

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Buxlow Preparatory School

Full Name of the School	Buxlow Preparatory School
DCSF Number	304/6051
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Headmistress	Mrs Ann Baines
Proprietor	Happy Child Ltd, Managing Director Tracey Storey
Age Range	4 to 11
Gender	Mixed
Inspection Dates	9th to 12th June 2008

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 Buxlow Preparatory School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged four to eleven years, founded in Wembley in 1927 with just six pupils. It has developed over the years and since 2004 it has become a division of Happy Child Ltd. This company was bought in 2007 by new owners who retained the company name. The owners have appointed a managing director who oversees the governance of the school. It occupies a compact site in a residential part of Wembley. The headmistress has been in post since 2004.
- 1.2 At the time of inspection there were 93 pupils on roll, of whom 42 were boys, and 51 girls. The school prepares pupils for competitive entry to senior schools, both independent and maintained.
- 1.3 The school aims to be a caring school that encourages a love of learning, enabling pupils to achieve the highest academic standards in a happy, well-disciplined environment. An emphasis is placed on courteous behaviour and developing pupils' independent learning skills. Staff aim to achieve good results through a broad and enriched curriculum, whilst maintaining a happy atmosphere through discipline, consideration for others and a strong sense of community. Pupils from many faiths and ethnic backgrounds are welcomed.
- 1.4 Admission to the school is by interview for entry to Reception to determine readiness for school. Further up the school, if a place becomes available, prospective pupils spend half a day in school when they sit test papers in English and mathematics. Pupils come predominantly from families of whom many run their own businesses and live within three miles of the school. Judged from the standardised tests taken, pupils' average ability is above that of the national average in maintained primary schools, with a few who are well above. The school has identified four pupils who have learning difficulties, although none of these has a statement of special educational needs. The pupils are representative of London's multi-cultural society. Two pupils have English as an additional language.
- 1.5 Since the last inspection, undertaken by Ofsted in 2005, a new surface has been installed on the main playground, significantly enhancing its appearance and enabling much more flexible use of it. New play equipment including a 'pirate ship' and a climbing frame are also part of this improvement.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The high quality education provided by the school successfully meets its declared aims and philosophy. It focuses on pupils achieving their full potential through access to a wide range of educational opportunities, well suited to all of their needs. The experience provided is a great improvement on that offered at the time of the last inspection and has a positive impact on the aesthetic, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, creative and physical development of the pupils. It also enables pupils to reach the intellectual and physical standards and make the creative and aesthetic development required for them to enter the senior schools of their choice. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, parents indicated that they are supportive of the wide range of experiences provided for their children.
- 2.2 Pupils are well known by their teachers. They enjoy their education and work in a happy, caring atmosphere. The high quality of display, which includes a great deal of pupils' work, is a strength throughout the school. It adds to pupils' educational experience, as well as supporting the school's aim to enhance their self-esteem. Since the last inspection, personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) has been introduced to broaden the curriculum, and support for those with learning difficulties has been improved.
- 2.3 The curriculum is well balanced and ensures that all pupils have access to a broad range of subjects and activities. These include drama, Latin, and Tae Kwan Doe.
- 2.4 Through PSHCE a good understanding of life beyond the school environment and of public services is developed through visits, visitors and discussion times. Many pupils participate in and enjoy what is on offer.
- 2.5 Art, music, drama, information and communication technology (ICT) and design and technology contribute to pupils' aesthetic and creative development. In designated ICT lessons, pupils gain an excellent range of ICT skills which are developed in all subject areas, and pupils see it as a tool used across the curriculum.
- 2.6 Although the school site is compact, imaginative use is made of local facilities to provide pupils with a particularly wide range of sporting opportunities. The playground has been recently resurfaced with 'soft' surface. Emphasis is given to the fun of keeping fit to encourage a healthy lifestyle.
- 2.7 Pupils are extremely well prepared for transfer to their next schools. Examination practice, verbal reasoning tests, mock interviews and discussion of current affairs all help them in competitive entry to senior school. Year 6 pupils are given formal responsibilities in the school, and give good support to younger pupils. This strengthens their self-esteem, and the school atmosphere helps them to believe that they have the ability to do well.
- 2.8 The curriculum enables pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding in an orderly and progressive manner. High quality, well-written curriculum documents provide for continuity of learning and underpin work at every stage. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and revised in the context of the school's development and the needs of the pupils.
