



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**NOTTINGHAM GIRLS' HIGH SCHOOL GDST**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Nottingham Girls' High School GDST

Full Name of School	<b>Nottingham Girls' High School GDST</b>
DfE Number	<b>892/6009</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>306983</b>
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Headmistress	<b>Mrs Susan Gorham</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Professor Jenny Saint</b>
Age Range	<b>4 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>1071</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>
Head of EYFS Setting	<b>Mrs Faith Potter</b>
EYFS Gender	<b>Girls</b>
Inspection dates	<b>08 Mar 2011 to 09 Mar 2011 04 Apr 2011 to 06 Apr 2011</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in April 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010\*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

\*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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## 1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Nottingham Girls' High School is a selective day school, founded in 1875. It is owned by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), which is a registered charity governing a group of 26 independent girls' schools in England and Wales. The school shares the aims of the GDST and seeks to provide high quality education for girls, within a happy, supportive and caring environment. To achieve this, the school's objectives are based on mutual respect and awareness of the value of each individual, encouragement of pupils to use their initiative, the provision of opportunities for each pupil to find and develop her own talents, and working in partnership with parents to build the foundation for a successful future for every girl. The school seeks to expand its mission to the outside community and maintain a reputation for excellence.
- 1.2 The school is situated just north of the centre of Nottingham and was originally housed in a group of Victorian mansions. Subsequent extensive acquisition of properties over the years, along with capital building projects, has resulted in the present campus. The junior school is in a separate building within the main school campus and includes provision for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).
- 1.3 Since the last inspection, in April 2005, there has been a great deal of change, commencing with the appointment of a new headmistress in January 2006. Subsequent developments have included the restructuring of the senior leadership team, changes to the pastoral structure in the senior school, rationalisation of the school's administration structure and review of security throughout the school. A new head of the junior school was appointed in September 2010 and subject co-ordinators have been replaced with key-stage phase leaders. A new sixth-form centre and an extension to the junior school have been built and a rolling maintenance programme has been established.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection, the school had 1071 pupils aged from four to eighteen. In the junior school, 29 children were in the EYFS and 269 pupils were in Years 1 to 6. In the senior school, 578 pupils were in Years 7 to 11 and 195 in Years 12 and 13. The pupils come from Nottingham and the surrounding area and represent a wide range of social backgrounds, although most are from families in which one or more parents are engaged in professional and business occupations. The school awards bursaries to about 15 per cent of the pupils according to need and in Years 7-13 eleven pupils hold scholarships awarded by outside organisations for ability.
- 1.5 Entry to Reception, at the age of four, is by an informal test of general intelligence and assessment of group play activities. At the ages of seven and eleven, prospective pupils are required to take written tests in English, verbal reasoning and mathematics, and to have an interview. At age sixteen, entry depends on GCSE results, supplemented by an interview and a report from the current school. The school enters pupils for national tests at age eleven, GCSE and A Level examinations. Ability and progress are monitored using standardised tests. A fairly wide spread of abilities is represented in the junior school where the ability profile is above the national average. The ability profile of the senior school is well above the national average. At this stage most pupils are of above or far above average ability, with very few having an ability that is average or below. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs but the school has identified some 44 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), five in the junior school and 39 in the senior school, the most usual being mild dyslexia. About 55 pupils come from homes

where English is not the first language but most are proficient in English. Thus, support for English as an additional language is not usually provided, except on a short-term basis for the occasional pupil from overseas.

