



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION**

**ST MARY'S SCHOOL ASCOT**

**MARCH 2017**



## SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	St Mary's School Ascot			
<b>DfE number</b>	868/6002			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	290286			
<b>Address</b>	St Mary's Road Ascot Berkshire SL5 9JF			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01344 296600			
<b>Email address</b>	headmistress@st-marys-ascot.co.uk			
<b>Headmistress</b>	Mrs Mary Breen			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	The Hon Martin Hunt			
<b>Age range</b>	11 to 18			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	391			
	<b>Boys</b>	0	<b>Girls</b>	391
	<b>Day pupils</b>	19	<b>Boarders</b>	372
	<b>Seniors</b>	267	<b>Sixth form</b>	124
<b>Inspection dates</b>	8 to 9 March 2017			

## 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 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 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 un-met 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 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.

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

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. 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'.**

## 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 vice chair of the finance and general purposes committee, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended chapel and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses, 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

Mr Geoffrey Marston	Reporting inspector
Mrs Vicky Buckman	Team inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mr Andrew Gillespie	Team inspector (Director of studies, Society of Heads school)
Miss Susan Hincks	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)
Ms Linda Macfarlane	Team inspector (Former deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Alan Sturrock	Team inspector for boarding (Pastoral deputy and head of boarding, Society of Heads school)

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>1 BACKGROUND INFORMATION</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About the school</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>What the school seeks to do</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>About the pupils</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Recommendation from previous inspection</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2 KEY FINDINGS</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>4 THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>7</b>

## 1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

### About the school

- 1.1 St Mary's School Ascot was founded in 1885 by a religious order called the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary (IBVM), now named the Congregation of Jesus (CJ). It is an independent Roman Catholic boarding school for girls aged between 11 and 18 years, situated in a 55-acre site in Ascot, Berkshire.
- 1.2 St Mary's School Ascot Trust was established in 1984 by council members who act as guardians of the school and appoint the board of governors to oversee the strategic direction and day-to-day management of the school.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection, 2 new libraries have been built for younger and older pupils. The school has developed a 400-metre all-weather athletics track and associated field-event facilities, and a second artificial sports pitch. A large new refectory for pupils has been opened as well as new common rooms for junior pupils and a school playground.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 Faithful to its foundress Mary Ward and her model of education, the school aims to foster intellectual, spiritual and personal development, encouraging in each pupil a sense of her own worth and talents, preparing them to lead others and to enrich their world. The school also seeks to develop each pupil's potential for independent thought and the search for truth through a rigorous academic education.
- 1.5 Based upon a Christian awareness of the needs of others, the school promotes a strong sense of responsibility and aims to form women of conscience, competence and compassionate commitment. It also provides opportunities for pupils to enjoy the full sacramental life and spiritual richness of the Catholic Church.

### About the pupils

- 1.6 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, mainly from London and the south east of England with the remainder from elsewhere in the UK and from overseas. Almost all pupils are full boarders and a handful are local day girls. According to standardised test results, the ability of the pupils on entry is above average. Few pupils have ability that is below average. The number of pupils requiring support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is forty-three. They require additional specialist support on an individual needs basis for dyslexia or dyspraxia. Three pupils have a statement of special educational needs or an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Forty-four pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), but are fluent and require no further support
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Lower sixth	Year 12
Upper sixth	Year 13

### **Recommendation from previous inspection**

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in May 2011. The recommendation from that inspection was:
- Improve the way it presents and explains sanctions and rewards to pupils.
- 1.9 The school has successfully met the recommendation of the previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

## **2. KEY FINDINGS**

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Outstanding success in academic examinations and excellent progress from pupils of all ages and abilities result from the school's fulfilment of its aim to provide a rigorous academic education.
- Pupils display exemplary attitudes to learning, fostered by highly supportive and committed teaching.
- Pupils succeed in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, competitions and performances at local, regional and national level.
- Pupils have excellent communication and higher-order thinking skills due to the high expectations of teachers, who set varied and challenging tasks.

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

- Pupils are highly confident, well behaved and considerate; these characteristics are strongly influenced by pupils' experiences in boarding and by the role of the Catholic faith in the life of the school.
- Relationships throughout the school are extremely positive, underpinned by shared values and a common purpose.
- Pupils demonstrate great independence of mind and action, and are very well prepared for the next stage of their lives.
- Pupils have a strong sense of moral responsibility, social justice and respect for the school rules.

### **Recommendation**

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

- Support pupils' appreciation of fairness by reviewing the sanctions applied for minor breaches of the school rules.



### 3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils achieve excellent standards in public examinations and extra-curricular activities, successfully fulfilling the school's aspirations to provide a rigorous academic education and to encourage in each pupil a sense of her own worth and talents.
- 3.3 Pupils' attainment is outstanding. Results in GCSE examinations from 2012 to 2015 have been well above the national average for maintained schools and were far above the national average in 2013. Results in IGCSE examinations have been higher than worldwide norms. Results at A level up to 2015 were far above the national average, and school data for 2016 displays that this level of attainment has been maintained. A very high rate of progress is achieved by all groups of pupils including those with SEND or EAL, when compared to pupils of similar ability. Higher-ability pupils make rapid progress due to the provision of additional support and experiences in the school's junior and senior academies. Pupils within the junior academy are challenged by additional speakers, trips and seminars, and through debate, enquiry and the setting of written tasks through which they can explore new topics. Senior academy pupils are provided with extension tasks to challenge their learning and understanding in order to equip them for entry into top performing, competitive and overseas universities. Pupils have an excellent understanding of the standard of their work in each subject and how to improve further due to teachers' regular marking and clear, helpful advice both in workbooks and verbally during lessons. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, an overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the teaching enables their children to make good progress, a view also confirmed by the vast majority of pupils.
- 3.4 All pupils throughout the school make excellent progress due to the very high expectations of teachers and varied opportunities for them to apply their knowledge and understanding across the curriculum. Pupils in Year 11 made excellent progress with an extended writing challenge to create an atmospheric stage lighting script, as a result of being allowed to first act out the scenes from the play *Burning Monkey* so that they became immersed in the characters' thoughts and feelings. Sixth form pupils spoke highly of the recently introduced extended project qualification which has enabled them to hone their research skills. In some of the examples observed, pupils made perceptive links with other areas of study and provided a high standard of balanced arguments and logic when exploring the influence of politics on pop music. They also applied scientific and philosophical arguments when comparing Darwin's theory of evolution and the views of the church.
- 3.5 The pupils' attitudes to learning are exemplary. Pupils take a pride in their work, keep well-organised notes, produce extensive amounts of work and are able to synthesise, hypothesise and draw logical conclusions from numerical and literacy sources to a very high standard. They demonstrate excellent participation in lessons. Pupils of all abilities are keen to answer questions and communicate with great clarity and confidence. For example, pupils in Year 7 including those with EAL or SEND were highly articulate when using musical terminology such as 'staccato' and 'major' or 'minor' keys and appropriately identifying instrumentation when describing their reactions to Vivaldi's *Gloria*. Sixth form pupils expressed their opinions of art therapy highly effectively in the German language as a result of the developmental questioning and high expectations of the teacher.

- 3.6 The high aspirations of the staff and the excellent rapport between the staff and pupils and amongst pupils themselves encourage openness and trust in class. Pupils demonstrate excellent higher-order thinking skills for their age due to the varied and challenging tasks set by the teachers and the pace of lessons. They naturally rise to any challenges set without fear of failure, as they are encouraged to take risks with their learning and lessons are adapted to meet their needs. Pupils in Year 8 demonstrated very high levels of resilience when learning about the physical states and properties of different materials. Helped by the teacher's questioning and time for reflecting on where they had gone wrong, the pupils persevered and were eventually successful in building a model that floated on water. Pupils in Year 12 displayed notable levels of perseverance with their learning of text-based programming code, sequencing and logic as the teacher allowed them to openly challenge their own approaches and learn from their mistakes. They confidently reviewed each other's work and made rapid progress in discovering key errors which helped them to solve the task.
- 3.7 Pupils' achievement in extra-curricular activities such as music, drama, ballet, dance and sport is excellent throughout the school. Investment in high-quality facilities and resources that support a wide variety of clubs and societies has contributed significantly to pupils' achievements, as have the numerous opportunities for pupils to perform in the school orchestra, choirs and whole-school productions such as *Danny Champion of the World* and *Northanger Abbey*, both on stage and as support crew. Pupils achieve very high standards in music theory examinations and performances on a wide range of instruments, as a result of the excellent support from specialist staff. The pupils achieve great success in sport, with many individual and team successes at local, regional and national level in netball, hockey, swimming, athletics and cross country. For example, the selection of pupils for England Hockey High Performance Assessment Camps is a regular occurrence. Other achievements in 2016 include gold medal success for skiers at the British Schoolgirls' Races in Flaine, and the school's athletics team reaching sixth place nationally in the English Schools Athletics Association Track and Field events. Successful personalities from the world of sport often visit the school to provide talks which inspire the pupils further. Many pupils have successfully gained their Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) at all three levels as a result of the extra time, commitment and excellent coaching provided by staff. Other pupils have achieved significant success in mathematics and science Olympiads, and art competitions. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, an overwhelming majority of parents and pupils spoke highly of the range of extra-curricular activities offered at the school.
- 3.8 Pupils are highly confident in their use of information and communication technology across a range of subjects and for independent study, fostered by highly effective planning and encouragement by teachers. Year 7 pupils successfully designed a range of high-quality Christmas cards, using complex graphical software techniques to crop, cut, place and edit images and text in a highly creative and imaginative way. After extensive research, pupils in Year 9 produced a highly informative and accurate historical article on the death of Archduke Ferdinand in the style of a London newspaper, using appropriate desktop applications. Pupils' appropriate use of laptops or tablet devices to take notes or research in lessons is actively supported by all staff to enhance learning, particularly for pupils with SEND.

- 3.9 The boarding experience enables pupils to achieve an outstanding level of success both academically and in extra-curricular activities, as a result of the support that boarders provide each other outside of lessons and the opportunities for private study in the new libraries and other areas of the school. Pupils regularly share word-processed notes from lessons or handouts through their use of the secure online communication channels available to them. Boarding staff are always on hand if pupils require help or guidance with their study. In response to the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the boarding experience helps their children's progress and personal development, and boarders agreed that it enables them to become more confident and independent.
- 3.10 High-quality leadership and management of the school have had a positive impact on the excellent achievements of pupils. An online tracking and monitoring programme known as 'The St Mary's App' has recently been introduced by the leadership team, and has been highly effective in enabling teachers and boarding staff to respond to pupils' learning needs in a timely and consistent manner. Leadership's continued investment in high-quality careers support ensures that almost all pupils gain entry to their first choice university due to the up-to-date, accurate and impartial information and guidance provided by staff involved in providing advice about university entrance. The strategic decision to keep class sizes small results in all teachers knowing their pupils extremely well, which consequently enables pupils to excel in their studies and be inspired to follow Mary Ward's quote: 'Women in time will come to do much'.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils are extremely self-confident, resilient and self-disciplined, and display high levels of maturity for their age. Their outstanding personal development is underpinned by excellent pastoral care and a high level of commitment by staff to support the needs of every pupil. Pupils understand extremely well how to improve their own learning, through regular opportunities provided for reflection on their own performance. Year 9 pupils filmed their own individual gymnastic routines using tablet devices and, through constructive coaching from each other, were able to re-perform and improve their displays. Pupils in Years 12 and 13 have an accurate understanding of how well they are progressing as a result of their completion of self-reflective sheets which are used in one-to-one discussions with their tutors in order to set and review individual subject-based targets and planned actions.
- 4.3 Pupils fully understand that the decisions they make are important determinants of their own success and well-being. They successfully manage to balance the demands of a rigorous academic life with the broad range of extra-curricular activities offered, through the provision of a life timetable which is supported by their tutors. The trust and flexible support provided by staff help the pupils to make decisions confidently, whether this is deciding option choices at GCSE or A level or selecting work experience placements to enhance their own learning.
- 4.4 Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is exemplary. They are considerate and influenced by the strong emphasis placed by the school on the importance of the Catholic faith and well-being within their strong boarding community. Pupils move sensibly and calmly around the school, displaying courtesy and politeness. Relationships are extremely positive at the school, underpinned by shared values and a common purpose. Pupils challenge misbehaviour and unkindness when they encounter them and display no tolerance for bullying. They are quick to demonstrate initiative in addressing any bullying that occurs. Scrutiny of behaviour logs demonstrates that incidents of misbehaviour are rare. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, almost all pupils stated that the school encourages them to behave well. All of the parents' questionnaire responses agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Pupils have a strong sense of moral responsibility, the rule of law and social justice. They possess an excellent appreciation of the difference between right and wrong, and a respect for and understanding of the school rules. Pupils have a thoughtful and perceptive awareness of the role of the democratic process, and of public institutions and services. They display a very keen sense of fair play and understand the system for sanctions, thereby successfully meeting the recommendations of the previous inspection. Pupils reported that some staff are still inconsistent on how and when they issue sanctions for minor breaches of the school rules, and therefore greatly appreciated and valued the contribution of the school council in supporting the ongoing work by the senior leadership team to improve the system further.
- 4.5 Pupils respond enthusiastically to the culture at the school which openly celebrates academic and non-academic achievements. They actively seek opportunities to excel in all aspects of life at the school and enjoy receiving awards and recognition in assemblies. Pupils gain a high sense of achievement and pride when they are collectively awarded the House Cup for the most overall house points earned each term.