- 2.9 A well-established system is in place for identifying pupils who require learning or English language support, and their progress is closely monitored by the class teachers. Teachers' support for those pupils within the classroom is caring and sensitive, and different tasks are provided to match their individual needs. This support ensures that pupils are given every opportunity to overcome their difficulties and to develop self-confidence and make progress.

Individual education plans are set out well, with clear objectives, appropriate review dates and targets. The school also makes provision for the most able pupils. These pupils, who may be gifted in specific subjects, are given enrichment activities and extended work. Parents are closely involved in the whole process.

- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.11 Pupils are well educated and achieve good, and at times outstanding, standards in relation to their age and abilities, not only in the curriculum, but also across a wide range of activities. The school is successful in meeting its aims through providing an environment in which pupils can achieve the best results of which they are capable. The standards achieved at the time of the last inspection have been improved by the provision of a revised curriculum which is much broader and more balanced. Throughout the school, they receive a thorough grounding in knowledge, skills and understanding in almost all subjects, and increasingly they apply their knowledge and skills well. At every stage, application and hard work characterise pupils' approach to their work and extra-curricular activities.
- 2.12 By the time they leave for the senior school of their choice, most pupils have achieved well across all the areas of education provided. The number of more able pupils gaining scholarships at the time of the last inspection has been maintained. The achievement of boys and girls is broadly similar.
- 2.13 Pupils benefit from an attractive learning environment, enriched by a mixture of high quality displays of their work and informative posters, which develop pupils' creative and critical thinking skills. The relationship between the staff and the pupils is one of mutual respect. Pupils feel secure and happy in their lessons and, as a result, settle quickly and enthusiastically to all tasks.
- 2.14 The atmosphere in the school encourages pupils to work hard. They listen and respond particularly well in lessons when teachers have high expectations and give clear guidelines regarding behaviour. All pupils have well-developed speaking and listening skills. This area has been a focus for development by the school. Pupils read a variety of challenging texts with appropriate expression and are confident to express their point of view in discussion. Pupils also use their literacy skills accurately in many areas of the curriculum. In a Year 5 geography lesson, pupils were working together successfully in groups identifying geographical features and locating positions on a map using photographs and clues, and dialogue and challenge from pupils to each other was an effective way to work through the problems set.
- 2.15 Pupils' mathematical and investigative skills are well developed and they use them efficiently in both written and practical activities. They are competent in the use of ICT, much improved since the last inspection. They reason and debate enthusiastically in lessons, as was seen in a Year 4 literacy lesson where pupils were working eagerly in groups to discuss the quality of effective advertisements. As pupils progress through the school, they become proficient in note taking and re-drafting their work. Across the school, pupils read fluently for their ages and abilities, including those with learning difficulties. They study easily alone or when working with others, and they show great enthusiasm for what they are doing. This was amply demonstrated in all lessons observed.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.16 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding; it is much more of a strength of the school since the last inspection. It supports the school's aim to develop pupils in a happy environment where individuals are valued. There is a strong sense of community and respect for the views of others, which underpins the daily lives of all the pupils and staff in the school. The staff have excellent relationships with the pupils.
- 2.17 The school places strong emphasis on the spiritual development of its pupils and strives to inculcate this within a culture of self-worth, honesty, respect and courtesy. The ethos of the school is such that pupils' self-worth is celebrated regularly through praise in lessons and publicly in assembly. All faiths are respected and celebrated. Bright and meaningful displays around the school, and in individual classrooms, show the pupils' understanding and enjoyment of the celebrations of these. Pupils are provided with regular opportunities for spiritual reflection, especially in religious education (RE) lessons and assemblies. Pupils respond well to such experiences and are interested in the beliefs of others.
- 2.18 Pupils have a very secure sense of what is right and wrong, and demonstrate excellent behaviour. Pupils follow the school rules which are firmly based on its family atmosphere. Pupils feel that rules are fair and are for their benefit. Pupils are courteous to each other, to teachers and to visitors. Overall, staff provide pupils with good role models in their relations with pupils and with each other. In games, pupils clearly understand and implement the virtue of the 'fair play' rule. In lessons they are keen to take up opportunities to explore moral issues. For example, in a Year 5 RE lesson when discussing poverty and wealth, pupils debated at length about the means of becoming rich and the merits of charitable contribution.