- 1.6 About half of the pupils entering Year 7 are from the junior school and the remainder come from a wide range of independent preparatory or maintained primary schools. Most of the pupils in Year 11 stay for the sixth form. On leaving from Year 13, almost all students proceed to university.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 Throughout the school, pupils are remarkably well educated in accordance with the school's aims and particularly with that which seeks that pupils should be confident learners. High standards of achievement in academic work are reflected in a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils are successful in all aspects of their learning and are efficiently prepared for transfer to the senior school and to universities. Throughout the school, pupils show a strong commitment to learning. They are aware of how they learn and what they should do to improve. Pupils' high standards of attainment are strongly supported by the teaching which, at its best, is most successful in engaging and challenging pupils, as well as promoting enjoyment and interest. In the junior school, marking of pupils' work is of high quality and, although more variable, much in the senior school is strongly supportive and includes pupils' self-assessment. Monitoring of pupils' progress by regular assessments contributes to their knowledge of how they are doing and the school is starting to make improved use of the abundance of available performance data.
- 2.2 The quality of pupils' personal development is excellent and fulfils the school's aim to provide a secure learning environment based on mutual respect and an awareness of the value of every individual. Pupils are self-assured, confident and unfailingly pleasant and courteous. In many activities they show good initiative, constantly strive to do well and acknowledge that much pressure to succeed is of their own making. Senior pupils welcome the opportunities for leadership. They provide good role models and provide good support for younger pupils in many aspects of school life. Pupils have a strong spiritual, moral and social sense and a well developed awareness of cultural differences.
- 2.3 Strong governance, leadership and management ensure the school's aims are central to its work. Policies, including those associated with safeguarding the pupils, are thorough and routinely reviewed and implemented. Much has been achieved since the last inspection and the current substantial agenda for further development carries with it considerable implications for senior managers to oversee and monitor each initiative to its completion. All of the recommendations in the last report have been accepted and improvements put in place. Parents are highly supportive of the school, particularly valuing the progress made by their children, the range of the curriculum, the attitudes and values promoted, the governance and management of the school and the high standards of behaviour. Inspection evidence did not support the view of a small number of parents that there were too few opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.
- 2.5 In order to comply with the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage, the school was required to:
- provide the parent of a child, in relation to whom the EYFS profile has been completed, in the final term of the EYFS, with a written summary, reporting the child's progress against the Early Learning Goals and the assessment scales;
  - provide details of arrangements under which the EYFS profile and its results may be discussed between a practitioner and the parent, giving a reasonable opportunity for the parent to discuss the EYFS profile and its results with that practitioner.
- 2.6 At the time of the final team visit, the school had rectified all of the above shortcomings as far as possible.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.7 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Rationalise the sequence of planned changes and develop robust systems for monitoring change through to final completion.
  2. Include details in teachers' planning of how the needs of individual EYFS children are to be met.
  3. Improve the timetabling and planning for children's physical development in the EYFS, to ensure that the amount of time for each session is appropriate to the needs of the children and the content is suitably focused on their physical development.



### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills**

3.1 Throughout both junior and senior schools, pupils are very well educated in accordance with the school's aims and particularly with the aim that they should be confident learners.

##### ***Junior school***

3.2 In the junior school, the pupils demonstrate good, and sometimes outstanding, levels of knowledge, understanding and skills across the curriculum and build a firm foundation in the basics of reading, writing and numeracy.

3.3 Throughout their time in the school, pupils effectively develop skills associated with listening, comprehension, writing and reasoning, and also with physical activity. Their well developed numerical skills are used to good effect in mathematics and other subjects. Drama and music are particularly well integrated into the curriculum, which enables good achievement in these areas. Singing in assemblies is excellent and, during the inspection, the Year 4 girls presented an energetic, musical version of *The Tempest*. The artwork displayed on the walls and in sketchbooks is very neatly produced but, on the whole, lacks creativity. The pupils excel in speaking, where they articulate well, are able to give rational explanations of their knowledge and understanding and show immense confidence and enthusiasm. Pupils discuss issues self-confidently and articulate their ideas clearly, whilst also listening and responding well to their teachers and to one another. They work with diligence and concentration, both as individuals and with others; on one occasion, paired working encouraged usually quiet and shy individuals to present lively, dramatic performances of poetry. Pupils make good and appropriate use of information and communication technology (ICT), using word processing, desktop publishing and web page design to good effect in cross-curricular activities.

3.4 The variety of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to achieve in enjoyable ways, for example through successful participation in sports teams, the African drumming group, which performed during a fund-raising afternoon, or the origami club, members of which contributed to a beautiful display about springtime.

3.5 The following analysis uses the national data for years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are available. Results in national tests at age eleven have been far above the national average for maintained primary schools. This level of attainment indicates that pupils make exceptional progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. The small number of pupils who are identified as requiring extra support make comparable progress, through individual support from teachers and teaching assistants.

3.6 Pupils' excellent attitudes to learning are marked by their respect for one another, by supportive teaching and the high expectations of their teachers. Their classroom behaviour is exemplary. Throughout the junior school, the presentation of work is of high quality, demonstrating the concentration and effort girls put into it. They demonstrate a good awareness of how they learn and what they must do to improve. The girls are courteous and display good manners in the classroom and at lunch time.

