



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**ST DOMINIC'S HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

**INTERIM INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## St Dominic's High School for Girls

Full Name of School	<b>St Dominic's High School for Girls</b>		
DfE Number	<b>860/6005</b>		
Registered Charity Number	<b>504645</b>		
Address	<b>St Dominic's High School for Girls Bargate Street Brewood Stafford Staffordshire ST19 9BA</b>		
Telephone Number	<b>01902 850 248</b>		
Fax Number	<b>01902 851 154</b>		
Email Address	<b>enquiries@stdominicsschool.co.uk</b>		
Head	<b>Mrs Sandra White</b>		
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Robert Turton</b>		
Age Range	<b>3 to 18</b>		
Total Number of Pupils	<b>275</b>		
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls (8-18); Mixed (3-7)</b>		
Numbers by Age	3-5 (EYFS)	<b>21</b>	5-11: <b>91</b>
	11-18	<b>163</b>	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	<b>275</b>	
EYFS Gender	<b>Mixed</b>		
Inspection dates	<b>22 Mar 2011 to 23 Mar 2011</b>		

## PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections*. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in March 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to 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 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 St Dominic's High School for Girls was founded in 1920, on its present site, by a Dominican Order. Now non-denominational, the school welcomes pupils of all faiths and none, within a Christian ethos. The school changed its name to St Dominic's High School for Girls in September 2010, having formerly been St Dominic's School. It is a registered charity, with the trustees forming the governing body. Having opened a sixth form in September 2007, the school caters for girls aged from 3 to 18 years of age and boys from 3 to 7, and aims to promote "growth in body, mind and spirit" through "the development of the whole person, including each child's spiritual, physical and moral well-being as well as academic progress".
- 1.2 The school occupies its own grounds in the village of Brewood, to the north of Wolverhampton. At the time of the inspection 271 girls aged 3 to 18 and 4 boys aged 3 to 7 were attending the school, of whom 21 were in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The ability profiles of the junior and senior schools are above the national average, with a fairly wide spread of abilities represented. The ability profile of the sixth form is slightly below the national average, with almost half of pupils having below average ability.
- 1.3 The majority of pupils come from within a twenty-mile radius and mainly from professional and business families. Approximately fifteen per cent of pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds.
- 1.4 The school has identified 47 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), of whom 40 receive specialist learning support. Two pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), both of whom receive additional support in English.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## 2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

### **The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills**

- 2.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills is excellent overall, in line with the school's aims to promote growth in body, mind and spirit. The pupils display excellent knowledge, understanding and skills in both their curricular and extra-curricular activities. They reason well and think logically. They apply previous knowledge effectively, including their mathematical knowledge. They read and write well and, since the last inspection, their presentation, spelling and grammar have improved throughout the school, especially up to Year 9. The pupils are highly articulate and respond to questions in a positive, informed and enthusiastic way. They listen attentively and can sustain their attention for long periods, working with evident enjoyment in many of their subjects. The pupils pick up instructions quickly and accurately and rarely need to have these repeated. They are efficient learners, working well independently and with others. They take notes independently and make good use of teaching resources provided, including information and communication technology (ICT). The pupils are highly creative and produce work of a high standard in art, music and drama.
- 2.2 The pupils' achievements in the performing arts are outstanding and a strength of the school. Other notable successes have been achieved in sport, with the under 12 swimming team being national champions in 2009. The pupils also enjoy success in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and in Young Enterprise. Good numbers of pupils, each year, achieve distinctions in examinations in speech and drama, in music and in public speaking.
- 2.3 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparable national data are currently available. The results in GCSE examinations have been above the national average for girls in maintained schools. Results at A level are only available for the last two years, and are slightly below the 2009 national average for girls in maintained schools, with improvement between 2009 and 2010. At GCSE, progress is good, results being good in relation to the pupils' abilities between Years 7 and 11. Results at A level are in line with pupils' abilities, indicating that their progress through the sixth form is appropriate. Throughout the school, pupils of all abilities, including those with LDD or EAL, make good progress.
- 2.4 The pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning. At all ages, they approach their work in a mature manner and their excellent behaviour further supports their learning.
- 2.5 The pupils' achievements are well supported by the quality of the teaching, throughout the school, which is excellent and often inspirational. The teachers are knowledgeable and show real passion for their subjects. Lessons are meticulously planned and target setting is the norm. The teachers ask focused questions, effectively drawing out the pupils' knowledge and understanding, and are careful to include the more reticent members of the class. Marking is carried out consistently and includes helpful comments to aid improvement.
- 2.6 The curriculum offered is broad and well balanced and, considering the size of the school, the sixth form is offered a good range of subjects. Complementing the