- 2.19 Pupils show clear social awareness in terms of accepting responsibility for their own behaviour, and in doing so make their contribution to helping the school achieve its aims. They are very proud of their school and feel valued and appreciated. Ample opportunities are created to bring the school together as a community. Worship in assemblies, celebration of success in assemblies and in classrooms, team games, concerts, plays, clubs and form time all play their part. Courtesy is of a high standard. Children in the Foundation Stage take account of others in their daily routines, by taking turns and sharing resources. Older pupils have responsibilities, for example as head girl and head boy, prefects, librarians and school council members. The pupils see this structure as a very positive way of staff and pupils working together for the good of the whole school community. Pupils have a good understanding of how public services and institutions such as the House of Commons operate. The regular residential visits enhance pupils' social awareness and development.
- 2.20 Pupils develop considerable appreciation of cultures through music, drama, visits to museums and galleries in London, and through receiving visitors to the school. They also gain an awareness of the richness and diversity of other cultures. The varied ethnic mix of the school population promotes an understanding of these different cultures and the atmosphere within the school is happy and harmonious. Teachers use incidental opportunities in lessons to celebrate diversity. Pupils learn of all the world's major religions and beliefs in RE lessons, and celebrate major festivals.
- 2.21 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.22 Teaching overall is of a high standard, with a significant minority of lessons being outstanding. Consequently, teaching promotes high attainment. This is an improvement on the last inspection and as a result of this high quality teaching, pupils of all ages and abilities, including those pupils who require learning support, make excellent progress, acquire new knowledge and develop effective skills. Examples of informative, challenging and interesting teaching demonstrate that the school is achieving its aim to offer the highest standard of education to all of its pupils.
- 2.23 Teachers in all classes present pupils with a range of well-planned lessons that extend pupils intellectually, emotionally and socially. The bright and stimulating classrooms provide environments conducive to learning.
- 2.24 Pupils are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. Pupils in Year 3 displayed their independence and their highly developed research skills whilst using a variety of resources, including the internet, to study the Anglo-Saxons. From the Reception class onwards, pupils are encouraged to work in partnership, sharing ideas and working co-operatively. Every opportunity is taken to develop these working relationships among pupils. Year 1 pupils worked effectively in small groups in perfect harmony to predict width and measure, and those in Year 5 engaged in a lively discussion about who was their neighbour, with all pupils contributing.
- 2.25 Teachers provide opportunities for pupils to evaluate their own work and decide how to improve it. In a Year 1 literacy lesson, pupils worked in small groups to improve their poetry reading using given criteria for reference. They gave each other positive suggestions and explained their ideas expressively. Year 3 thoroughly researched authors in a literacy lesson, and Year 5 extended their mathematics work on measure well by moving to the ICT room to record their findings successfully.
- 2.26 During lessons teachers expect pupils to form their own opinions, answer questions clearly and express their views so as to develop their analytical skills. Teachers make clear the learning objectives and pupils are aware of the targets set for them. Classroom displays often incorporate these targets. For example in Year 2, the literacy display clearly shows the writing targets and in Year 4, numeracy targets are displayed and these are referred to during the lessons.
- 2.27 The provision of a wide variety of activities and the high expectations by teachers result in lessons in which pupils behave well and enjoy learning. The use of praise, smiles and encouraging words promotes responsible behaviour. Teachers make full use of pupils' eagerness to learn.
- 2.28 Teachers are vigilant in their assessment of pupils and undertake thorough, comprehensive assessments of their work. In addition, the use of standardised tests has now been established to ensure that pupils' progress is even more carefully monitored. This information is used in planning future work for lessons, in addition to identifying those pupils who need learning support.
- 2.29 All staff keep records of pupils' attainment in lessons and in their written work. Marking is very positive and helpful. It gives pointers to ways in which pupils can improve. Throughout the school, resources are plentiful and appropriate for the ages of the pupils.
- 2.30 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.1 The care devoted to pupils and the attention to their welfare, health and safety are outstanding. The concern of the staff for pupils and the happy family atmosphere which pervades the community both strongly support the school's aims to provide an environment in which pupils flourish. The arrangements for pastoral care, welfare, and health and safety are an important feature of the school. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection.
