



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST MARTHA'S SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St Martha's School

Full Name of School	St Martha's School
DfE Number	302/6014
Registered Charity Number	233809
Address	St Martha's School Camlet Way Hadley Wood Hertfordshire EN4 0NJ
Telephone Number	020 8449 6889
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Email Address	office@st-marthas.org.uk
Headmaster	Mr James Sheridan
Chair of Governors	Mr Les Edgar
Age Range	11 to 19
Total Number of Pupils	255
Gender of Pupils	Girls
Number of Day Pupils	Total: 255
Inspection dates	07 Dec 2010 to 08 Dec 2010 17 Jan 2011 to 19 Jan 2011

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 November 2006.

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.

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 Martha's School is a girls' day school of the Order of the Sisters of St Martha and the sisters are the trustees of the school. The Order was founded in France in the middle of the 17th century to serve the poor and sick. Escaping from religious persecution in France in 1903, a group of sisters settled near Brighton, before some moved to north London where they opened a small school in Barnet. The school is now located in the village of Hadley Wood on the outskirts of Barnet where the senior section moved in 1947. It has been developed around an 18th century listed house. Governance is delegated to a governing body, one of whom is a sister of the Order. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors has been appointed.
- 1.2 The school is a Catholic foundation that exists in order to promote the spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual and physical well-being of every pupil in its care, in the spirit of the Gospel. It strives to foster an awareness of God and to build community by working on good relationships between staff and pupils, staff amongst themselves and pupils with their peers. It accepts girls from other denominations and of any race or belief. It stresses the values of perseverance and dedication to whatever the pupils do now and in the future. The school aims to ensure that the pupils will leave the school helped by St Martha's motto: 'Servite Domino in Laetitia' ('Serve the Lord with Joy').
- 1.3 The ability profile of the school is slightly above the national average, with a fairly wide spread of abilities at all ages.
- 1.4 The pupils are drawn from the local area and reflect its ethnic diversity. A small number come from overseas to join Year 12. Most pupils come from professional or business backgrounds. There are currently 255 pupils in the school, of whom 7 have English as an additional language (EAL). All of them receive support for their English. The school has identified 18 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD). All of them receive specialist learning support through their individual educational plans. A number of pupils leave after Year 11 to pursue their education elsewhere and so the sixth form is small in relation to the size of the school.
- 1.5 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 successful in meeting its aims of promoting the spiritual, aesthetic, intellectual and physical well-being of every pupil in its care, in the spirit of the Gospel. The school motto, 'Serve the Lord with Joy', is evident everywhere in the school and is central to the spirit of the staff who work there. Pupils achieve well overall. Each pupil is helped to achieve her best through careful monitoring and tracking, and through the setting of targets that are regularly discussed with a personal tutor. The school uses standardised data to monitor progress and thorough teaching contributes to good examination results. The concern in the previous inspection report about provision for pupils with LDD or EAL has been addressed through excellent systems that enable these pupils to achieve to the best of their abilities. As yet, the school is not equally successful in offering challenge to the most able, or consistent opportunities for independent learning, but it has put in place the foundations of a more comprehensive policy. The pupils benefit from much choice in the curriculum as well as a broad base to their education, although timetabling in the sixth form imposes some constraints on the teaching of some subjects. Physical education provision in some year groups is limited.
- 2.2 The strong pastoral care contributes to the achievements of the pupils and engenders the good attitudes to learning that the pupils show. The pupils learn from the start to show respect for other people; they are welcoming and friendly to all. Their spiritual awareness is strong and those that do not subscribe to the tenets of the Gospel willingly accept the attitudes to others that it teaches. Good relationships amongst pupils and between staff and pupils are a strength of the school; the pupils feel well cared for and appreciate the concern that their teachers show for them. The school is successful in its aim of building a community. It makes excellent arrangements for the pupils' welfare, health and safety which contribute to their personal development.
- 2.3 The governors are committed and have a good structure of committees to support the work of the school. They fulfil their responsibilities with regard to regulatory requirements. Leadership and management of the school are excellent and much progress has been made since the previous inspection, particularly in addressing the role of middle managers, raised at that time. The senior leadership team (SLT) has a clear shared vision and has put effective structures in place to realise it. In response to pre-inspection questionnaires, pupils expressed their confidence that any bullying would be effectively and promptly dealt with. They appreciate the range of extra-curricular activities on offer and the opportunities to take responsibility. Parents praised the worthwhile attitudes and views of the school and its high level of pastoral care, and inspectors agree.

