork successfully for their rapid progress in early reading and writing. Adults get to know each individual child and their families very

well, which eases their transition into school. They use regular and ongoing assessments to plan the next steps in children's learning and are, at present, developing these systems even further by refining documentation. Adults demonstrate a good understanding of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework and of how young children learn. This, along with the very close knowledge of each individual's needs and interests, ensures that everyone is challenged and included appropriately. Adults are also keenly aware of the appropriate balance between activities which are led by them and those which are directed by the children themselves, allowing time to test, experiment and explore through play. Leadership is strong. The leader knows the setting well, including its strengths and areas which have been identified for improvement. There is a willingness to embrace outside partnerships and expertise, particularly with the local authority, which has helped to ensure that the setting has continued to improve and develop. For example, the outdoor area is now a vibrant place where children can extend all areas of their learning through exciting play activities. Leaders and staff ensure that the welfare, health and safety of the children remain paramount. Inspectors observed great vigilance with security, that ratios are met and that qualifications are appropriate.

Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

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:

- formalise the outcomes of systems for monitoring and self-evaluation, and for planning for improvement, in a written school development plan.

Inspection Judgement Recording Form

outstanding	good	satisfactory	inadequate
-------------	------	--------------	------------

The quality of education

Overall quality of education	✓			
How well the curriculum and other activities meet the range of needs and interests of pupils	✓			
How effective teaching and assessment are in meeting the full range of pupils' needs	✓			
How well pupils make progress in their learning	✓			

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

Quality of provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	✓			
The behaviour of pupils	✓			

Welfare, health and safety of pupils

The overall welfare, health and safety of pupils	✓			
--	---	--	--	--

The quality of the Early Years Foundation Stage provision

How effectively are children in the Early Years Foundation Stage helped to learn and develop?	✓			
How well do children achieve in the Early Years Foundation Stage relative to their starting points and capabilities?	✓			
How good are the personal development and well-being of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
What is the quality of welfare, health and safety of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage?	✓			
How effectively is the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage led and managed?	✓			
What is the overall effectiveness of the Early Years Foundation Stage including, where relevant, the quality of childcare?	✓			

School details

Name of school	Bicker Preparatory and Early Years School		
DCSF number	925/6041		
Unique reference number	130283		
Type of school	Preparatory School		
Status	Independent		
Date school opened	April 1994		
Age range of pupils	3–11		
Gender of pupils	Mixed		
Number on roll (full-time pupils)	Boys: 29	Girls: 33	Total: 62
Number on roll (part-time pupils)	Boys: 6	Girls: 10	Total: 16
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational needs	Boys: 0	Girls: 0	Total: 0
Annual fees (day pupils)	£4,095		
Address of school	School Lane Bicker Boston Lincolnshire PE20 3DW		
Telephone number	01775 821786		
Fax number	01775 821786		
Email address	bickerprep@fsmail.net		
Headteacher	Mrs Sheila Page		
Proprietor	Mrs Sheila Page		
Reporting inspector	Joanne Harvey		
Dates of inspection	8 July 2009		