- 3.2 Pupils are guided well through carefully thought out pastoral arrangements. All staff are dedicated and diligent in their care for pupils, and form teachers supervise the efficient pastoral care system well. Pupils receive help and guidance from a full range of adults, from break and lunch time helpers through to the headmistress. PSHCE and RE lessons and house meetings all provide opportunities for pupils to discuss their concerns and ideas, thereby strengthening and reinforcing the school's pastoral system most effectively.
- 3.3 Members of staff set a good example and treat all pupils with respect, and pupils feel valued by their teachers and are happy. Relationships are warm and mutually supportive. In turn, pupils are supportive of each other. Pupils' views are overwhelmingly positive about the school; they feel that teachers help them to learn and care whether they are happy or not. In discussions they felt that they could approach members of staff with any difficulties or concerns they had, and were confident that they would be dealt with efficiently.
- 3.4 Measures to promote good behaviour and discipline are very effective. The school ethos is one of encouraging positive behaviour and kindness to others. Behaviour around the school is exemplary. For example, in the compact playground, numerous lively activities happen simultaneously, and pupils take care to avoid spoiling the playtime of others. The house system operates for pupils of all ages, with house points awarded for good behaviour, and academic and non-academic efforts and achievements. Pupils' successes are celebrated in assemblies and certificates are presented to those who regularly behave well and meet the school criteria of the 'golden rules'.
- 3.5 The clearly written anti-bullying policy operates effectively. An excellent child protection policy has been written. All staff have received training on child protection issues.
- 3.6 The school provides a safe and healthy environment in which pupils thrive. A range of policies are implemented effectively by all staff. Measures have been taken to minimise the risk of fire and other hazards, and regular fire practices occur; the pupils know what to do in an emergency. Thorough risk assessments have been carried out for all areas of the school and for all activities that are conducted off-site.
- 3.7 The school has published a comprehensive health and safety policy and the health and safety committee meet regularly. Good quality care is offered to pupils when they are ill or have suffered an accident. All staff, teaching and non-teaching, are qualified first aiders and there is a qualified nurse on the staff in charge of first aid. A medical room is available, detailed records are maintained, medicines are dispensed safely and teachers are kept informed about pupils' medical conditions.

- 3.8 Pupils are encouraged to develop healthy eating habits. All pupils bring a packed lunch to school and a snack for morning break. They are encouraged to take regular physical exercise.
- 3.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.10 The quality of links with parents and the community is strong and has improved since the last inspection. The school works in partnership with parents to provide the highest quality of education for its pupils and to ensure that they lead confident, fulfilling and challenging lives, in line with its aims.
- 3.11 A high proportion of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that they were extremely satisfied with the quality of education provided by the school. They singled out for particular praise the quality of teaching, the range of subjects offered, the help and guidance given to their children and the promotion of positive attitudes and values.
- 3.12 Parents of all ages are given many worthwhile opportunities to become involved in the activities of the school and in the work and progress of their children. Parents are encouraged to contribute to the quality of school life through the parent teachers association, The Friends of Buxlow. This committee organises many family and social occasions during the academic year, including a Halloween party, Christmas party, summer gala, and summer fete, and monies raised have benefited pupils. One such example was the gift of £5 per pupil to spend on books during Book Week. Parents are welcomed into the playground at the start and end of each day. This provides useful opportunities for informal discussions with staff, including the headmistress, if parents have concerns.
- 3.13 A wide range of helpful information is provided which keeps parents well informed. This includes termly newsletters, work summaries sent to parents at the beginning of each term, new parent information booklets, and the relatively new text messaging service where parents can be alerted to any immediate alterations or announcements. Parents are regularly invited to accompany school trips and the contribution that those from different cultures can make is valued. Parents have come into school and joined RE and PSHCE lessons to take part in explanations of faith and to share information about Sikh clothes, and other parents have shared professional medical expertise, such as giving a drugs talk to Year 6 pupils.
- 3.14 There are two formal occasions each year for parents to discuss their children's progress with class teachers and these are very well attended. Reports on pupils' work and progress are thoughtfully written and show a deep understanding of the pupils.
- 3.15 The school takes parents' concerns seriously and these are handled with appropriate care. The complaints procedure is made available to all parents.
- 3.16 The school works hard to maintain and develop a strong network of community links and seeks to strengthen them. Pupils participate in many fundraising events for both local and national charities. Representatives from these charities come into school to further develop these links. Local services also visit the school to enhance the curriculum, for example the local police, and local companies for re-cycling. Pupils regularly visit places of interest in and around the area and such visits support and enrich the work undertaken in the classroom.
