



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ST HELEN'S SCHOOL

NOVEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	St Helen's School			
DfE number	312/6004			
Registered charity number	312762			
Address	St Helen's School Eastbury Road Northwood Middlesex HA6 3AS			
Telephone number	01923 843210			
Email address	enquiries@sthelens.london			
Headmistress	Dr Mary Short			
Chair of governors	Ms Suzi Woolfson			
Age range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils	1155			
	Boys	0	Girls	1155
	Day pupils	1155	Boarders	0
	Little St Helen's	222	Juniors	265
	Seniors	512	Sixth Form	156
Inspection dates	9 to 10 November 2016			

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.

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 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 following their inspection 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 unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

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 an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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 grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they 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 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'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with 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 form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Cathy Williamson	Reporting Inspector
Mr Richard Batchelor	Team inspector (Director of studies, IAPS school)
Mr Stephen Crump	Team inspector (Head, GSA school)
Dr Christopher Enos	Team inspector (Director of studies, GSA school)
Mrs Lizbeth Green	Team inspector (Former head, ISA school)
Mrs Frances Mwale	Team inspector (Head, GSA and IAPS school)
Mrs Caroline Pellereau	Team inspector (Former Head of Lower College, GSA and HMC school)
Mrs Sharon Pratt	Team inspector (Deputy head, ISA school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 St Helen's School is an independent day school for girls between the ages of three and eighteen. The school is a registered charity governed by a council of nine trustees. The chair and the headmistress have been appointed since the previous inspection and the school has opened a new junior school building and an individual needs department. In the sixth form the school has ceased to offer the International Baccalaureate and has introduced the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
- 1.2 St Helen's School has an academically selective intake. It occupies a 20-acre site that houses all the school facilities and has separate buildings dedicated to the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the junior and senior schools. The school was founded in 1899 in Northwood in north west London to serve the surrounding community and now draws pupils from a wide catchment area in the north and west of London and the surrounding counties. The school is sub-divided into Little St Helen's, which includes the EYFS and Years 1 and 2, the junior school for Years 3 to 6, and the senior school for Years 7 to 13.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide every pupil with the opportunity and means to achieve academic excellence and to develop the personal skills, emotional resilience and the confidence to achieve their full potential, enabling them to play a full and active part in the local, national and global community.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come largely from professional and business families and from a wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds that are representative of the school's large catchment area. The school has identified 86 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and, of these, 77 receive additional support. Two pupils have a statement of special educational needs; none has an Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan. No pupil has English as an additional language. Many pupils speak another language at home but consider English as their first language. The school has identified around a third of its pupils as highly academically able or as having particular gifts or talents. Teachers make provision for them in their lesson planning and the curriculum is modified for a few pupils with particular talents in sport or drama.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an Interim inspection in September 2010. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Strengthen existing procedures to monitor teaching and marking so as to encourage the spread of best practice evident in some departments.
 - In the EYFS, increase the opportunities for child-initiated activities.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met the recommendation to increase the opportunities for child-initiated activities in the EYFS.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' achievements is excellent.

- Pupils attain high standards in their academic studies throughout the school.
- Pupils are highly successful in competitions and performances in a wide range of activities.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are exceptional. They enjoy taking responsibility for their own work and are highly motivated to learn.
- Pupils' study skills are strong and they successfully develop independent research skills.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils are exceptionally accepting of others. They appreciate the cultural diversity of their school and form strong, supportive relationships.
- Pupils have high moral standards, readily accepting responsibility for their actions.
- Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. They understand how to improve without becoming discouraged.
- Pupils make a tangible difference to the lives of others through their extensive charity and voluntary work.

