

Inspection report

St Petroc's School

Independent school

DfES ref no: 908/6001

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection:

12 - 15 June 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 Petroc's School is an independent preparatory day school for boys and girls aged 3 to 13 years. From September 2006 the school will no longer keep pupils above the age of 11 years. It first opened in 1912 in Bude, in Cornwall, and relocated to the current premises in 1926. The school is a charitable trust, run by a board of trustees. There are currently 100 pupils on roll, 34 of whom are part-time. Younger pupils are in receipt of nursery funding. The school accepts pupils with special educational needs. The school is in a residential area on the edge of the town. It has extensive grounds including several playing areas and a very large playing field at the rear of the premises. A day nursery known as Seahorses Nursery is held within the school building and takes children from three months to three years; it is registered separately and inspected by Ofsted's Early Years inspection arrangements.

The school aims to *'help every child to be happy with school life, to be stimulated and to improve on what they can do, to learn new interests, make new friends and to learn to be kind and considerate.'*

Summary of main findings

St Petroc's School is a successful school, which meets its stated aims by providing pupils with a good education. As a result of good teaching, using a varied, well thought-out curriculum, pupils make good progress. Pupils are cared for well and are valued as individuals. They are happy and enjoy coming to school. Provision for pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The buildings provide an environment conducive to learning and the school makes effective use of its location close to the coast.

What the school does well:

- it provides a very wide range of interesting activities and sports which enrich the curriculum and give pupils satisfaction and enjoyment;
- it provides an environment where pupils enjoy coming to school and learning;
- it encourages pupils to behave well and to develop positive attitudes to learning;
- it provides all pupils with opportunities to participate in music and drama activities; and

- it keeps parents very well informed about their children's progress:

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

- attend to the training issue in section 3 of this report.

Next Steps

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

- identify more consistently in teachers' planning precisely what pupils are going to learn; and
- ensure that pupils transfer the skills gained in reading and writing in order to increase their knowledge and understanding in other subjects.

COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

1. The quality of education provided by the school

The quality of the curriculum

The curriculum is of good quality. It comprises a wide range of subjects, including all areas of the National Curriculum, religious education (RE), and personal and social and health education (PSHE). A significant strength of the school is the enrichment added to the curriculum through the interesting and varied additional activities and the range of sports which extend every pupil's learning experience from Year 3. As these are an integral and compulsory part of the curriculum, pupils invest the same kind of attention, interest and involvement as they do in other subjects, widening their experience and becoming increasingly effective learners. Optional school sports on Saturday mornings supplements this provision for the large number of pupils who regularly attend.

From the Foundation Stage, aspects of literacy and numeracy are methodically developed and this contributes strongly to the good quality of pupils' skills in these areas. Pupils develop good skills in reading and writing and by the time they reach Key Stage 3 are able to write at length to an expected standard. However, pupils do not always use these skills as much as they might to increase their knowledge and understanding in other subjects. French is taught to all pupils from the reception class onwards, helping them to develop early interest and enjoyment in the language. Work in RE gives pupils a developing appreciation of Christian values and some understanding of the beliefs of other world faiths. The programme of study for PSHE supports and contributes to the aims and ethos of the school. Physical education (PE), including swimming, ensures that pupils have opportunities to learn the skills and rules of a wide range of games, alongside aspects of personal education such as fairness, perseverance and team spirit. Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) is planned to assist pupils' growing awareness and skills in their use of technology, and aids effective learning across the curriculum. The expressive and creative arts are valued highly, with opportunities for all pupils to share their learning and skills through regular performance. Concerts for parents each term celebrate pupils' competence in drama and music and their growing self-confidence and assurance.

Planning is methodical and systematic with schemes of work and half-termly planning for each subject for all classes. Planning is clear and, where there are classes with different age groups, includes careful documentation for each. Teachers make effective use of a range of planning tools including national guidance, for example, the National Literacy Strategy, as well as targeted planning from published resources, as in mathematics. In their half-termly planning, some teachers merely list the topics to be covered in each subject rather than identifying precisely what pupils will learn. Where teachers do make clear the learning objectives, progress is more easily tracked over time and learning is more accurately assessed.

From Year 4 specialist subject teaching is increased, helping pupils to become accustomed to the specialist teaching of secondary school. Pupils really enjoy sport

and activities and, in discussion, their enthusiasm and appreciation was very evident. The majority of pupils have instrumental music lessons, reflecting the strong musical tradition of the school.

The school has a clear special needs policy, which is to offer education to any pupil for whom it is confident it can provide effectively, recognising that this may require additional support. Two pupils currently receive additional help in school and from outside therapists. Liaison and communication are effective, helping to maximise the learning opportunities of the pupils. In addition the special needs policy usefully includes the needs of more able pupils for targeted support.