curriculum is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including sport, the performing arts and visits to places of interest both locally and further afield.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 2.7 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent and is strongly enhanced by the exceptionally caring relationships and supportive atmosphere that are apparent throughout the school. The pupils develop well spiritually as a result of the school's underlying Christian ethos. The pupils take an active part in assemblies and they take full advantage of the opportunities to reflect on their self worth and their place in the wider world that are offered in assemblies, in lessons and through the extensive programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education. They are sensitive to the beliefs of others and show respect for those of faiths different from their own.
- 2.8 At every stage, the pupils show a high level of awareness of moral and social issues and they reflect on these with maturity and understanding. They have a clear understanding of the needs of others and frequently initiate fund-raising for those in need. The pupils readily take on positions of responsibility and pupils from Year 6 upwards are active on the school council and contribute to decision making. The pupils are friendly and courteous, and a strong feature of their personal development is the way older pupils support younger ones and younger pupils regard older ones as role models. Those pupils spoken with during the course of the inspection combined self-assurance with a clear sense of concern and respect for others. Many opportunities for cultural development are woven into the curriculum, with a variety of speakers enriching assemblies, timetabled lessons and extra-curricular activities, and pupils show an excellent awareness of their own and others' cultures.
- 2.9 The outstanding pastoral care provided is underpinned by highly effective systems that enable pupils to feel valued and supported, and is a significant strength of the school. Measures to promote good discipline are extremely effective and appropriate structures are in place to deal with issues such as bullying should they arise. In interviews, pupils said they were confident to raise any concerns they had and that these would be dealt with. Special care is taken to ease the process of transfer through the school and the provision of a "2 to 3 Club" and a "6's to 7's Club" helps to smooth these transitions. Induction days and a "buddy" system are successful in encouraging new pupils to settle in. The system of vertical mentoring, where older pupils offer support to younger ones, enables the development of interpersonal skills and also contributes to the pupils' sense of belonging. Teachers are in close touch across the whole school and staff meetings provide opportunities for teachers to consider any pupils giving cause for concern and put supportive strategies in place.
- 2.10 Arrangements for welfare, health and safety are thorough and comply with statutory requirements to keep pupils safe. Child protection procedures are clear and well structured, and all staff have received appropriate training in this area. A comprehensive health and safety policy covers all areas of the life of the school for pupils, staff and visitors. All fire prevention measures are in order, and fire practices are held regularly and recorded correctly. Meals are of a good standard and are freshly cooked on the premises. Pupils are strongly encouraged to develop healthy eating habits and are informed about choosing healthy food options. Appropriate risk assessments are in place for events in and out of school. Admissions and attendance registers are properly completed and kept for the required length of time.

