



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Nottingham Girls' High School GDST

December 2019



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School's Details

School	Nottingham Girls' High School GDST			
DfE number	892/6009			
Registered charity number	306983			
Address	Nottingham Girls' High School GDST 9 Arboretum Street Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG1 4JB			
Telephone number	0115 9417663			
Email address	enquiries@not.gdst.net			
Head	Mrs Julie Keller			
Proprietor	The Girls' Day School Trust			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	736			
	EYFS	31	Junior school	177
	Seniors	377	Sixth form	151
Inspection dates	3 to 5 December 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Nottingham Girls' High School GDST is an independent day school for pupils aged between 3 and 18. It is registered as a single-sex school for female pupils. The school was founded in 1875 and the present campus, situated just north of the centre of Nottingham, comprises the original group of Victorian mansions and additional properties. The Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) is the legal proprietor of the school; a local advisory governing body is also in place. The school is divided into two sections: the infant and junior school, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for pupils aged between 3 and 11, and the senior school for pupils aged between 11 and 18. Since the previous inspection, the school has opened a nursery for pupils aged between 3 and 4 and has restructured the curriculum.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to inspire, nurture, educate, support and encourage girls to counteract stereotypes and equip them for successful lives throughout school and their future careers through academic excellence, leadership skills and compassion for others.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of family backgrounds from Nottinghamshire and surrounding counties. The cultural diversity of the pupils reflects that of the local area. Data provided by the school indicates that the ability of pupils in the junior school, senior school and sixth form is above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 139 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, 37 of whom receive additional specialist support. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 118 pupils, 8 of whom receive additional support for their English. Pupils identified as being the more able in the school's population are supported in their learning through challenging activities within and outside the classroom, and those with particular talent in music, drama and sport are provided with extended opportunities.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the junior school, up to 2018, the school used its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework. In 2018, the school measured attainment using National Curriculum tests and the results were above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2016 to 2018, performance has been well above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.4 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2016 to 2018 have been well above, and in 2019 far above, the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.
- 2.5 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils show highly positive attitudes towards learning and outstanding collaborative skills.
 - Pupils' communication skills are excellent across the age range.
 - Pupils of all ages are confident with and make judicious use of information communication technology (ICT) to further and support their learning both at school and at home.
 - Pupils achieve great success across a wide range of academic, sporting, drama, music and other activities.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils gain in self-understanding as a result of strongly supportive and respectful interactions with their peers and with staff.
 - Pupils are highly sensitive to the needs of others and make significant positive contributions to the local and wider community.
 - Pupils show excellent moral understanding and mature responsibility for their actions.
 - Pupils of all ages are kind and caring and show great respect for all members of their culturally diverse community.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school should continue to monitor achievement and personal development to ensure that the recent initiatives, such as the 'bespoke mastery' curriculum and the 'positive' project, are benefiting pupils of all abilities and ages.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils of all ages and abilities are successful in their academic achievements and make progress that is at least good, and often rapid, across all areas of learning in line with the school's aims. This is evident in short-term progress noted in lessons observed across the curriculum and in the scrutiny of pupils' work. Almost all children in the Early Years Foundation Stage meet or exceed their early learning goals by the end of their Reception year. This is the result of good prior knowledge of children before they join the school, good links with parents, and careful planning by staff for each individual child. The school's own assessment data and performance in standardised tests, show that most pupils in the junior school achieve above national age-related expectations for English and mathematics. They demonstrate a highly positive attitude towards learning, with their curiosity stimulated through a carefully structured curriculum and their enthusiasm enhanced by specialist teaching from the age of four in music, sport and computer science.
- 3.6 Pupils including those with SEND and EAL, and the more able, make very good progress from their starting points across the full range of subjects at A level and GCSE. They develop the skills and ideas that enable them to attain higher levels in public examinations, supported by a teaching methodology designed to motivate minds and promote regular revision, recall and consolidation of knowledge. Pupils respond positively and successfully to the appropriate, clear, aspirational, and well-communicated targets set by teachers whose knowledge of their pupils' individual abilities is enhanced by the small size of the teaching groups. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all parents and pupils agreed that the school enables pupils to make good progress. An increasing number of sixth formers achieve offers at universities with highly competitive entry requirements.
- 3.7 Across the school, pupils' development of their knowledge, skills and understanding is excellent. Secure prior learning, engaging and structured teaching approaches, access to a wide variety of resources, and pupils' excellent attitudes all contribute to this success. From the earliest age, pupils work extremely well in collaboration with others and are also highly productive in individual work. Pupils are unafraid to secure their understanding through frequent requests for clarification in class. Year 3 pupils showed clear understanding of the meaning and importance of resilience, empathy, creativity, initiative, positivity and excellence, the six characteristics of the RECIPE programme for success embedded in the junior school from nursery upwards. They applied them, with particular reference to resilience, to a story in a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lesson. Well-structured activities instil a love of literature in pupils of all ages, as seen in a Year 6 library lesson where they were stimulated by ambitious texts such as *Macbeth* and *The Lady of Shalott*. Senior school pupils worked together very effectively to further their ideas and level of performance through physical improvisation in groups in drama and identification by peers of rhythmic features in their compositions in music. GCSE English pupils can infer complex meaning from abstract images, and across the senior school pupils demonstrate increasingly sophisticated higher-order skills of analysis, hypothesis and linkage of material in subjects such as psychology, geography and economics, and in outstanding extended project qualification (EPQ) work, for example, an excellent study of twentieth-century Middle Eastern poetry in translation. Pupils are able to reach their own conclusions across the curriculum as their knowledge is challenged through the use of open questioning.
- 3.8 Pupils' communication skills are exceptional; in the junior school, these are evident in their reading, writing and speaking. Pupils readily and confidently articulate their knowledge because lessons are planned to encourage the presentation of ideas and opinion. Reception children used accurate vocabulary in their explanations of where shapes could be found in a picture, and Year 6 pupils used relevant scientific and computing terminology, and clear expression of ideas, in describing the action of pulleys and coding. Senior school pupils are also very articulate; they enjoy debating complex ideas and write with high levels of fluency; they interrogate text in an assured way as teachers encourage them to question the accuracy of ideas presented to them. GCSE English pupils were able to infer complex meaning from abstract images when discussing representations of duality in a film poster of