Visits outside school further extend pupils' knowledge and experience as, for example in history when pupils went to the Civil War Exhibition at Torrington. Visitors from the local community contribute to pupils' growing understanding of the world around them from the kindergarten class upwards.

The quality of teaching and assessment

In most of the lessons seen the quality of teaching was good and sometimes better. The very good teaching was particularly evident where teachers' enthusiasm and expertise were used to good effect to engage pupils. For example, the oldest pupils made radios and their evident excitement and sense of achievement were palpable. In the most effective lessons the activities were matched closely to the learning needs of the pupils. Staff use effective teaching methods, mostly based on whole class teaching but with some group and paired work, although this latter approach is not used as often as it might be. Nonetheless, as a result, pupils do increase their knowledge and understanding and develop new skills. The teaching generally sustains pupils' interest and motivates them to learn. Where pupils fail to maintain their interest the pace of the lesson is too slow and lacks sufficient challenge. Questions are frequently open-ended to allow for a range of answers rather than a single right or wrong response. On the whole pupils concentrate well, listen and persevere with the tasks they have been set. Pupils are almost always alert in lessons, have positive attitudes to learning and are sufficiently confident to ask for help when they need it. Teachers usually cater well for the varying abilities and needs of the pupils, especially in the mixed-age classes. Teachers give good individual support and teaching assistants provide further valuable help for pupils. Resources are used efficiently and the interactive white board is used effectively to explain and demonstrate new ideas.

Relationships are very good, and teachers know pupils' capabilities and strengths very well. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour, of their work rate and of their quality of presentation. On the whole these expectations are met. Most lessons are conducted at a brisk pace with lessons beginning and ending promptly. There is a very orderly pattern to the school day. Older pupils respond by getting ready for the next lesson by changing for PE or preparing to move to specialist teaching rooms. Pupils willingly take turns, for example in a Year 5 and 6 music lesson when they took turns to use the keyboard to provide background sound effects for the song they were learning.

Teachers mark pupils work diligently but do not always provide additional comments to give pupils more guidance. There are some instances, for example in English with the oldest pupils, where marking is very explicit, drawing attention to why the pupils work is good and giving clear guidance on what they need to improve still further. Pupils' work is almost invariably well presented with pupils taught cursive script and joining their letters from an early age.

There are effective procedures for assessing pupils' attainment. Teachers regularly check pupils' progress in lessons, ensuring that they understand what they are learning. Pupils' progress is also continually monitored through three-weekly 'orders' where pupils' effort and achievement are graded and the information shared with parents. In addition annual examinations are taken in the summer term. Parents are kept very well informed through the 'orders', twice-yearly detailed written reports and an annual consultation evening with staff. The headteacher and staff make themselves readily available should parents wish to discuss their children's progress. Pupils at the end of Year 6 usefully take the national tests, which act as benchmarks for attainment.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school promotes pupils' moral and social development very well. Their cultural development has particular strengths in relation to the creative and expressive arts. Their spiritual development is satisfactory.

The aim of the school is to create a happy environment within which pupils can learn effectively. The ethos of the school is to praise and encourage pupils to try hard and do their best and pupils flourish in consequence. Older pupils report that *'We are like a big family at this school...we are friends with everyone.'* Their growing confidence and self-esteem are fostered through the comprehensive sporting and enrichment activities, which at the same time contribute to their increasing physical and practical capabilities.

The strong moral code in the school is supported effectively by assemblies and through the curriculum in RE and PSHE. Local church ministers lead assemblies weekly, extending pupils' spiritual and moral awareness. Pupils have a clear sense of the difference between right and wrong. The school makes plain what it expects from pupils and they respond appropriately from the earliest years. Their behaviour in and around the school is good and they treat each other with unforced consideration. The 'Stars and Stripes' awards system is clearly understood and valued by pupils who enjoy the celebration of their achievements in the Friday assemblies.

From the early years pupils are encouraged to do small tasks unaided, to make choices about activities and to work co-operatively. In all classes pupils enjoy taking responsibility for small jobs until such time as they are able to progress to being monitors or prefects, overseeing a range of practical and pastoral tasks. Older

pupils feel a sense of obligation to look after younger ones and prefects specifically mentioned their role in making sure that they looked out for any pupil who might need a little care or a friend to talk to. This focus of social responsibility is given additional prominence and importance by the annual citizenship award for the pupil seen to have contributed particularly well to the welfare of others in school.

Work in citizenship develops pupils' growing awareness of aspects of personal, local and national concern as well as wider issues of global responsibility. Pupils are reminded of their links with the wider world through raising money for Charities such as UNICEF and supporting work to improve education and health in parts of Africa. In addition, through history study pupils learn of the contribution of ancient civilisations to world culture. However, pupils' awareness and understanding of living in a modern multi-cultural society are limited.

The creative and expressive arts play a central role in pupils' cultural development and contribute strongly to their growing independence and self-assurance. The celebration of pupils' work in regular concerts and performances reinforces this personal development.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils

The provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils is good. There is much good practice in the school to ensure that the pupils are well looked after and kept safe. The school implements a range of carefully thought out policies for anti-bullying, health and safety of pupils on visits outside school and child protection. The head-teacher is the named child protection officer but has not yet attended up-to-date training in line with Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance. The school has reacted promptly to this omission by arranging an appropriate course next term. In addition, the school is running an evening course in child protection for all staff later this term.

A comprehensive health and safety policy covers all areas of school life. Risk assessments are made on all parts of the building and on various activities. These include out-of-school visits, PE, swimming, surfing and subjects such as design and technology and science. The behaviour policy emphasises a positive approach to managing pupils' behaviour. Pupils behave well in and around the school and report that staff deal swiftly with any small instances of bullying or misbehaviour in a sensitive manner. The school makes good provision for fire safety with regular, documented fire drills. All fire appliances are suitably maintained and a detailed fire risk assessment is carried out annually. The clear First Aid policy gives good guidance to staff, who are all trained in First Aid; well-stocked First Aid boxes are located where needed. Pupils are supervised appropriately at all times when they are on school premises and when they take part in school sports activities. The admission and attendance registers are kept according to regulations. The school fulfils its duties with regard to the Disability Discrimination Act 2002.

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 fully with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:

- *ensure that the designated child protection officer and all staff receives appropriate training to comply with current DfES guidance (paragraph 3(2)(b)).*

4. The suitability of the proprietor and staff

There are rigorous appointment procedures for all staff, who are well qualified for the posts they hold. All staff, including long-serving members of staff, have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau for their suitability to work with children.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation

The school is housed in the large, detached premises of a former hotel, which have had extensive additions over the years. The buildings provide flexible accommodation, which is used effectively to provide an environment conducive to learning. There is a well-appointed range of classrooms with additional specialist rooms for science, art, music, pottery and ICT. There is a useful hall space, which is also used as the dining room. Pupils can eat a wholesome school lunch, which is well presented and organised; the occasion also provides good social contact. The corridors and classrooms are attractively decorated with examples of pupils' work. The school is kept neat and tidy and generally well maintained. The school has a rolling programme of maintenance and the outside of the building is due for redecoration.

There are extensive play areas with both grassed and hard surfaces, which include a tennis court, several playing fields and additional well-equipped fenced areas for the younger pupils. The school makes the most of its coastal location with surfing and angling as part of the sports curriculum.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

6. The quality of information for parents and other partners

Very informative and clearly presented notices and newsletters provide regular and effective information for parents about the school and its activities. The prospectus gives a straightforward introduction to the school, its aims, curriculum and wider

provision. Parents responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive in their satisfaction with the school. Detailed reports are sent twice yearly to parents giving them precise information on their children's progress and attainment and these are supplemented by parents evenings at the end of the spring term. Parents are encouraged to attend class assemblies on Friday mornings to see at first-hand aspects of pupils' learning in progress.

Notice boards and the school's website help to ensure that parents are kept well informed about curricular visits and excursions, as well as social events such as St. Petroc's Day celebrations and the termly school performances. The active Friends of the School contribute significantly to the work of the school through making costumes for performances, raising funds and supporting social activities.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

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

The school has a detailed complaints procedure, which meets current regulations. A small number of parents reported that they were unaware of the procedure and the school has taken steps to address this.

Does the school meet the requirements for registration?

Yes.

SCHOOL DETAILS

Name of school:	St Petroc's School
DfES Number:	908/6001
Type of school:	Preparatory
Status:	Independent
Age range of pupils:	3 -13 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
Number on roll (full-time pupils):	Boys: 34 Girls: 31 Total: 66
Number on roll (part-time pupils):	Boys: 20 Girls: 14 Total: 34
Number of pupils with a statement of special educational need:	Boys: 0 Girls: 1 Total: 1
Annual fees (day pupils):	£1,380 - £2,145
Address of school:	Ocean View Drive Bude Cornwall EX23 8NJ
Telephone number:	01288 352876
Fax number:	01288 352876
Email address:	Office@stpetrocs.com
Headteacher:	Dr IT Whitehurst
Proprietor:	St Petroc's School Trust
Reporting Inspector:	Jill Bainton
Date of inspection:	12 - 15 June 2006

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