- 3.17 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The structure and management of Buxlow Preparatory School involves the managing director of the proprietorial company fully in the school's development and financial planning. She devises appropriate strategies to ensure effective educational provision and is responsible for maintaining adequate investment in human and material resources.
- 4.2 The managing director and the headmistress work closely together to provide clear direction for the school. The managing director has, within the company, members who have a broad spread of expertise with which to provide effective strategic and financial management of the school. The company has invested appropriately in human and material resources. It has a clear understanding of how the school works through the monthly meetings for the heads of its four constituent schools, at which it receives informative reports from the headmistress.
- 4.3 Governance and management are excellent and combine to produce a very happy school where pupils are given a great deal of support and encouragement to succeed.
- 4.4 The compact school site has been imaginatively developed to use every possible space as efficiently as possible and it is well maintained. The playground has been much improved since the last inspection, with the new surface and the addition of climbing and play equipment and a magnificent 'pirate ship'.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.5 Caring and visible leadership provides a clear educational direction for the school, ensuring that all its aims are fulfilled well. The school is well led and managed; an improvement since the last inspection. The relationships among pupils, and those with their teachers, are an outstanding feature of the school. Since the previous inspection, the role of co-ordinators has been created to strengthen the senior management of the school. This is currently in its infancy and the school is aware of the need for the co-ordinators to play a more active role in monitoring their subject across the school.
- 4.6 A staff meeting is held each week, with pupils' welfare high on the agenda. This is an effective forum for the ideas of all members of staff, with decisions taken later by the headmistress after careful consideration of the views expressed. Staff meetings also focus on academic subjects. Through these regular meetings, all members of staff are kept fully informed about school matters. The development plan covers each aspect of the school and is a working document produced jointly between the school and the company.
- 4.7 Subject co-ordinators have produced informative handbooks, and are well organised regarding their resources. A tracking system has been introduced to record and monitor the progress of all pupils; this enables co-ordinators to be fully aware of the standards achieved by pupils in their subject. The co-ordinators meet as a group, led by the deputy head, to discuss curriculum issues.
- 4.8 The staff are of a high quality, and the procedures for appointing and deploying them are managed effectively and supported by appropriate documentation. The required checks are made on all staff before an appointment is confirmed, and proper records are kept. There are no newly qualified teachers on the staff at present, and the school does not currently participate in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers. A good system of induction operates for new members of staff, who feel welcome and supported.

All staff are appraised bi-annually as part of the staff and school development process. The performance appraisal is a management, evaluative and professional development device. The model of appraisal is that devised by the proprietorial company. A central component of their personnel policy is its commitment to performance appraisal.

- 4.9 Financial control and planning are good. The provision of resources supports teaching and learning and the needs of the pupils. The accommodation and grounds are maintained to a high standard.
- 4.10 The administration of the school is efficient and supports staff well in their work. Non-teaching staff provide dedicated assistance for the work of the school, and all are committed to its ethos and success. Visitors are given a positive and a personal welcome to the school.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 High quality governance and the strong leadership of the headmistress, together with her senior colleagues, ensure that the school fully meets its aims. Pupils achieve good and frequently outstanding standards in their academic work and in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Such achievement results from high quality teaching and effective systems which support the pupils in their learning. Pupils of all ages are well motivated and approach school life with enjoyment. Their personal development is outstanding. Excellent relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves combine to develop children who are articulate, thoughtful and confident. The staff provide a supportive atmosphere in which pastoral care is outstanding and every pupil feels respected and valued. Parents are extremely satisfied with the education provided and pupils are appreciative of the opportunities which are made available to them.
- 5.2 The school has made outstanding progress since the last inspection, undertaken by Ofsted. All recommendations have been met. The school curriculum policy is fully in place. A strong programme of activities has now been established for all pupils. Assessment is planned well and used effectively to set realistic targets and goals. Classroom resources are excellent and used successfully to support teaching and learning.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 The following is suggested for particular consideration in order for the school to improve still further:
1. create space within the structure of the timetable to enable co-ordinators to monitor their own subjects effectively.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 9th to 12th June 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with the managing director, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Mrs Karin Kelly	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Lynda Corry	Headmistress, ISA school
Mrs Linda Donowho	Head, IAPS school