## **The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management**

- 2.11 The quality of governance is good. In line with the recommendations of the last inspection report, the structure and priorities of the governing body have been reviewed in order to provide active oversight, support and challenge. The governors, most of who have been appointed in the last two years, have a good understanding of the work and needs of the school. They are highly committed to the school and to its ongoing development and future success. In light of this, they have recently identified two further governors whose appointments will enhance the range of experience and expertise offered by the existing members of the governing body. To further support their work, the governors are conscientious in undertaking an appropriate range of training. The governors visit the school frequently, attending events, meeting with staff and observing lessons throughout the school. They meet regularly with members of the school's senior management team and exercise effective oversight of the finances and strategic direction of the school. They take seriously their responsibilities for overseeing regulatory matters and all statutory requirements are met.
- 2.12 The quality of leadership and management is good, with many excellent features. The senior management team gives strong leadership and is successful in ensuring that the school meets its aim to promote the pupils' growth in body, mind and spirit. The well-being and success of the pupils is at the heart of all the school seeks to do and, to that end, the leadership is committed to ensuring continuous improvement in all areas of the work of the school. Levels of staffing are good, and all necessary recruitment checks are properly carried out and recorded correctly in the centralised register of appointments. Staff throughout the school are well deployed and staff, both teaching and support, make a significant contribution to the overall well-being of the pupils. Premises and accommodation are kept in excellent order. Although all the requisite policies and procedures are now in place and meet requirements, in the past the school has not always been sufficiently rigorous in ensuring that those with delegated responsibility for updating policies and procedures, in line with changed requirements, have done so in a timely manner.
- 2.13 Links with parents are excellent. Parents receive helpful information about the school and about their children's progress. The great majority of parents who answered the pre-inspection questionnaire said that the school promotes worthwhile attitudes and views and offers a good range of extra-curricular activities, that information about the school is readily available and that they can communicate easily with the school. A number of parents said that the school does not encourage them to be involved with its life and work and that concerns are not always handled well. However, the inspection found that parents are offered many opportunities to be involved and that concerns are handled appropriately. The great majority of the pupils responding to their questionnaire said that they are making good progress in their work, that there is a good range of activities and that they have opportunities to take on positions of responsibility. A number of pupils said that teachers are not always fair in the way they treat pupils and that teachers do not monitor their workload. The pupils spoken with during the inspection said that they know teachers care about them. However, some pupils did feel that their workload is excessive.
- 2.14 The school has an appropriate complaints procedure and handles complaints efficiently, in line with the policy.



### **3. ACTION POINTS**

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

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

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

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

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Monitor the workload of all pupils, particularly those in Years 10 and above.
  2. Set up rigorous systems for governors and managers at all levels to monitor the effectiveness of policies and procedures in a timely manner, including in the EYFS.

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

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

4.1 The overall effectiveness of the EYFS is outstanding. The small numbers in each group mean that staff know the children well and can plan to meet their individual needs. As a result, children make outstanding progress from their different starting points. There is a close working relationship with parents, who are kept well informed of their children's progress, via homelink books and a weekly bulletin. Effective arrangements exist to ensure the children's health and safety and to encourage their involvement in their school and wider community. Steps are taken to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the setting's already outstanding practice and improve it further.

##### **4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.2 Leadership and management is good overall. Some features are outstanding. Safeguarding procedures are secure. Careful attention is given to the children's welfare. Systems for assessing the children's progress are outstanding, with clear links between observations and planning for the next steps in the children's learning. Self-evaluation takes account of the views of children and parents/carers. Staff and other resources are well deployed, including staffing for the extended day, and there is a strong sense of teamwork. Policies on discrimination and equality are well implemented in practice, so that all children have equal opportunities to succeed. However, the monitoring of the impact of other policies is not sufficiently rigorous, as was the case at the time of the last Ofsted inspection.

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

4.3 The quality of provision is outstanding. The highly stimulating and welcoming environment fully reflects the children's backgrounds and the wider community. Detailed flexible planning successfully balances teacher-led activities with those chosen by children. Adults respond to the children's interests swiftly, as exemplified by the circus activities initiated by the children. Stimulating indoor and outdoor environments provide safe learning areas for wide-ranging activities, such as the Reception children's imaginative role-play about mermaids. Experiences for the children are rooted in expert knowledge of the learning and development requirements. The excellent relationship between practitioners, parents and children ensures children feel secure, extremely well cared for and that their behaviour is excellent. Adults are vigilant in promoting safe practice. Staff eat with the children and actively encourage them to have a balanced meal. Children's achievements are recognised in celebration books, golden assemblies and on achievement boards.

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

- 4.4 Outcomes for children are outstanding. The children are eager learners who are keen to share their achievements. They progress well in relation to their starting points and work happily both individually and in groups. Children express their needs clearly, enjoy books and count objects carefully. The children are taught sensitively with open questioning; children demonstrate imagination and a sense of awe and wonder at the rich experiences offered to them. The children are well behaved; they listen carefully to each other, sing songs to remind themselves to eat healthily, keep clean and stay safe. The easy availability of the outdoor classroom ensures that the children are always physically active.

**Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the acting chair of governors and another representative of the governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors 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 Jean Marsland

Mrs Jane Holberton

Mr Roderick Spencer

Ms Sally Dibb-Holland

Reporting Inspector

Former Head of Juniors, GSA school

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Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector