

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST JAMES SENIOR GIRLS' SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St James Senior Girls' School

The junior school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School St James Senior Girls' School

DfE Number 205/6399
Registered Charity Number 270156

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Headmistress
Mrs Laura Hyde
Chair of Governors
Mr Jeremy Sinclair

Age Range 10 to 18

Total Number of Pupils 298
Gender of Pupils Girls

Numbers by Age 11-18: **277** 5-11: **21**

Number of Day Pupils Total: 298

Inspection dates 12 Oct 2010 to 13 Oct 2010

08 Nov 2010 to 10 Nov 2010

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 October 2004.

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

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.

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.

^{*}These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- St James Senior Girls' School is one of the St James Schools founded in 1975 with 1.1 the vision that education for pupils from the ages of four to eighteen would nourish the whole being spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically. The original belief in the importance of studying philosophy, alongside the best of traditional British education, underpins the ethos of the school. The intention is to inspire an admiration for wisdom together with an appreciation of the essential part it plays in discovering how to live happily, freely and in a spirit of unity. The main aim of the school is to provide a balanced education, which will promote true happiness and fulfilment for each individual in its care. The welfare of the pupils is stated to be first and foremost. Although without specific religious affiliation, the school attaches importance to Christian principles and observance, whilst welcoming the contribution that all faiths can make to an understanding of spirituality. Pupils come from families associated with all the major faiths and none, and represent many different races and backgrounds. The school is a charitable trust, administered by a board of governors which also oversees the other St James Schools.
- 1.2 The Senior Girls' School has been located at Olympia since 2001 and shares a building with the Junior Boys' and Girls' School. All senior girls are day pupils, currently 298 between the ages of 10 and 18, with 55 in the sixth form. Most girls who have attended the junior school and wish to transfer are accepted into a Year 6 class in the senior school. A further cohort is taken into Year 7 based on the North London Consortium of Schools 11+ examination, as well as an interview and consideration of school reports. Girls generally come from professional and highly educated families. They are predominantly white British, with a few from a variety of other backgrounds. English is an additional language for fifty-three girls, eight of whom receive support in English. Fifty-two girls have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), twenty-seven of whom receive specialist learning support provided by the school. None has a statement of special educational needs.
- 1.3 The ability range of pupils fluctuates from year to year. Based on tests carried out at the beginning of Year 7, the ability profile of the school is above the national average. Most girls are of above-average ability, a proportion being far above average.
- 1.4 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 The school is extremely successful in meeting its aim to inspire an admiration for wisdom and for girls to appreciate the part this plays in learning how to live happily, freely and in a spirit of unity. This is apparent in girls' excellent achievements academically, in their community service and in their outstanding personal development. They attain standards which are excellent compared with those in maintained schools at both GCSE and A level, making good progress from their starting points. Good teaching and an effective curriculum contribute well to girls' overall excellent achievement.
- 2.2 Articulate and confident, girls show a great depth of maturity. They learn from an early stage the value of meditation and philosophy in their education, which is reflected in their wise and thoughtful dispositions. Girls of different cultures and faiths relate exceptionally well to one another, conscious of each other's needs. Community cohesion is a significant strength of the school. Behaviour is exemplary; girls are very polite and considerate. The high-quality pastoral care provided by form tutors supports the successes of the school. Safeguarding the girls and their welfare, health and safety always has a high priority. In their responses to a pre-inspection questionnaire, girls expressed their appreciation of many aspects of school life, particularly extra-curricular activities, the support they receive from teachers and the concern that all staff show for their welfare. A small minority felt that rewards and sanctions are not always allocated in an equitable manner and this gives a feeling of unfairness at times.
- 2.3 The governing body is effective, aware of the school's significant strengths and committed to further improvement in the buildings. Leadership and management are also good, as seen in the clarity of vision and girls' achievements. Excellent policies are implemented with care and consideration for others. Not all middle leaders or heads of department are as successful as the best, which leaves some inconsistency in the quality of teaching. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection in the quality of information and communications technology (ICT) resources available, although not all staff use the modern technology to best effect. Staff morale is high. Parents are exceptionally positive about every aspect of school life, from the progress their children make to the management of the school. Inspection evidence supports these views. The school maintains excellent links with parents, providing helpful information about school life as well as details about the girls' achievements and areas for development.

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.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
 - 1. In order to raise the quality of all teaching to that of the best, ensure that heads of department are more accountable to senior leaders for monitoring provision in their areas.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

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

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievements is excellent, and better than at the time of the last inspection. Girls become increasingly confident in their individual abilities and make good academic progress, reflecting the school's aim of promoting true happiness and fulfilment for each individual in its care. Pupils of all ages approach their work with clear enjoyment and commitment, striving for excellence.
- 3.2 Girls are articulate, listen carefully to their teachers and to each other, and express themselves clearly in both oral and written tasks. They show good levels of understanding in both curricular and extra-curricular work. They apply their excellent linguistic, mathematical and scientific knowledge with confidence. Expertise is well developed in ICT lessons, culminating in significant success in the short-course GCSE examination. Girls develop high levels of creative and physical skills in the many opportunities provided.
- 3.3 Groups and individuals show excellent achievements in music, such as membership of the National Children's Wind Orchestra and the Royal Academy of Music, and in the sciences where pupils have gained Crest Awards, Nuffield bursaries and success in Biology and Chemistry Olympiads. Other achievements are in national mathematics and essay-writing competitions, national Cranmer Awards for drama and involvement in the National Youth Theatre. The school enjoys considerable sporting success at national and local level in netball and lacrosse. Participation and success at bronze, silver and gold levels in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award is high. Sixth-formers go on to study a wide range of courses at popular universities.
- The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results in GCSE and at A-level were excellent compared with the national average for girls in maintained schools. IGCSE results have been above worldwide averages, and broadly in line with UK averages. Approaching two-thirds of the grades at GCSE and IGCSE were at A* or A, and over half of the grades at A level were A or B. Examination results in 2010 were similar to those of earlier years. These results, interpreted in the light of good teaching, and the exceptionally positive attitudes of pupils, indicate that they are making good progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability, as also shown by standardised measures of progress.
- 3.5 Girls have extremely high expectations of themselves and respond eagerly to their studies. They work very well independently and cooperatively in groups. Their concentration is excellent. Their exceptional attitudes to learning are supported by hard work and an ethos of respect for each other and their teachers. Meditation at the start and end of days and lessons fosters this approach.

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

- The good curriculum has breadth and fulfils the aims of the school, nurturing the whole being spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically. It contributes effectively to academic achievement, covers all the required areas of learning and meets the needs of pupils of all ages and abilities. Transition from the junior school and other schools is supported by good curriculum links. Preparation for the next stage of education is excellent, with very helpful guidance on entry to higher education.
- 3.7 A broad, though sometimes uneven, range of subjects is available up to Year 9, including Sanskrit for those pupils who studied this subject in the junior school, classical and modern foreign languages and the three separate sciences. Years 10 and 11 have a central band of compulsory courses, with a wide choice of optional subjects at GCSE and IGCSE. A good, broad range of A-level courses is offered in the sixth form. Subjects usually run with the normal subject time allocation, even where take-up is low. Philosophy is taught to every year group to provide expansion for pupils' personal development and access to wisdom from the great spiritual traditions of the East and West.
- 3.8 A particular strength is the emphasis on sport, drama, dance and music. Sport is compulsory throughout the school, with generous time allowed and good choice and flexibility. There are some disparities in curriculum time allocation, such as that available for each of the three sciences, and the timetabling of two periods consecutively. This is ideal for some practical subjects but not for others, like modern foreign languages.
- 3.9 All year groups benefit from a well-planned, carefully integrated programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education, closely linked with a good careers programme starting in Year 8. Year 10 pupils are encouraged to think about the world of work. Girls value greatly the excellent, innovative whole year-group visit to a centre where, over a week, they experience a very varied programme, ranging from kitchen skills to interview techniques and time management. An extensive programme of leadership skills is provided in the sixth form involving specialist external trainers as well as school staff.
- 3.10 The curriculum for pupils with LDD, and those for whom English is an additional language, is very effective. All pupils are screened on entry to the school and those identified with specific needs are carefully monitored. Staff are provided with lists of subject vocabulary and library staff provide helpful reading materials. The number of subjects studied is adapted to help pupils maximise their success. The most able pupils also receive targeted support.
- 3.11 The curriculum is enriched by an extensive range of about forty high quality extracurricular activities, supporting the main school curriculum by providing intellectual
 challenge for the more able and stimulating all pupils to extend their interests, skills
 and knowledge. Levels of involvement are high and participation is closely
 monitored by form tutors. Staff are exceptionally willing and respond during the
 course of the year to requests from pupils, and clubs are run for even small groups.
 Participation in the Model United Nations, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award, and a
 wide range of service work, provides many opportunities to become involved with
 local and more distant communities.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.12 The quality of teaching is good. Lessons range from those where exceptional skills ensure high pupil engagement, enthusiasm for learning and rapid sustained progress, to a few with some weaknesses as well as strengths. Teaching is effective in promoting pupils' progress and intellectual development and supports the school's aims. It provides the girls with good opportunities to achieve success. Effective specialist support for pupils with LDD, and for those for whom English is an additional language, helps them make progress comparable to that of their peers.
- 3.13 Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they are adept at conveying their love of subjects to the girls, who are quietly appreciative in their response. Staff know girls exceptionally well and this enables them to cater for their individual needs.
- 3.14 Lessons are often academically challenging and pupils are highly attentive and responsive. They are confident risk-takers, willingly answering and asking questions. Resources are usually used well, with a good focus on practical activities. Outstanding relationships between teachers and pupils are apparent in high quality communication. This reflects the strong, caring ethos of the school and helps to promote a positive attitude to learning.
- 3.15 In examples of excellent practice, pupils' engagement and interest in science was held through the use of a range of strategies. For example, in a sixth-form lesson pupils held 'dominoes' on which there were questions and answers, and all had to be involved in this excellent academic game. In a history lesson of a similar quality, girls shared their notes and ideas about the General Strike, developing an excellent knowledge as the teacher skilfully tested their understanding. The good use of assessment boards in a range of lessons enables teachers to gain immediate feedback on pupils' understanding. High expectations of good conduct are invariably met. Less successful lessons were characterised by a lack of pace at times and insufficient opportunity for pupils to engage with the work, which did not build well on prior knowledge because questioning was weak. Few staff use the digital projectors and interactive whiteboards at their disposal to maximum effect.
- 3.16 Marking is mostly thorough and accurate, and useful diagnostic comments are made. Girls value greatly the amount of personal feedback they receive from staff. A well-established system of pupil tracking results in the allocation of helpful, aspirational targets. Although a wide range of marking systems operates amongst departments, girls are happy with this diversity and understand clearly where they stand in each subject. Excellent examples of marking and target-setting were seen in several subjects, including in modern foreign languages, English and the sciences.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 Girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. The school's unique ethos is clearly evident and the aim of providing spiritual enrichment by drawing on the wisdom of our world traditions is central to pupils' experience.
- 4.2 Pupils develop an outstanding appreciation of spirituality; they have a well-developed sense of identity and self-worth. They readily and happily engage in the period of quietude at the beginning and end of each day, when they may meditate, contemplate, pray or simply be still. Similarly, at the start and end of lessons, pupils peacefully reflect on what has passed and prepare for what is to come.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral awareness is extremely strong. They are encouraged to live generously, and they do, aiming for the best and developing a strong sense of honesty and service. Pupils develop the skills to weigh up the pros and cons of a situation. These outcomes stem from the study of philosophy as a core feature of the school and a comprehensive and extremely useful programme of personal, social, health and citizenship education with offshoots covering, amongst other things, financial literacy. Older pupils' understanding of moral dilemmas has been further enhanced by the introduction of a fortnightly activities period, which includes a series of lectures with topics as diverse as 'The Fantastic Voyage nanotechnology and robotics in medicine' and 'The value of a spiritual life'.
- Pupils' social development is excellent. They grow to be confident and perceptive young adults. Sixth-form prefects and older girls help younger ones, and all pupils respond positively to the encouragement they receive to contribute to the school and wider community. Each year the school has a major project for which to raise money and each form devises its own plans for this, with these ideas being approved by the community service council run by sixth formers. This year's project supports a charity which houses and educates street children in Calcutta, and last year a significant sum was raised to purchase a minibus for Ghana to transport pupils to and from school. Alongside this, every form and individual develops outstanding awareness of social responsibility through community service, ranging from Year 7 cooking lunch for local senior citizens once a term to Years 8 and 9 inviting guests to a round-table discussion entitled 'Memories and Megabytes'.
- The cultural development of the pupils is also exceptionally good supported by the school's inclusive ethos and a comprehensive schedule of educational visits and trips. Girls in Years 6 to 11 greatly enjoy attending a residential course each year where they learn to live together whilst taking part in various activities; for example, Year 8 pupils sailed off the Isle of Wight. Pupils appreciate the many opportunities for them to be involved in public performances. For example, around forty pupils from Years 6 to 8 are involved in the future production of *The Railway Children* and a similar number are in *The Sound of Music*. The girls are very involved in assemblies which enhance their cultural awareness. In an assembly during the inspection, all girls valued the lower school string orchestra's outstanding performance and the quality of a presentation by sixth-formers on 'Communication'. All faiths and cultures are appreciated and valued on many occasions.

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

- Outstanding pastoral care is provided for pupils. Staff give excellent guidance, in accordance with the school's aims of providing support for all aspects of each individual's personal development. Form teachers are central to the pastoral care system and they work very effectively in their roles, liaising closely with parents, senior management and other staff. They are highly valued members of staff and carefully selected. They meet fortnightly or weekly with a member of the senior leadership team or headmistress to discuss matters relating to the girls in their care. Girls usually remain with the same form teacher right through until the end of Year 11, thus providing continuity and a depth of knowledge of each pupil. Sixth-formers are very proactive in their dealings with younger pupils. Those who work as form prefects provide excellent support, and a member of the senior leadership meets with them on a regular basis to guide their work. Embedded in the culture of the school is a readiness to share concerns and a clear trust that these will be dealt with sensitively and effectively.
- 4.7 Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are excellent. Staff know pupils well as individuals and show them respect, leading to girls' high standard of self-worth. Pupils know whom they should approach if they do have problems and they feel very well supported by both staff and older girls. Bullying is highly unusual but pupils say that, on the very rare occasion when it does occur, it is dealt with constructively and effectively. Staff are also on the lookout for any less serious examples of hurtful behaviour and they deal with this appropriately. The approach of the school is to start with the youngest pupils and work with them to prevent problems from arising; this is highly successful and leads to a calm, ordered and purposeful atmosphere.
- In the pupils' questionnaire, a small number of girls suggested that teachers did not always treat pupils equally and that rewards and sanctions were not always fair. However, discussions with pupils indicated they were happy with the way in which they were treated, although some of the younger girls did feel that teachers were not always consistent in their approach to minor matters. The new discipline system, which has recently been introduced in consultation with the girls, is inevitably taking some time to bed down and be fully accepted.
- 4.9 The safeguarding policy is robust and effectively implemented. An appropriate programme of regular training in child protection for staff and volunteers is carried out. The school places a high priority on the safety and welfare of pupils both in school and on educational visits, and undertakes thorough risk assessments. All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, and arrangements for pupils who are ill are good. The school has a suitable plan in place to improve accessibility for those with disabilities. Admission and attendance registers are carefully maintained and stored appropriately. Pupils are encouraged to keep healthy, not least through the excellent range of curricular and extra-curricular sport on offer. The food provided is vegetarian and, although choices are somewhat limited, pupils are generally satisfied with the provision and appreciate changes made in response to suggestions from their food forum.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The governance of the school is good and supports the school's aims. Investment has improved ICT facilities in response to a recommendation in the previous inspection report. Many governors have had a close association with the school over a number of years, often as parents of past or present pupils, giving them substantial and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and development points. They receive useful, detailed information about all aspects of school life from the headmistress.
- 5.2 The board of governors for St James Senior Girls' School has oversight of all functions except financial arrangements, which are carried out by a central bursarial team. They have wide-ranging expertise in areas such as leadership, marketing, finance, buildings and the law, but currently do not have a governor with knowledge of the secondary school curriculum, which is unhelpful. In recent years, as the St James Schools have grown in complexity and size, a good committee structure has evolved. A new chair was appointed in 2007 following the retirement of the founding chairman. A Senior Girls' School group is dedicated to the evaluation of, and support for, the education provided in Years 6 to 13.
- 5.3 Governors are well aware of the complexities of one building shared by two schools, the Senior Girls' School and the Junior School, each with its own headmistress, and the difficulties that this can generate. They are working to resolve the situation with a long-term buildings plan, but some issues remain. Governors carry out their responsibilities conscientiously and effectively concerning safeguarding, welfare, health and safety, and for pupils with LDD. Procedures are in hand to establish formal and supportive appraisal for the headmistress, involving the headteacher of another senior school, but this has yet to come to fruition.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- Leadership and management are good, and focused on responding to the needs of the girls. The school's aim of nurturing the whole being spiritually, emotionally, intellectually and physically is at the very heart of the school, reflected in the headmistress's drive for excellence in the quality of education provided. Senior leaders have a clear understanding of their roles and complementary skills. They work very closely and effectively together. The exceptionally good personal development of the girls grows from the spiritual and inclusive approach modelled by the headmistress and senior staff. High academic standards are the outcome of both the leadership drive to improve teaching and learning, and the girls' endeavour. The air of calm referred to in the previous inspection report has been maintained, as has the clarity of vision and purpose generated by leaders. Good progress has been made in implementing the single recommendation in the last report to improve the ICT resources available in the school.
- 5.5 Middle leaders are effective in their various roles in the school, with some excellent practice, for example in English and modern foreign languages, but the picture is inconsistent. In a few subject areas, variability in the quality of teaching and learning has not been fully resolved. Lines of accountability are clear but are not always implemented rigorously. Leadership provided by form tutors is highly effective and appreciated. Systems of communication within the school ensure that all are

informed of what they need to know. Very effective strategic planning, based on school aims and an excellent knowledge and understanding of school strengths and shortcomings, is successfully guiding developments. Staff are well qualified and knowledgeable, and the resources at their disposal meet the needs of the curriculum. Excellent use is made of the accommodation available, including the off-site specialist sports facilities.

- All recruitment checks are carried out meticulously and school policies, including that for safeguarding pupils, are systematically checked and revised regularly to ensure that they meet all requirements. They are thoroughly implemented. Staff appraisal is developmental and helpful. In-service training responds to whole school areas such as child protection and welfare, health and safety, as well as individual needs, with a strong focus on ensuring that staff have up-to-date knowledge and understanding of examination board requirements.
- 5.7 The outstanding sense of community throughout the school is generated by the team of teaching and administrative staff, who work very well together. This stems from the exceptional spiritual base, apparent in the focus on meditation, the girls' welfare and high quality communication.

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

- 5.8 The school maintains excellent links with parents, who appreciate the warmth, care and attention to detail shown by staff when making contact with them, as well as their children. The school's aims are fully met through this all-round communication. Parents responding to a questionnaire about the school showed no significant concern over any aspect of the school's provision. They were extremely pleased with the information they receive; they also considered that girls make good or better progress, that the school achieves high standards of behaviour and is well managed. Inspectors concur with their overwhelmingly positive views.
- 5.9 Parents have many opportunities to be involved in school life and to learn about, and support, their children's education. An exceptionally helpful programme of reporting enables them to keep abreast of progress and attainment. This comprises twice-yearly reports giving detailed information on progress, half-termly grades and a grade sheet for the end of the spring term. Form tutors make themselves available for discussions with parents after the end of the school day, and several evening sessions are arranged to enable parents to appreciate curriculum options. An excellent conference takes place during the working day, when the form tutor, careers teacher, parents and the girls come together to discuss possible future directions and careers. Social exchange is furthered by inviting parents to tea at the school as well as to an annual lecture on topics such as health care research and personal challenges. Parents have many other opportunities to attend school events, for example supporting sports teams, and music and drama productions.
- 5.10 Parents' views are surveyed annually and changes made in response to concerns, such as increasing the number of sports available. The school has introduced text and e-mail communication and has improved the website, which displays all the required policies, as well as producing a high-quality school magazine, *Spectrum*, which celebrates the school's work and successes. The school handles any concerns parents have speedily, sensitively and with due care; there have been no formal complaints in the past two years.

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 other staff, and with governors including the chair of 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

Mr Peter McGregor Reporting Inspector

Mrs Susan Gorham Headmistress, GSA school
Mr John Wood Headmaster, ISA school