**Senior school**

- 3.7 Pupils are very secure in their knowledge and understanding and have highly developed skills across the full range of the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. They are extremely articulate, speak confidently and listen attentively, concentrating well in lessons. Pupils enjoy debate, for instance when reporting back from the school council or contributing to a Young Enterprise team meeting called to refresh their campaign. Written work is well structured and girls have highly developed skills of organisation in the way they approach their work. They are aware of how they learn and what they should do to improve. Sixth-form pupils described the significant encouragement afforded them towards greater independence of thought as they rise up through the school.
- 3.8 Through analysis of the models provided by their teachers, pupils develop the confidence for their own creativity. A creative writing group has produced an anthology, *Moments*, containing striking and accomplished poetry. Displays of pupils' poetry and literary collages also show creative impact. Pupils use specialist vocabulary competently and they reason logically from general principles. From Year 7 onwards, pupils become increasingly adept in critical thinking and analysis and opportunities to hone these research skills have been keenly taken up by Year 13 students through the Extended Project Qualification.
- 3.9 Older pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) skilfully as a tool for a variety of purposes including gathering information and research. The achievement in use and application of mathematical skills is outstanding. The competence acquired by pupils in dedicated mathematics lessons is used to good effect across many other areas of the curriculum.
- 3.10 The high levels of achievement in extra-curricular activities reflect the pupils' enjoyment and determination to do well, through success in areas such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, biology and chemistry Olympiads, CREST awards and mathematics challenges. Success has been achieved in a considerable range of competitions ranging from poetry and language competitions to a national sustainability award. Many of the clubs are led by senior pupils giving them experience of achievement in leadership.
- 3.11 High skill levels are achieved in sports with many pupils playing at county level; school teams most recently achieved county champion status in netball, hockey and swimming. A good number of girls take up opportunities for sports coaching and are successful in gaining accreditation as sports coaches. Individual successes have been outstanding in swimming, fencing and rowing, where pupils have represented their country. The orchestra, choir and symphonia develop pupils' music skills through playing and singing with others. A recent production of *Oliver* gave a large cast the opportunity to focus their musical and theatrical skills, and a dance and gymnastics evening offered a motivational showcase for a very large number of girls of all ages.
- 3.12 Pupils with LDD achieve well. Their teachers are made aware of their needs in mainstream lessons and are ready to respond through individual support as required.
- 3.13 As for the junior school, the national data for 2007 to 2009 are used for the following analysis. Results in GCSE and A Level have been far above the national average for girls in maintained schools, and above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools indicating that progress is good in relation to pupils of

similar ability, as is confirmed by standardised measures of progress. Notably, 30% of A-level grades were awarded A\* in the first year of the award of this grade.

- 3.14 Year 13 leavers, go on to selective universities to read a range of academic courses. Performance in lessons shows high levels of attainment and preparation for public examinations and interviews with pupils confirmed very high aspirations and level of attainment.
- 3.15 Pupils in all years have a very positive attitude to their learning. They participate readily in lessons and listen to others. Pupils are keen to take responsibility for their own learning and will seek out teachers for one-to-one consultation in order to understand how they may improve their work. Some study their subjects beyond the confines of the syllabus. All pupils are very well behaved and support each other very well. They take notes efficiently and are very responsive to advice about how to approach their work.

### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)**

- 3.16 Throughout the whole school the curriculum is good and supports well the mission of the school to build a foundation for a successful future and to provide a secure learning environment based on mutual respect and an awareness of the value of every individual.

#### ***Junior school***

- 3.17 The curriculum covers all the required areas of learning. Whilst broadly based on the National Curriculum, it extends beyond it to include religious education (RE), a modern foreign language and personal, social and health education (PSHE). The balance of subjects is carefully organised to help pupils to progress quickly in reading, writing and mathematics. Despite the focus on numeracy and literacy in the curriculum, the amount of time preparing for national tests is not disproportionate. However, the long lessons and the lack of synchronisation of the timetable across the junior school place some constraints on the balance of the curriculum throughout the week, particularly in Years 1 and 2.
- 3.18 Pupils are encouraged to read daily as part of their homework and in school through the reading scheme and, in later years, to read class books related to other parts of the curriculum. The reading scheme has been reviewed so that pupils in Years 1 and 2 have a broad introduction to a wide variety of texts in different genres at every level. Girls happily attend extra revision or extension activities provided after school if they need reinforcement or demonstrate exceptionally high ability. Themed weeks, such as 'science and technology week', provide added excitement and variation to the curriculum. Writers' workshops, which bring in professional writers to work with the pupils, provide valuable extension of the curriculum and the opportunity to share with other independent and maintained schools who are invited to attend. Good arrangements ensure a smooth transition from the junior to the senior school and, in turn, to the sixth form.
- 3.19 The curriculum is enhanced by a good range of extra-curricular activities including musical, artistic, dramatic, sporting and craft activities, as well as by chess, dancing and Fair Trade. Musical opportunities include African drumming and a steel band.

**Senior school**

- 3.20 The curriculum is highly effective in its coverage of all areas of learning and there are examples of outstanding practice within the school. It provides a broad and balanced education which enables all the girls to achieve and maintain high standards. Up to Year 9, pupils study a broad range of subjects, including three sciences and at least three, and potentially five, languages by the end of Year 9.
- 3.21 In Years 10 and 11, the broad choice of options enables the curriculum to cater for pupils' individual interests and aptitudes. The sixth-form curriculum provides a very wide choice of AS and A2-level subjects, along with physical education, tutor time, careers guidance and the extended project qualification, which is an excellent preparation for university study.
- 3.22 PSHE is taught throughout the school. It provides a well-led programme based on good resources; PSHE skills are mapped across the curriculum to ensure that all areas are covered in an appropriate manner.
- 3.23 Pupils who feel that they need extra support with their studies are able to self-refer to the special needs co-ordinator, who liaises with their teachers to make sure that appropriate help is available. In addition, girls comment favourably on the amount of time which the teachers are happy to give to help them individually to improve their grades. Pupils of high ability are able to challenge their knowledge and skills by taking part in inter-house competitions and a wide range of national initiatives which the school provides, such as CREST in science and mathematics challenges.
- 3.24 The curriculum successfully prepares pupils for the next stage of their lives. The very strong careers programme makes full use of information and presentations by parents and from girls who have recently graduated. Staff know the pupils well and provide access to good information and advice from Year 9 onwards. In Year 11, all girls are expected to arrange to go on work experience and there is an active Young Enterprise group in the sixth form. Year 11 pupils also have the opportunity to take the Open University Young Applicants Scheme courses which they complete in the sixth form. The outstanding extra-curricular provision provides a very wide range of activities including sport, performance and creative arts, academic and general interest and is much appreciated by the girls. However, the wealth of opportunity involves the girls in making difficult decisions. The wide range of extra-curricular activities is enjoyed by most of the pupils but some comment on the time pressures that participation puts on them. Sporting fixtures are an important feature of extra-curricular life, as is participation in house activities. Regular drama productions enrich the cultural life of the school, as does the range of instrumental ensembles, choirs, and orchestra. Art, debating and academic clubs complement the curriculum. Pupils' personal development is furthered by opportunities to participate in a range of educational trips at home and abroad.
- 3.25 In the sixth form there is an impressive number of ways in which the girls may develop leadership skills: these include The Duke of Edinburgh's Award, Young Enterprise and Ecoteam, which has started a sustainability project with a local city primary school and a community service group that takes a group of 10 year olds from an inner city school to Castleton for a weekend. In addition, pupils organise a Christmas party for older residents, run a summer school for autistic children and help in a local primary school.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.26 Overall, teaching is highly effective in promoting pupils' progress and supports the aims of the school.

#### ***Junior school***

- 3.27 The quality of most teaching is good with some that is excellent. It assists pupils to make good progress and the levels of challenge are generally well matched to age groups and abilities. In many lessons, the teaching is highly effective in engaging pupils and promoting enjoyment and interest. A creative approach to planning is used, particularly in the way that cross-curricular links are utilised. Year 4's work on India effectively incorporated geography, religious studies and art. Planning identifies suitable provision for individual learning needs and care is taken to promote a safe and secure learning environment.
- 3.28 A variety of teaching strategies is used effectively to stimulate pupils' interest and involvement, though some lessons are predominantly teacher-led and do not provide sufficient space for pupils individual contributions. Interactive whiteboards are well used to encourage participation and provide visual stimuli, instructions or guidance. Questions are mostly teacher-initiated and sometimes do not require pupils to expand on their answers, but pupils respond thoughtfully and have sufficient confidence to raise their own questions.
- 3.29 Well-planned lessons are closely linked to learning objectives that are consistently visible in the classroom and in books. Through effective review at the end of sessions, pupils use well-established strategies to gauge whether their learning objectives have been met. Pupils are encouraged to speak about 'struggles' with work, rather than about being unable to do something. They learn how to track their progress: for example, in Year 6 mathematics they set personal learning targets, through the monitoring of their test scores. Teachers' use of assessment for learning strategies is well established.
- 3.30 Excellent use is made of praise, verbal and written, to encourage pupils. Pupils are shown how to identify their strengths and weaknesses and to set targets for self-improvement, without dwelling unduly on comparisons with their peers. Teachers' expectations of pupils are high: girls are expected to give of their best and not to give up. Mostly good subject knowledge was evident, although this is not always consistent across all curriculum areas. The brisk pace of lessons keeps pupils sufficiently focussed; they are in no hurry to leave when the bell goes, even at break times. Cooperation and collaboration between pupils is encouraged with effective use of talk partners, paired and group work.
- 3.31 Across the school, the accommodation is well used, particularly the library which supports various activities, in addition to reading. The two computer suites support the teaching and pupils' learning well. High-quality resources are used in many lessons, although some lessons lack practical equipment to assist pupils' understanding.
- 3.32 Marking is of a high quality, particularly in English, where informative comments help pupils know exactly how to improve. The use of stamps, positive comments and stickers promotes confidence that leads to increased intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic rewards are used in some cases, for example the 'Square Points' and weekly Special Achiever systems. The girls' progress is carefully monitored by regular assessments using both school based, standardised and national tests. Greater

analysis of the results of these has recently begun with a view to informing planning and improving the outcomes for girls.

### ***Senior school***

- 3.33 Good teaching throughout the senior school effectively fosters pupils' interest in their work, supports the aims of the school and promotes progress. A significant amount of the teaching is excellent. Pupils are very well prepared for public examinations, developing strategies to tackle questions in a methodical and comprehensive manner. During the inspection, the necessary tasks for preparing for a controlled assessment were made highly engaging for the pupils and examples of vibrancy, fun and challenge were observed across a range of subjects. Nevertheless, in some lessons, where presentation by the teacher dominated the beginning of the lesson, pupils who were ready and willing to engage in a task were held back unnecessarily.
- 3.34 The pupils are at their best when the teaching allows them to work co-operatively and gives them the freedom to complete research tasks, which lead to the presentation of their own work. In many subjects, including art, drama, chemistry and physics, pupils worked well together on tasks and this allowed them to demonstrate real enjoyment of the subjects.
- 3.35 Evidence of high quality independent work and attention to detail was available in pupils' work and in displays around the school. In a Year 13 lesson, very able teaching framed the lesson so that much of the content was drawn from the pupils and allowed them to rehearse arguments they could use in their examination.
- 3.36 The teaching in Years 7 to 11 sometimes lacks academic challenge but it builds strong foundations for pupils' progress and substantial achievement in the senior part of the school. Extension opportunities become more widespread in Years 12 and 13, for example in modern languages; these older pupils are also able to benefit from excellent extension opportunities such as the Gold CREST Award, which provides opportunities for pupils' involvement in scientific research, and the extended project qualification.
- 3.37 One-to-one subject clinics are highly regarded by pupils of all ages and provide support and extension opportunities. In lessons, pupils encounter a variety of learning styles, in line with the school's aim. For example, visual stimuli in PSHE lessons promoted debate, aural instructions in food technology focused pupils' work, and demonstrations of techniques in biology required attention to detail and accuracy from the pupils when they completed the same tasks for themselves.
- 3.38 In response to a recommendation made at the last inspection, the school has enhanced its use of ICT considerably throughout the curriculum. Excellent practice was observed in the innovative use of ICT by the English Department, both in Year 12 when pupils drew on knowledge from a book, music and a television adaptation, and in a Year 8 lesson on storytelling in which the use of technology allowed pupils to volunteer sophisticated ideas.
- 3.39 The relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are excellent and a friendly environment is created in which learning is promoted. Excellent resources are available to the girls and teaching takes place in comfortable and well equipped classrooms, laboratories and studios. The library is actively used, and both books and on-line resources are available to girls in lessons and study periods. Lessons are well planned, with well-structured learning objectives explained to the pupils.

- 3.40 The quality of marking is variable. There are some very good examples of best practice in Year 7, for example the effective use of an assessment level proforma in English, helpful references to National Curriculum levels in history, enabling pupils to see what they need to do to improve, and topic check-lists such as those in design technology and biology. High quality peer assessment and marking was observed in work completed by girls in geography and music; notably, Year 9 history work provided excellent comments for pupils to use to raise their attainment. Whilst in general there was limited evidence of formative feedback to the pupils in work scrutiny, constructive comments and praise were commonplace in lessons. Rewards were frequently used to focus participation and raise a healthy competitive spirit.
- 3.41 The senior school uses assessment for learning and has begun building an academic overview of students' progress. However, as the school is aware, an abundance of performance data is available, but under-used. Formalised meaningful target setting is at an early stage and, whilst the use of baseline data is being piloted by a small number of departments, its use across the school remains aspirational and is a key focus in the school's strategic plan.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