Jekyll and Hyde. Pupils of all ages listen sensitively and with respect to one another's views and use these to further develop their own ideas.

- 3.9 In the nursery, children show clear development of their knowledge of numbers, counting, shapes and patterns, as a result of enjoyable and stimulating activities set by their teachers. Across the junior school, pupils are very competent and confident mathematicians, successfully applying their mathematical skills in other subjects such as measurement in science and coding a counter in computing. Senior school pupils display strong and confident numerical skills, evidenced in a GCSE computer science lesson when pupils set each other binary to decimal and decimal to binary calculations, and applied successfully in other areas of learning including statistical analysis in psychology and the running of Young Enterprise companies. Significant numbers of pupils enjoy success in national mathematical competitions.
- 3.10 Pupils are highly competent in information and communication technology (ICT) and apply it confidently and judiciously to support and develop their learning both at school and at home. Nursery children are introduced to ICT as part of their 'understanding the world' learning and pupils from Reception to Year 6 rapidly advance their ICT skills as a result of specialist teaching in computer science. Pupils develop the skills to work independently, create presentations, and to collaborate through the leadership's initiative in providing tablet computers and a well-developed virtual learning environment. Pupils' highly developed ICT skills prepare them well for life beyond school, in line with the school's aims.
- 3.11 In all sections of the school, pupils display excellent study skills which enable them to organise, recall and retrieve relevant information from a wide range of resources in response to the broad range of learning activities and challenges set by teachers. They have a resilient attitude towards having a go and a strong desire to achieve. They competently analyse their work to make improvements and are motivated to work hard by the culture of the school. They develop their ability to bring their knowledge and understanding together in different contexts, for example in English where a student responded well to feedback and made rapid progress in the quality of their creative writing.
- 3.12 Pupils' academic and other successes are excellent, with notable achievement across a wide range of academic, creative and physical activities. Junior school pupils experience success in many areas especially music, sport and chess. Almost all junior school pupils learn a musical instrument, some achieving the highest grades in external music examinations. In the senior school, pupils' achievements include regional and national representation at sport such as netball and rowing, high levels of performance in drama and music, success in the Duke of Edinburgh's award and Young Enterprise schemes, and success in many external culture, language, and technology competitions. Pupils are proud of their own and others' achievements and acknowledge the impact of the committed coaching and support given by staff.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils grow in confidence, self-knowledge, self-esteem and resilience as they progress through the school. In the EYFS and junior school, their excellent attitude towards learning is underpinned by the RECIPE for learning which is embedded in all aspects of school life. They are able to describe their emotions, understand the importance of a positive sense of self, and describe what resilience looks like, in a highly mature way. From an early age the speed at which children learn to manage their emotions is given impetus by the school's well embedded 'positive project'. Younger pupils commented that "If you want to be someone else, the only person in your way is yourself" and, across the junior school, pupils have a very good understanding of how to use an 'emotional barometer' to label feelings and measure emotions. In the senior school, the benefits of the positive project are reinforced through seminars to parents on helping their daughters cope with topics including anxiety, examination stress, health and well-being.

- 3.15 Senior school pupils display very high levels of self-confidence and a clear sense of how to improve their own learning due to target setting and the supportive, affirmative and collaborative learning culture. Pupils across the school are aware of their own strengths and weaknesses and say they are well-prepared for the next stage of their education. They are fully engaged with their learning and are able to carefully consider potential consequences and reach their own conclusions in an informed and logical way, because teachers present information and opportunities that encourage them to question, explore and empathise. Junior school pupils demonstrate excellent decision-making skills based on the structured information that they have been provided or have researched. Pupils make considered decisions, both independently and collaboratively, as a result of guided questioning, freedom of choice within a given brief and well-structured activities. Senior pupils fully understand that the decisions they make help determine success and well-being and they are assisted in this by the careers department and the extensive alumnae network of the GDST.
- 3.16 Pupils' firm appreciation for the non-material aspects of life is strengthened both by the curriculum and the extensive extra-curricular programme. The use, at all ages, of the outdoor learning environment, together with specialist outdoor learning tuition, bushcraft trips, hiking trips and activities such as tree planting in Derbyshire and within the school grounds, enable pupils, in their words to "have time and space to think away from it all", and to "gain a greater sense of who we are". Pupils' spiritual understanding is further enhanced by music and drama performances within school and on trips and tours, and they talked of being inspired by the artwork displayed within the department and around the school. Junior school pupils talked enthusiastically about the value of art for them, describing it as 'peaceful'. Pupils learn about different religions through philosophy, religion and ethics (PRE) and personal, social, and health education (PSHE) lessons as well as assemblies, guest speakers, class and tutor time and multi-faith events and activities. In their written work and in discussions, pupils demonstrate high levels of empathy, understanding, tolerance and respect of different faiths and cultures and they eagerly listen to, and constructively challenge, the views of others. Pupils respect their school environment; they carefully consider the world around them and have a strong grasp of environmental issues. Junior school pupils are Nottingham City Council litter champions. Across the school, they eagerly and successfully raise funds for charities not only to help others but also to raise awareness and espouse principles, for example, running a 'swap shop' to combat 'fast fashion' and promote sustainability. From an early age, pupils are sensitive towards the needs of others and willingly give their time to help. Sixth-form pupils spoke of understanding that money and status are not everything, awareness of the privilege in being at the school and their pride in being a community of people 'all very different but with shared values'. Pupils extend their social awareness through engaging with community events such as Nottingham's *Night Light*, extensive outreach work with local primary schools, and volunteering at a local women's centre.
- 3.17 In the questionnaire, all staff and almost all pupils agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour and pupils' behaviour was exemplary in all areas of the school. The school has an ethos of respect for self and others that is reinforced in class and tutor groups, assemblies and PSHE lessons and is reflected in the pupils' politeness, courtesy and consideration of others at all ages. Across the school, pupils implicitly show a clear appreciation of right and wrong, treating each other with respect, understanding and support in a non-judgemental and constructive manner. In the junior school, class rules are drawn up by pupils and their teachers and as result they willingly adhere to them. In a Year 9 English lesson, pupils thoughtfully explored moral dilemmas such as who to save from a group of culturally and socially diverse individuals on a doomed rocket trip, and they were willing to challenge stereotypes and bias when making these difficult decisions. Pupils' moral understanding is strengthened by a cross-curricular application of key issues such as inclusion and diversity. Sixth-form pupils spent time in several tutor group meetings explaining how their work in languages and the Model United Nations (MUN) activity was linked to the Year 9 exploration of democracy and how to make a positive change in the community.
- 3.18 Pupils of all ages make excellent positive contributions to the lives of others within the school and the local and wider communities. From the nursery upwards, year groups organise fundraising events to

support their chosen charities. Pupils across the school are proud to be themselves and they look out for each other, welcoming in new pupils in a positive and inclusive manner in line with the school's ethos and aims. Children in the EYFS learn to share with others and tidy up after activities, YEAR 6 pupils learn how to be responsible through the big sister-little sister scheme when they work with Reception or Year 1 pupils in a weekly joint activity and Year 12 pupils link with those in Year 6 to assist their transition to the senior school. Senior school pupils are confident in their interactions with pupils of all ages and acquire leadership and teamwork skills that will equip them for life as a result of taking on roles of responsibility. Pupils serve as reliable house, form and sports captains, school and well-being prefects, representatives on school council and food forum, run various clubs and activities, and help to look after the junior and senior school dogs. A very large majority of pupils and parents, and all staff, agree in the questionnaire responses that the school helps pupils to develop strong teamwork and social skills.

- 3.19 Pupils talk eloquently about being active and staying safe on- and off-line. They use the positive project to sustain a positive approach to mental well-being and have successfully established a well-being club, attended by pupils and staff, and a team of well-being prefects to support the mental health of pupils across the school. Pupils appreciate the quality of the food and are encouraged to think about and adopt a balanced lifestyle by the breadth of sporting and wider extra-curricular activities.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a representative of The Girls' Day School Trust and a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended tutor meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Janet Pickering	Reporting inspector
Mr David Harrow	Compliance team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Anne Haas	Team inspector (Head of junior school, HMC school)
Mr Ian Senior	Team inspector (Deputy head, GSA school)
Ms Sarah Williamson	Team inspector (former deputy head, HMC school)