- 4.6 Pupils highly value the opportunities for leadership and take on responsibilities eagerly. They enjoy playing an active role in the school community, and gain great confidence and self-esteem as a result. Pupils acquire an understanding of how decisions can also have an impact on those around them, through membership of the various pupil committees or opportunities for key leadership positions such as prefect or house captain. Pupils with responsibilities, including in boarding, fulfil them with great success, taking independent and effective action when required which is highly respected by other pupils. Pupils develop extremely positive work ethics and a detailed understanding of commitment to others through their participation in the service section of the DofE scheme. They successfully support patients at a local dementia care home by performing general everyday tasks or providing appreciated companionship time. Further responsibilities include successfully supporting local junior school children and younger pupils at their own school with reading and mathematics. Pupils in Year 10 develop highly productive teamwork skills with their organisation of the annual fun fair which enables pupils and staff to mix with each other in a fun, safe and relaxing environment.
- 4.7 Pupils' spiritual awareness is excellent. They spoke highly of the opportunities to attend Mass and private prayer in the chapel, which is central to the school community and enables them to gain an excellent understanding of non-material aspects of life. Pupils are able to reflect quietly on their own faith and identity, and on the spiritual dimension of human existence. This opportunity is further enhanced by pupils having the opportunity to participate in their own year retreat which enables them to understand the spiritual richness and the sacramental life of the Catholic Church, thus meeting one of the main aims of the school.
- 4.8 Pupils demonstrate well-developed aesthetic and cultural awareness through the high standard and proliferation of art displays around the school and successful participation in a range of musical activities and performances. They have an excellent appreciation for those less fortunate than themselves, evident from their enthusiastic organisation and collaboration in numerous successful charity and fundraising events. Sixth form pupils develop high-quality leadership skills, empathy and commitment towards others, for example in their provision of sports coaching to a charity in South Africa which helps young people out of poverty and enables them to stay in school. Pupils' understanding of world faiths is enhanced by visits to museums and other religions' places of worship, and through the school's delivery of a high-quality comparative religions GCSE module. They demonstrate a notable understanding of the Torah Scrolls and Shabbat, which is supported by an annual visit to a Jewish museum, and of Hinduism, which is similarly supported by a visit to a Hindu temple. Boarders are particularly aware of the need to accept those of different backgrounds, and appreciate the opportunity to widen their outlook by learning more about the cultures of their friends from abroad. Pupils from overseas greatly appreciate the values and traditions of life in the UK, as well as sharing experience such as Chinese New Year or Indian curry themed evenings in the dining hall. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a minority of pupils disagreed that the school encourages them to be tolerant of those with different faiths and beliefs. Inspection evidence gained by speaking with pupils confirmed that the school provides numerous opportunities to explore and understand other faiths and cultures through the comprehensive Skills for Life programme.

- 4.9 Pupils understand how to be physically and mentally healthy, particularly in terms of diet, exercise and a balanced lifestyle through the work of the food committee, varied menus and high-quality nutritional information provided by the school. They actively participate in a range of opportunities provided by the school for exercise including sport, dance, ballet, the gym and outdoor activities such as rock climbing, polo, horse riding, golf, fencing, sailing, swimming, tennis and skiing. An overwhelming majority of pupils responded in the pre-inspection questionnaire that they feel safe at school. All pupils spoken to reported that they know how to stay safe online, as a result of the comprehensive Skills for Life programme and the support provided by all staff.
- 4.10 The caring and supportive boarding environment makes an outstanding contribution to pupils' personal development and welfare. Pupils settle in to boarding very quickly as they are made to feel very welcome and valued from their first day at the school. Formal buddy systems are in place but boarders naturally look out for each other, including those with SEND or EAL. Younger pupils form excellent relationships with the older pupils in the school, who set an excellent example both in the school and in the boarding setting. The boarding experience develops pupils who are highly mature for their age, self-assured, able to make decisions for themselves and work highly effectively with others.
- 4.11 The leadership and management ensure through highly effective pastoral support that pupils develop skills, a moral understanding of their own conduct, competence and compassionate commitment which prepare them well for the next stage of their lives. Pupils leave the school as confident, independent, sincere and cheerful young people, who reflect the spirit of Mary Ward and thus amply fulfil the school's aims.