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) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Extend the programme of physical education.
2. Ensure that timetabling, particularly in the sixth form, avoids over-long teaching periods in certain subjects.
3. Encourage the pupils to engage more fully in independent learning.

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 overall achievement of the pupils is good and shows that the school achieves its aim of helping each pupil to achieve her best. Pupils with LDD are able to achieve to the best of their ability. The most able pupils gain very good examination results but are not always challenged to learn independently. Pupils listen and read with understanding and are competent in the use of mathematics, and information and communication technology. They are articulate and able to express their views, as was evident in an English lesson for younger pupils on different ways in which language is used. The pupils' writing for all purposes is of a good standard. They demonstrate logical thought, exemplified in GCSE business studies where pupils discussed corporate social responsibility. Creativity is evident in imaginative displays in classrooms, in the striking art work seen in the art rooms and in musical undertakings. Opportunities for pupils to display their physical capabilities are limited.
- 3.2 Pupils achieve well in national competitions in chemistry and mathematics. Significant numbers achieve distinctions and merits in speech and drama examinations and in music, reflecting accomplishment in a variety of instruments with a few successes in higher grades. Pupils gain sailing certificates and cookery diplomas. Others achieve notable successes in local athletics championships, especially in Year 9. Pupils have been successful in Irish dancing, ice-skating, karate, long distance running and tae kwon-do. The school supports the pupils in these activities and celebrates their successes in assemblies, in the school bulletins and on the plasma screens around the site.
- 3.3 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 available. Results at GCSE and at A level have been good in relation to the national average for girls in maintained schools. At A level, results have been similar to the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. Standardised measures indicate that the pupils' progress to GCSE is good in relation to the average for pupils of similar ability. The good progress made by pupils of all ages was observed in lessons during the inspection as well as in their written work, displays and subject interviews. In the sixth form, standardised tests show that pupils make good progress and almost all girls leaving Year 13 gain entrance to university, the majority to their first choice of institution.
- 3.4 Pupils approach learning positively and have a strong work ethic. They come to their lessons ready to co-operate and to engage fully in the tasks set. They apply themselves well and are eager to achieve. Pupils organise and present their work neatly and carefully.

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

- 3.5 The school's curriculum is good and effectively supports its aim of teaching the whole person. All pupils benefit from opportunities for discussion in religious education, life skills classes and personal, social, citizenship and health education (PSCHE). The curriculum for pupils up to GCSE is broad and enables the pupils to have experience of core subjects, as well as a number of additions in Years 7 to 9 and options for GCSE. Provision for games and physical activities for pupils of all ages is adequate, but is limited in scope, apart from a GCSE option in physical education for Years 10 and 11. The academic curriculum in the sixth form offers a wide range of subjects in relation to its size and the school does its best to accommodate what the pupils want. However, the length and distribution of a few A-level lessons are uneven owing to timetabling constraints. A full programme of outside speakers, and visits to art galleries in London or trips abroad to Paris and Sorrento enhance the pupils' learning.
- 3.6 The school provides well for those pupils with LDD or EAL, addressing the recommendation of the previous inspection. A designated learning needs co-ordinator who is able to provide strong support has been appointed. The pupils' needs are initially identified by subject staff or by standardised testing. After consultation with the pupils' parents, appropriate learning plans are devised and all staff are then made aware of ways in which the pupils' needs can be supported. Staff liaise with the learning needs co-ordinator at all stages and, in particular, when introducing new schemes of work. Provision for the most able pupils is as yet less well developed although the new extra-curricular programme is beginning to address this need.
- 3.7 There is an extensive careers programme to support the pupils, particularly in the transitional stages. Pupils and parents receive information and advice about GCSE and A level-options; the headmaster interviews individually all pupils from Years 9 to 13. Pupils in Years 10 and 12 take part in work experience programmes, and good support is provided for university application. At each stage of their education, pupils are well prepared and supported.
- 3.8 The school's extra-curricular provision is good and has grown since the previous inspection. Pupils from Years 7 to 11 are strongly encouraged to participate in the wealth of different pursuits. Activities to provide additional stretch and challenge in academic subjects are included, as well as extra lessons in the sciences to enable some pupils to take the triple science GCSEs. Few activities are provided after school as many pupils travel home by bus but the school has now started to provide some late buses to enable activities to take place later in the day.
- 3.9 There are active links with the community. Pupils in Year 12 have the opportunity to participate in the pilgrimage to Lourdes each year, helping the infirm. All pupils participate in the distribution of harvest gifts each year, and in the Lenten campaign they raise money for a designated charity. Pupils sang carols at Christmas in a home for the elderly.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.10 Teaching overall is good and is effective in supporting the pupils' progress. Some teaching is outstanding. The high standard of teaching enables pupils of all ages and abilities to achieve well and make good progress. Teachers are committed; they know their pupils well and encourage them in their work. Teaching demonstrates good subject knowledge and skill in varying the activities during the lessons to maintain the pupils' interest. Good time management ensures that lessons achieve the learning objectives for the pupils. Good resources for learning are provided and many teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards to involve pupils in the lessons. As at the time of the last inspection, opportunities afforded to pupils for independent thinking are limited and the pupils' work demonstrates few occasions when those of different abilities are given different tasks. Homework tasks are generally appropriate but in some cases lack opportunity for the most able to extend their thinking. In the best lessons observed, skilful use of questioning made appropriate demands on able pupils. Some imaginative tasks encouraged pupils to take risks. For example, in GCSE classical civilisation, pupils prepared presentations on Greek gods to deliver to the class and set brief questions or puzzles for their peers who, in turn, graded the presentations using examination criteria. This encouraged the pupils to use analytical skills when listening as well as to judge what level of questioning was appropriate for their peers.
- 3.11 An extensive programme of training supports teachers in their work. In particular, the training on such topics as the use of data, monitoring, tracking and target-setting has had a substantial impact on the way teaching follows the pupils' progress. Assessment procedures have been improved considerably since the previous inspection and are now excellent. The use of standardised tests in Years 7, 10 and 12 ensures that the pupils' abilities are known and this information is disseminated to all teachers in an understandable format. Detailed training has been given to teaching staff to help them to use the available data in order to raise their own and the pupils' performances. Target-setting is very well embedded in the school and regular, active monitoring of the targets assists pupils to maintain their focus.
- 3.12 Scrutiny of the pupils' work shows frequent and careful marking. The best marking is consistent, detailed and supplemented with helpful comments to support further progress.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

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

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is outstanding. The previous inspection report praised the personal development of the pupils and this continues to be a real strength of the school. The school places the Catholic faith at the heart of its life, and staff and pupils live by its motto, 'Serve the Lord with Joy'. The spiritual awareness of pupils is nurtured through an active life of prayer and reflection at school and they benefit from an attractive chapel and a full-time chaplain. The school meets the aim articulated in the mission statement of fostering an awareness of God in its pupils. The school recognises that not all its pupils may have a strong belief in God but they are encouraged to start their 'journey of faith' at St Martha's and there are plentiful opportunities for them to develop their spiritual awareness. The self-awareness gained by pupils contributes to their self-confidence and self-esteem.
- 4.2 The moral development of the pupils is palpable. They support one another and have a strong sense of right and wrong. They understand the rationale underlying the school's rules and respect these. Pupils emphasise the support that they feel emanates from the school and from their fellow pupils, and recognise the friendly and welcoming atmosphere. Indeed, the ambience around the school is calm and ordered. The school has recently reorganised its PSCE programme, putting a robust structure in place that is supported by clear schemes of work. This programme gives pupils opportunities, amongst other things, to consider their rights and responsibilities, and also develops an understanding of public institutions in the UK. It is supported by an excellent programme of visiting speakers who cover a number of relevant themes.
- 4.3 Pupils' social development is excellent. They accept responsibility for their own actions and are keen to uphold the profile of the school. Pupils contribute to the school community by assuming positions of responsibility in roles such as form and sports captains. Each form also elects a representative for the Faith in Action group. Sixth formers are elected to positions as house captains and can apply for the post of head girl. Pupils feel that they can bring their views to the student council for further consideration. They are encouraged to show their concern for the wider good and to commit to charitable fund-raising. They initiate and participate in campaigns for charity with enthusiasm, for example supporting an active link with a school in Zambia. They understand the value of this contribution and its significance to the school's ethos. Assemblies, meetings and some lessons allow pupils to develop their social, political and economic awareness with regard to those less fortunate than themselves, and thereby to develop a caring attitude to the community beyond the school gates, both local and international.
- 4.4 Although the school places great emphasis on the role of the Catholic faith in day-to-day life, pupils of other faiths are welcomed too, and the pupils exist within an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding, an aspect of the school of which they are very proud. The number of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds represented in the school offers many chances for cultural development, and the curriculum allows pupils to experience and learn about other countries and their cultures. They develop understanding of the world outside school. As well as learning about other cultures, the pupils have frequent opportunities to explore their own culture, through the curriculum and through visits to places of interest, to theatres and to galleries.

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

- 4.5 The quality of arrangements for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is outstanding. The relationships amongst pupils and between pupils and staff are exceptional. The school has a caring, positive ethos that is reflected in the way that members of the school community work together. The school is successfully achieving its aim to build a family atmosphere that allows all pupils to develop confidence and self-awareness.
- 4.6 The tutor group structure enables pupils to build strong and lasting relationships with staff. Pupils were quick to assert that they always feel there is an adult to whom they could turn in case of difficulties. The tutor log system ensures a high degree of consistency in the quality of pastoral care and it is monitored assiduously by housemistresses and senior staff. The tutor log also offers a very useful programme for tutors to cover with their charges. All pupils have a weekly meeting with their tutor which has structure and purpose. Tutor groups are organised within a house system which is effective in building relationships across year groups and engendering a positive sense of competition. The 'guardian angel' system, by which sixth formers provide support for new Year 7 pupils, offers further reassurance. Younger pupils recognise the effectiveness of the school's induction procedures that ensure that they make a smooth start to their senior school career and are made to feel welcomed and at home.
- 4.7 Behaviour is good around the school and in lessons. There are effective procedures for promoting good behaviour, such as the house point system, and any lapses are dealt with swiftly, effectively and with consideration for the welfare of the community. Pupils were keen to emphasise that bullying is very rare and that any cases are dealt with quickly. This view was firmly supported by the pupils' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The strong ethos of care and consideration for others is reinforced by an effective anti-bullying policy. In their responses to the questionnaire, some pupils expressed the opinion that the school does not listen to their views. However, the inspection team noted that there is an active student council, and those pupils who were interviewed were clear in their understanding of how to make their views known.
- 4.8 The school's safeguarding arrangements have regard to statutory guidance and are robust. All staff are trained annually in safeguarding procedures and those with specific responsibilities are appropriately trained at least every two years. The school takes all necessary measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards; it ensures that arrangements for health and safety are effective. There is suitable provision for pupils who are ill or injured and for those with LDD, and they are treated with care and consideration. The school has a detailed plan to improve educational access for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities and staff training is particularly strong in this area. Admission and attendance registers are properly maintained. Pupils are educated in the need for healthy living and learn about the importance of a good diet in home economics and PSCHE. School meals are nutritious and varied but provision for regular physical exercise is limited in some year groups.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 Governance of the school is good. The governors have a careful oversight of the school and are effective in providing the pupils with an education consistent with its aims. They are committed to the school's ethos and to maintaining its Catholic traditions. Their concern that each pupil should be enabled to achieve to the best of her ability and should be the recipient of a high standard of pastoral care is central in their vision for the school. They monitor educational standards through scrutiny of results and through annual reports from heads of faculty, as well as the headmaster's termly reports. They are responsible for good financial planning and for ensuring that the school makes essential investment in staff, accommodation and resources, and do so effectively. They are involved in development planning for the school and have a clear sense of priorities in what they wish to do. The work of the governors is supported by sub-committees, all of which meet regularly and report to the full governing body.
- 5.2 The governors have in place a formal appraisal system for the headmaster, to whom they offer support and challenge. The chair is readily available and meets regularly with senior staff. Governors attend school functions and have a sound insight into the workings of the school. At present, the governing body lacks the wide spread of expertise it considers necessary and is recruiting new members. The training of governors is limited but they are aware of the need and are arranging for a consultant to lead a training session.
- 5.3 The governors are effective in discharging their responsibilities for child protection, welfare, health and safety throughout the school. They undertake an annual review of the safeguarding policy.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 Leadership and management of the school are outstanding. At all levels of management, there is a shared vision, at the heart of which are the well-being and progress of the pupils. The school motto permeates leadership and management's planning as does their concern for every pupil in their care. The SLT sets clear educational direction for the school and is diligent in ensuring that every member of staff is clear about and able to share that direction. Since the previous inspection, the role of middle management has been much developed and the lines of communication are well defined so that school policies are effectively carried out. Heads of faculty are responsible for disseminating school policies to all teaching staff and ensuring that they are adhered to. Housemistresses similarly monitor the work of tutors so that the pastoral system is equally strong. The pupils benefit from the strength of leadership and management both pastorally and academically because of effective oversight of the smooth working of the monitoring systems that enable every pupil to achieve to the best of her ability and support her with outstanding pastoral care.
- 5.5 The SLT has instituted a programme of training so that staff are developed and motivated in their academic and pastoral work. All staff are trained for their roles in meeting the needs of all children, and in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety. Performance management is actively carried out at all levels and for all staff roles. Self-evaluation lies at the heart of this process but the achievement of set targets is

actively monitored throughout the school year. The SLT continually reviews and evaluates the work of the school, constantly seeking to improve what it does. Recommendations made in the previous inspection report have been debated, discussed and addressed effectively. In addition to maintaining the excellent systems it has put in place, the SLT also plans for the future, involving all staff in development planning for the benefit of the pupils. It plans with an awareness of financial constraints, closely addressing how to improve its own performance while investing wisely in essential resources.

- 5.6 The school has thorough arrangements for checking the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors.

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

- 5.7 The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians is outstanding. St Martha's maintains a close and constructive relationship with parents. Parental pre-inspection questionnaires revealed a high degree of satisfaction with the school and the education and support provided. In their responses, parents said that they value the attitudes and ethos promoted by the school and they feel that the school achieves high standards of good behaviour. They appreciate the pastoral care of their daughters and are happy with the ease of communication with the school. A few parents suggested that provision for the most able pupils is limited in scope and that homework does not always encourage independent learning, comments endorsed by the inspectors.
- 5.8 Since the previous inspection, the school has developed a new communications policy and there are plentiful streams of information sent to parents, including a weekly bulletin that is available through the parent zone on the school website, email, a termly colourful and attractive newsletter, a social network feed and frequent updates online. Parents are invited to many school events and are keen to support their children on these occasions. There is a strong parent teacher association which runs a number of events, raising considerable sums of money for the school.
- 5.9 Parents are given up-to-date feedback on the progress of their daughters. Interim grades can be accessed on the website every month and they include brief comments from each teacher. Full reports provide comments on the pupils' attitudes and progress as well as highlighting areas for improvement. Teachers complete reports thoroughly and professionally, and their regard and affection for their pupils comes across strongly in their comments. There is also a great deal of informal communication between teachers and parents regarding the pupils' progress. For example, contact is likely to be made if work is not handed in or is of an inadequate standard. Parents are also notified if their daughter is making particularly good progress, and the commendations system ensures that letters are sent home if pupils achieve a certain number of house points.
- 5.10 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with the required information about the school. Much of this information is available on the school's website, and a list of available information and policies is provided with the prospectus. Parents of prospective pupils are invited to apply to the school for copies of any other policies they wish to examine.
- 5.11 The school takes parental complaints seriously and always follows them up, abiding by the procedures detailed in the complaints policy. Suitable records of complaints

and the school's responses are maintained. Owing to the effective channels between the school and parents, concerns are generally resolved swiftly and amicably, and parents have not had recourse to the formal complaints system.

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, 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 Deborah Forbes

Mrs Carole Baker

Mrs Gwenda Lilley

Mr Michael Windsor

Reporting Inspector

Headmistress, ISA school

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Headmaster, HMC school