Recommendation

2.3 In the context of these excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider the following:

- Build on the excellent transitional procedures already in place within the school by engaging sixth-form pupils more fully in their preparation for academic life beyond school.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievements is excellent. Pupils achieve high standards in lessons, extra-curricular activities and external examinations so confirming that the school meets its aim to provide each and every pupil with the opportunity and means to achieve academic excellence. In the pre-inspection questionnaire, most parents agreed that the school meets their daughters' educational needs and a very large majority of parents and pupils agreed that pupils make good progress.
- 3.2 In the EYFS, the children's understanding and skills are well-developed for their ages. All children make rapid progress including the less able who are well supported by teaching assistants. The children's information and communication technology (ICT) skills develop well as they programme a bug robot to move around a track and children develop their co-ordination and physical skills as they enjoy the indoor and outdoor classroom spaces. Reception children carefully cut out poppies for Remembrance Day and Nursery children show their growing independence by zipping up their own coats before going outside. Because of the free-flow design of the indoor and outdoor spaces, children experience a wide variety of learning environments and so initiate much of their own learning showing that the school has met the recommendation for the EYFS from the previous inspection. The EYFS profiles show that most children are exceeding their age-related Early Learning Goals. In Years 1 and 2, classroom displays show pupils' accomplished writing skills and their self-portraits demonstrate a high standard of observation and excellent colour sense. At the end of their time at Little St Helen's, pupils are well-equipped to move on to the junior school.
- 3.3 The junior school's internal measures show that the majority of junior pupils perform above, or well above, the average for their ages so that, at the end of Year 6, the large majority progress into a senior school of their choice. A large majority of these pupils continue into the senior school. All pupils write and read well; the most able write fluently using sophisticated vocabulary. The majority of pupils read aloud with confidence; senior pupils' presentation for Remembrance Day was of outstanding quality and clarity. Mathematical skills are strong and pupils apply them across the curriculum such as in music where their knowledge of fractions was applied to musical beats. Pupils use ICT well for presentations and to find information such as in science where Year 6 pupils used tablets and computers to research the circulatory system. Pupils' knowledge and understanding in the humanities are excellent. In a Year 6 history lesson, pupils understood the root causes of the Second World War and related the social disaffection in German society at the time to the current political upheavals in Britain and the United States. Pupils demonstrate excellent physical skills and junior sports teams are strong. Pupils reach high standards in the creative and performing arts. The outstanding junior choir performs in lessons and assemblies; there is open access, showing that pupils of all musical abilities are performing at a high level.
- 3.4 The following analysis for the senior school uses the national data for the years 2013 to 2015. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results in GCSE examinations have been above the national average with results in 2013 and 2014 well above the national average. Results in International GCSE examinations have been higher than worldwide and UK norms. Results in A-level examinations have been well above the national average. In 2016, GCSE results improved from 2015 with 88% of results graded A or A*. From the results in GCSE and standardised measures of progress that are available, pupils make progress that is good in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. At A-level progress is high in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. The school's internal measures show that pupils with SEND and more able pupils make progress that is at least as good as their peers; inspection observations confirmed this view.

The school makes an exceptional pastoral commitment to its pupils and this supports their strong progress. Despite the size of the school, pupils are known well and their progress and care are enhanced and managed on an individual basis by teachers and tutors who make every effort to ensure their pupils' well-being and progress.

- 3.5 Senior pupils develop high levels of knowledge, understanding and skills. Linguistic, mathematical, aesthetic and creative skills are particularly strong. Year 8 pupils show their excellent speaking and research skills in presenting the BBC News Report each year. Pupils' language skills are well-developed: in a Year 8 Mandarin lesson pupils pronounced dates and countries accurately and wrote a variety of words using traditional Chinese characters. Strong mathematical and scientific skills were observed with high levels of understanding across all ability levels. In a Year 11 lower mathematics set all pupils understood the concept of vectors and attempted top grade examination problems with confidence.
- 3.6 Senior pupils are highly skilled in the creative and performing arts. Pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 successfully performed *Macbeth* for their annual production and Year 8 art pupils' pen and ink drawings showed advanced skills for their age group. Pupils demonstrate excellent musical knowledge and many become skilled performers in choirs, orchestras and ensembles performing at venues such as Southwark Cathedral and St John's, Smith Square.
- 3.7 When they leave school almost all pupils gain places on university courses against strong competition, the large majority obtaining their first choice.
- 3.8 The academic success of pupils is a key aim of the school and the leadership has actively promoted independent learning and challenge. This has been most successfully implemented by the teaching staff and is one of the strongest factors contributing to the pupils' academic successes. A small minority of pupils in the questionnaire said that staff did not treat them fairly, but the large majority disagreed and said that their lessons are interesting and that teachers are supportive and helpful. In interviews, some pupils said they were inspired by their teachers' passion for their subjects.
- 3.9 Throughout the school pupils have exemplary attitudes to their learning. They settle immediately in class, working equally well alone or in groups and the supportive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers, create a calm and purposeful atmosphere in the classroom enabling rapid progress. Pupils are highly motivated, curious, enjoy learning and are keen to take full responsibility for the quality of their work. Year 11 art pupils of all abilities talked knowledgeably and enthusiastically about their GCSE projects and how these related to the work of their chosen artists. This willingness to work independently was observed throughout the school and is encouraged by teachers from the earliest years. Pupils are confident learners, committed to their own success, and they take positive steps to improve. Year 11 pupils said they opt to re-do difficult history questions to understand the examination requirements better, and Year 5 pupils perfected their monster robots in design and technology through trial and testing. Teachers support and encourage such commitment with rewards and extra help outside lesson times.
- 3.10 Pupils have excellent study skills. Most are highly organised and able to concentrate well in class. Teachers experiment with philosophical questioning to develop pupils' higher-level thinking skills, and throughout the school pupils develop excellent thinking and memory skills as these are embedded in the curriculum. Pupils' research skills are well-developed, encouraged by the junior school's 'Active Learning Week', the Year 9 project, and the Extended Project Qualification in the sixth form.
- 3.11 Throughout the school, pupils achieve highly in their extra-curricular activities. Sports teams regularly achieve success in local, regional and national competitions. The under-15 rugby

squad recently won the county tournament and junior swimming teams have previously won primary school national finals. Senior netball and badminton teams have won county championships with individual county successes in athletics; pupils in Year 9 who elect to take the Sports Leaders' Award have all been successful. Pupils of all ages take examinations in ballet, speech and drama and music with many achieving the highest grades. Public speaking is a strength of the school with team and individual successes in local and national public speaking and debating competitions. Many pupils work successfully for their Duke of Edinburgh (DofE) award at all three levels. The 'Heath Robinson Club' designs, makes and refines their unusual inventions in the spirit of the great illustrator. Their 'ribbon cutting machine' was considered good enough to display at the local museum and featured on national television. Young Enterprise groups compete in the national business competition and, in 2015, one group become UK Champions.

- 3.12 A very large majority of pupils and parents in the questionnaire agree that the school provides a good range of activities. Pupils' high level of success in so many areas owes much to the exceptionally wide range of clubs, outings and practices organised by staff, and the pupils' easy access to the extensive, on-site school facilities.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils throughout the school demonstrate high levels of self-esteem. They understand their own strengths and weaknesses. A small minority, in the pupil questionnaires, said they would welcome more information about their progress and a few parents agreed, but the large majority of pupils said they were aware of their on-going progress. Pupils approaching GCSE said that teachers prepared them thoroughly through tests, practice papers and by discussing their progress so that they were able to revise and practise thoroughly to improve their performance. Pupils are naturally friendly and polite but are confident enough to express their own views. They believe in their own abilities and enjoy a challenge in lessons and activities; they are resilient, not afraid to try things that they find difficult. A few Year 12 pupils described the problems they had in moving from GCSE to A level but were proud of the fact that no-one gave up and that they had overcome their initial difficulties.
- 4.3 Pupils readily take responsibility for their own actions and decisions, weighing up the consequences for themselves and for those around them. Pupils in Year 6 discussed the importance of the decisions they would soon have to make about their future school and senior pupils consider their futures as they choose options at GCSE and A-level. The school's strong emphasis on sustainable practices has encouraged many pupils to think critically about their lifestyle decisions such as the most environmentally friendly way to travel to school.
- 4.4 Pupils are exceptionally self-disciplined and monitor their own behaviour for the good of the school community. They persevere in their studies and in their extra-curricular activities, committing themselves to complete difficult tasks whether it is a demanding EPQ project or a gruelling DofE gold expedition. Pupils are not afraid of change and readily adapt to new situations. In the EYFS, children relate happily to other adults in the setting when their key person is not available and junior pupils have adapted quickly to their new building. Sixth-form pupils staying with disabled guests at their residential week adapt cheerfully to helping the guests with their personal care.
- 4.5 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the non-material aspects of life. They appreciate the beauty around them, including in their school grounds, and reflect this in their creativity in art and music. Pupils in a Year 5 English lesson demonstrated an awareness of each other's feelings as they studied *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and discussed the difference between real love and that created by magic. Pupils appreciate their own good fortune and show empathy and an awareness of the problems of others, especially those who are suffering or in difficult situations. Some pupils described listening to a survivor of the Holocaust and how they became aware that they might be the last generation to hear such a testimony first-hand. They felt it was their responsibility to pass on what they had heard.
- 4.6 Pupils throughout the school are highly effective when working collaboratively. They are invariably trustworthy and their supportive, non-judgemental attitudes towards each other ensure harmonious teams that achieve success on the sports fields, in drama and musical productions, in running school activities and helping others in school and in the wider community. The pupils' strong ability to work purposefully with others is well shown, for example, the junior school council has organised outings and charity events and Year 9 pupils, after reviewing the rewards system, designed and launched a new one. Pupils' sense of purpose and responsibility is strongly influenced by school leaders and governors who promote excellent relationships throughout the school community, providing strong role models for the pupils.

- 4.7 Pupils have a highly developed sense of right and wrong. They choose to respect laws and rules, whether in school or in the wider society, because they understand that they are responsible for their own actions and they have the confidence to challenge misbehaviour in others. They appreciate the need to self-regulate their behaviour and responses. For example, most co-operate with the school's policy on mobile phones, and senior pupils accept library fines with a good grace and humour.
- 4.8 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and how to maintain their own physical and mental health; most pupils are engaged in some form of sporting activity and junior pupils participate actively in lessons to help them become more self-aware. Pupils say school has been responsible for much of their understanding about healthy lifestyles. They cite the healthy options available for lunches, the availability of the fitness equipment and timetabled sport throughout the school including in the sixth form. They have benefited from the helpful information they have gained from tutor times and assemblies about staying safe, including on-line.
- 4.9 Pupils are exceptionally accepting of others. They respect their peers, valuing the diversity of faiths, cultures, backgrounds and ethnicities within their school and they form friendships without regard to these differences. Pupils are interested in other cultures as well as their own. In a Year 7 religious studies lesson introducing Hinduism, pupils were respectful and keen to understand the culture and religion. Year 3 pupils showed respect and empathy for the situations of people in other cultures as they read folk stories from across the world in an English lesson, and senior pupils demonstrate their respect and care for those with disabilities as they help at a charity for the integration of disabled people.
- 4.10 Pupils appreciate what they have and demonstrate a strong desire to contribute to the lives of others. They engage successfully in a wide range of fund raising activities particularly when they have a personal connection; senior pupils raised funds for the Malawi flood victims because they had visited the country as part of their gold DofE project. Many older pupils make an outstanding contribution to the lives of others through their community involvement especially with elderly people and those with disabilities. The school leadership strongly promotes a sense of social responsibility in line with the school's aims, thus ensuring that pupils play a full and active part in the local, national and global community, and show high levels of commitment to their charity work and service to others.
- 4.11 In each section of the school, pupils acquire the skills they need to move on to the next stage of their education. The EYFS children develop their fine and gross motor skills before moving confidently on to Year 1. Year 6 pupils are keen to develop the skills they need for their transfer to secondary education and sixth-form pupils prepare well for higher education by researching their chosen courses whilst completing their applications. A minority of sixth-form pupils in the questionnaire said they were not satisfied with the advice they received about their career choices. The school provides much support, particularly for those applying to the most competitive universities, but there are some inconsistencies in the provision at this level, leading to some pupils being unsure as to whether they have made the most appropriate decisions about their higher education courses.