- 4.1 Throughout both the junior and senior schools, the pupils' personal development is excellent. There are many opportunities for pupils to develop a strong moral and spiritual sense and the confident, mature and creative pupils show that the school's aims are fulfilled in this area.
- 4.2 Pupils are well known as individuals. Their spiritual development is good in terms of their strong sense of personal identity and their respect for themselves and others. They develop a good understanding of different faiths and beliefs and respect one another across the wide range of ethnicity and culture within the school. Assemblies respect the multi-faith basis of the school and support pupils' growing understanding of a multi-cultural society. In a Year 7 assembly, a presentation by the Gideon Bible Society in the presence of non-Christian pupils was handled with particular sensitivity. Pupils' sense of self-esteem is enhanced through the celebration of individual success in a variety of ways around the school. Many take the opportunities afforded by art and music to have experiences that are spiritually uplifting and provide the opportunity for reflection.
- 4.3 The pupils are polite and well behaved with a well-developed sense of right and wrong and, as they move through the school, a growing understanding of rights and responsibilities. They are able to make a personal response to moral and ethical issues, when, for example, their visit to a Dutch concentration camp built on their study of the holocaust. In PSHE, pupils develop their tolerance and respect for the views of others.
- 4.4 There is a caring ethos and senior pupils relish the many opportunities they have to assume responsibility and lead activities. Year 13 girls gain skills acting as subject mentors for younger pupils. Through the house system, girls develop good relationships in their year groups and between years. House competitions such as debating, sport, poetry and even spelling encourage social engagement, as do the many clubs and activities.
- 4.5 Through opportunities to study other faiths in RE, and to discuss world issues in the upper junior classes, pupils' develop a good awareness of other cultures and ways of life. Sixth-form pupils have discussed stem cell research online with pupils in New York and Year 8 girls have been able to discuss moral issues with pupils from other cultures through the Face to Faith programme. Pupils run an Amnesty International club.
- 4.6 Pupils from a wide range of backgrounds are welcomed into the school. Their cultures are respected and make for a strong cohesive community. Lessons on friends, relationships and bullying promote the excellent behaviour and relationships observed. The school council allows elected pupils to share ideas and contribute to the school. Pupils have a good grasp of social and environmental issues at local and global scales.
- 4.7 The PSHE programme contributes strongly to the girls' personal development. As recommended in the last report, the school continues to seek specialist input for this programme. Girls know about public institutions and elections. An extensive charity fund-raising programme, much of it pupil led, shows empathy for those less fortunate than themselves and those affected by natural disasters. Pupils' positive response



to the needs of others is evident in their organisation of a residential weekend for local disadvantaged primary pupils and through charity events such as the Water Aid Water Walk.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.8 Across the junior and senior schools, the arrangements for pupils' welfare are good, and for health and safety excellent. The pastoral arrangements are effective and induction arrangements for pupils and the transitions between different stages of the school are carefully managed with attention to the individual. The staff support and guide the pupils promoting well-being and fostering mutual respect in accordance with the school's aims. As a consequence the pupils are safe and happy.
- 4.9 High-quality relationships exist within the school and enable pupils to succeed. Junior school pupils talk enthusiastically about their learning and all aspects of school life, stating, "It's great here." They also feel they are valued and listened to. Senior pupils know where to turn for advice and support, saying staff are "generous with their time." Pupils report that bullying is rare, moreover they know where to find support and are confident that any issues will be dealt with in timely and effective fashion. There are appropriate arrangements for pupils who are unwell and the school nurse contributes to PSHE on health related issues.
- 4.10 Parents are positive about the high standards of behaviour. The pupils understand the school's expectations and are polite, considerate and proud of their school. They accept that a well-ordered school needs rules and sanctions. The majority see the new rewards and sanctions code as fair and of benefit to all; they like the fact that merits significantly outnumber sanctions.
- 4.11 The safeguarding arrangements are robust and comply fully with the regulatory requirements. Procedures to appoint staff are thorough and effective, with the safeguarding policy fully implemented. The staff receive appropriate and regular training in child protection and are mindful of health and safety arrangements. Measures are in place to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. The school has a suitable plan to improve access for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities.
- 4.12 PSHE and food technology lessons address healthy diet and pupils are encouraged to take regular exercise and to eat sensibly. A Year 4 group commented that the junior school food forum could succeed in affecting change with regard to healthy options and a balanced diet, providing their requests were "sensible and reasonable". The school is aware that lunchtime activities may impact on the girls' eating habits. Food appropriate to healthy eating is available from the canteen. However, the tuck shop in the senior school allows pupils access to less healthy foods. Medical facilities for pupils who are ill are good and under the charge of a full-time nurse. Admission and attendance registers are fully compliant.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 The strong system of governance provides a highly supportive balance, whereby the trust (GDST) provides exemplary oversight and professional support and the local governing body offers more regular support that includes knowledge of the context of the school and its local community. The school derives considerable benefit from the involvement of the trust as proprietor whilst relying on the support and interest of the local governors. With the school's management, governors have established appropriate aims for the school that combine the stated aims of the trust and those that are specific to the nature and intention of the school itself.
- 5.2 Overall, key governors know the school well and exercise an active interest in, and oversight of, its success. The chairwoman of the local governors is newly appointed to the chair and to the board but has quickly made it her business to understand what the school is about. She has been well briefed by her predecessor and well prepared for the task through the GDST induction course for new chairs of governors. She is aware that the local governors have a good grasp of the strength of the school through observation of examination success and standardised measures of progress, pupil numbers, staff presentations to governors' meetings, visits to performances and attendance at open mornings such as 'come and see us at work'. Added to this, regular reports from the headmistress and the business manager help the local governors to monitor the performance of the school. Nevertheless, the board consists of people with an appropriate but relatively narrow range of expertise which the chair wishes to strengthen, in order to support the headmistress and her team through wider expertise.
- 5.3 Local governors acknowledge the role of the trust as proprietor and welcome its overall support and guidance for their activities. From the headmistress they seek vision and strategic planning. They see their role to help, inform and provide the objectivity of a critical friend. The headmistress recognises this and welcomes the regular contacts with the chairwoman. The local board operates with no committees and this is seen as appropriate for its size and current commitments. The creation of working groups with a limited remit is sensibly envisaged, as and when one-off issues emerge that require more attention.
- 5.4 The local governors ensure that they meet their obligations through the work of the business manager and his team and have in place governors with responsibility for safeguarding and health and safety. The GDST, as proprietor, provides a range of training events for governors.

## **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

- 5.5 At all levels, the leadership and management of both the senior and junior schools are highly effective in meeting the overarching aim of the school to provide a high quality of education within a happy, challenging, supportive and caring environment. Clear educational direction and ethos is evident in the high quality of pupils' educational achievements and in their outstanding personal development as they move through the school. Policies, including those associated with safeguarding the pupils, are thorough and routinely reviewed and implemented. Efficient organisation and management is evident in the clear documentation that underpins all major areas of the school's operation. Formal and effective schemes are in place for appraisal of staff, as are strategies for evaluating the quality of care and welfare.
- 5.6 In response to a recommendation in the last inspection report, a senior management team has been established in the junior school and has enabled monitoring of teaching in each year. The head of the junior school has a very clear vision of how she wishes to take the school forward and, with the phase leaders, has put in place an ambitious action plan for the development of assessment, provision for pupils with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented, for the creative curriculum and staff development.
- 5.7 Since the last inspection, perceptive self-evaluation in the senior school has led to the setting and achievement of priorities that have given a strong sense of direction and vision for the school's future under the firm, purposeful leadership of the headmistress. Consultation on the achievement of change has effectively involved permanent groups of senior and middle managers each with different responsibilities, including heads of faculty and those who have a focus on teaching and learning or pastoral matters. In this way a range of opinion is sought and disseminated. Some consultation seeks the views of other members of the school community, including pupils. Currently, some new initiatives, such as assessment for learning, are embryonic but there has been significant investment in staff training and effective departments have been usefully encouraged to work with others less certain. In both the junior and senior schools, senior management has engendered a substantial and appropriate agenda for development that includes, for example, improved knowledge of and use of performance data, academic monitoring and target setting. All of this, and more, is clearly identified in the three year strategic policy and presents the school with a considerable task. Middle managers recognise the need for change and that impending developments have implications for the planning of their own training and development. The substantial amount of planned innovation carries with it considerable implications for oversight and monitoring by senior managers.
- 5.8 Throughout the school, management is successful in securing, supporting, developing and motivating high quality staff and ensuring that they are suitably trained for their roles in meeting pupils' needs, and for safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. The fact that much teaching is of high quality results from the recruitment of teachers with impressive subject knowledge and teaching skills. The non-teaching staff offer a range of skills and expertise that make a strong contribution to the areas of provision, such as administration, site management and catering, that create a pleasant working environment. The school has thorough arrangements for checking the suitability of all staff and governors.

### **5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.9 Throughout the school as a whole, good relationships exist with the parents. Parents are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and are satisfied with the progress of their children and the education that they are receiving. In response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, they rated particularly highly the progress made by the children, the range of the curriculum, the attitudes and values promoted, the governance and management of the school and the high standards of behaviour. Relationships with parents are constructive and supportive, as they were at the previous inspection, and contribute to the school's success in achieving its aims.
- 5.10 Parents also were satisfied that information about the school and its policies are readily available and timely responses are given to parents' questions. The school is improving the opportunities for parents to communicate with their school through an on-line communication facility, and the 'enquiry desk' which replies promptly to parents' initial concerns. The school contacts parents without delay if there are specific reasons to do so. In the junior school, the homework diary provides a good means of communication between parents and the school. In addition to parents' meetings, the class teachers of junior school children are often available to talk to parents outside before school starts.
- 5.11 Opportunities for parents to be involved in the life of the school are plentiful, through the activities of the parent teachers' association, by attending school events or by taking advantage of the good opportunities to meet or communicate with teachers. The parent-teacher association (PTA) is active in organising a major school event each term, for example the Spring Fayre that took place during the inspection and socials for parents. The PTA work with the school to provide a stimulating topic for their AGM, such as a 'Brain rules' session and a talk on health and well being by the nurse. Some parents help with careers events and with school productions. In the junior school, a newly formed parents' forum helps parents to gain a more in-depth picture of school life. Inspection evidence did not support the view of a small number of parents that these opportunities were too few.
- 5.12 Published material about the school is of high quality, and includes all the information that is required. Guidance associated with subject choices is well laid out and explained. The information available to both parents and prospective parents about the school is comprehensive. The website and regular newsletters are helpful and clear. Reports to parents about their children's progress are informative and constructive, with many suggesting ways in which girls may improve their work even more. These have been revised as recommended by the last inspection. Long reports are complemented by half-termly sheets of effort and attainment grades so that parents are made aware of the progress of their children on a regular basis. Formal parents' evenings take place at least once a year, with additional well-placed meetings for parents of pupils involved in making choices about the next stage of their education. In the junior school, a beneficial practice involves girls undertaking a piece of open homework once a term, which is displayed and evaluated by the child, teacher and parents.
- 5.13 Based on an appropriate policy, complaints are dealt with sensitively and effectively, and there is successful monitoring of the length and nature of response to concerns. Parental concerns are taken seriously and acted upon, for example in the junior school the timing and length of reports is being reviewed.

## **6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

### **6 (a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)**

6.1 Overall, the setting is highly effective in meeting the needs of all children and provides support for both individuals and groups. Good teaching in a nurturing and welcoming environment ensures that most children achieve high standards in their learning and development, although teachers' planning does not always take account of the specific needs of individual children. Children's welfare is effectively promoted and thorough safeguarding procedures are in place. Teachers' detailed knowledge of the children ensures that they have a good start to their education. The recent self-evaluation reveals a clear vision for future developments and the capacity for sustained improvement.

### **6 (b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the EYFS**

6.2 Leadership and management are good overall. Teachers successfully implement policies which provide invaluable guidance, promote equality and eliminate discrimination. Children's well-being and safeguarding are of paramount importance to the school, thorough risk assessments are in place and the school successfully provides a safe and secure environment. Weekly staff meetings and informal discussions are used to discuss children's progress but, in the final term in the EYFS, parents do not receive a summary report on their children's progress, measured against the Early Learning Goals and assessment scales, nor are these results discussed with parents. The school has taken immediate action to ensure that the summary report and opportunity for discussion will be provided in the future. Nevertheless, management of the setting is not sufficiently rigorous in reviewing and evaluating teachers' planning and assessment to ensure consistency of practice, particularly in relation to the completion of sufficiently detailed EYFS profiles. A positive relationship exists with parents and, in the pre-inspection questionnaire, the parents who replied indicated that they valued the work of the school. There is direct access from classrooms to the excellent outside learning environment and this is well used. Resources, which are of good quality, are easily accessed by children.

### **6 (c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage.**

6.3 The quality of the provision is good overall with some outstanding features. Children respond positively to the warm and nurturing environment which ensures they feel happy and secure. Relationships between children and adults are very strong. The setting benefits from excellent onsite facilities and children have access to a computer suite and school library. The timetable provides a good balance and coverage of the Early Learning Goals except in the case of the children's physical development. Physical education is timetabled for one hour-long period each week which is too long for the children. Planning does not clearly state aims and objectives for each activity. There are inconsistencies in teachers' planning, and written plans do not always take account of the differing needs of individual children. Teachers manage children's behaviour sensitively, rewarding good work and behaviour with positive verbal comments, stickers and achievement certificates which are presented at a weekly assembly.

## **6 (d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

- 6.4 Achievement and progress are outstanding in relation to children's starting points and capabilities. Children are articulate and participate enthusiastically in speaking and listening activities. A phonic reading programme is used daily and children use phonics to write simple regular words, as well as making attempts at reading or writing more complex words. They are beginning to develop independent writing skills. Children have a good knowledge of 2-D and 3-D shapes and are able to identify and name a cube, cuboid, sphere and cylinder and relate them to household objects. Children are encouraged to make decisions about what to order for lunch and select their meal daily from the published menu. They have good personal hygiene and wash their hands before eating and at regular intervals throughout the day. Children take responsibility for clearing their plates away in the dining hall. They understand the importance of keeping themselves and others safe when using scissors and other equipment. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**

## INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, attended registration sessions and assemblies and visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mrs Beryl Fawcett	Reporting Inspector
Dr Nick Argent	Former Head Master, HMC school
Mrs Margot Branson	Head of Junior School, GSA school
Mrs Cynthia Hall	Headmistress, GSA school
Mrs Kirsten Jackson	Former Headmistress, GSA school
Mrs Frances Mwale	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Dr Paul Silverwood	Headmaster, GSA school
Miss Mary Regan	Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector