



**ISI**

Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report**

**The Laurels School**

**January 2023**

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## School's Details

<b>School</b>	The Laurels School			
<b>DfE number</b>	306/6028			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1053810			
<b>Address</b>	The Laurels School Our Lady's Close Upper Norwood London SE19 3FA			
<b>Telephone number</b>	02086 747229			
<b>Email address</b>	office@thelaurelsschool.org.uk			
<b>Headmistress</b>	Mrs Linda Sanders			
<b>Proprietor</b>	Parents, Children and Teachers in Partnership (PACT) Educational Trust			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Phillip Leonard			
<b>Age range</b>	11 to 18			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	120			
	<b>Seniors</b>	103	<b>Sixth Form</b>	17
<b>Inspection dates</b>	31 January to 2 February 2023			

## **1. Background Information**

### **About the school**

- 1.1 The Laurels School is an independent day school for female pupils, established in 2013. The governing body of the school is the board of directors and trustees of the PACT Educational Trust Limited.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has moved twice due to a growth in numbers and the need for greater facilities and more space. The school is located on the same site in south-east London as its sister school the Cedars, with whom it shares some facilities.

### **What the school seeks to do**

- 1.3 The school aims to develop the whole child, in close partnership with parents, through a deeply embedded character programme grounded in Catholic principles. It seeks to enable each girl to fulfil her potential through acquiring virtues in a climate that balances freedom with responsibility.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.4 Pupils in the school come from a wide range of backgrounds living within a 10-mile radius of the school. Standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils is above average in relation to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 22 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) of whom 21 receive specialist support. There is one pupil in the school with an education, health and care plan. There are 13 pupils identified as having English as an additional language, all of whom receive additional support in this regard. The curriculum is modified for those pupils identified as the most able.

## 2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

### Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are 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 FOCUSED 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 standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; 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 standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

## Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 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 senior school, the school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2018 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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**

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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**

- 2.12 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.

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

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.14 A range of information is 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.

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

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.16 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.

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

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.18 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.

**2.19 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.

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

#### Key findings

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

- Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their learning. They are motivated and enthusiastic and have an outstanding work ethic.
- Pupils develop excellent skills in communication; they are articulate, listen with respect and are able to present their ideas coherently and with enthusiasm.
- Pupils are collaborative and empathetic; they work extremely well with others in lessons and in extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils make excellent progress when teaching is focused and provides appropriate levels of challenge.

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

- Pupils show an excellent level of maturity in their relationships with each other and with adults in school.
- Pupils display an excellent level of responsibility for their own behaviour and appreciate the needs of others in school and in the community.
- Pupils develop a strong sense of self-understanding.
- Pupils demonstrate an excellent awareness of the importance of respect and kindness and the inclusion of all.

#### Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enable pupils to meet their high academic aspirations by offering consistent challenge in lessons across all subjects.

#### 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 have a very positive approach to learning; they come to lessons ready to work and are attentive and appreciative of the study and organisational skills that they have developed through specialist teaching and mentoring. Pupils enjoy and work well collaboratively as observed in a French role play exercise where Year 9 pupils acted out a doctor and patient interview in the target language with great enthusiasm. Year 7 pupils worked in groups in a PE lesson, analysing each other's performance and demonstrating excellent skills of collaboration in their encouragement of each other. Pupils are also



capable of working by themselves and reflect effectively on their own progress in order to highlight areas that they need to focus on. This was seen in a Year 11 Latin lesson where pupils analysed their progress in understanding and using the pluperfect tense.

- 3.6 Pupils are excellent verbal communicators and are always keen to engage in discussion and debate, encouraged by the high premium placed on oral skills by their teachers. They listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others and respond appropriately. Their excellent speaking and listening skills are honed through effective teaching and enhanced by opportunities to speak in public, including in elections for house, class council or head of school positions. Pupils relish the opportunity to present work in lessons or as part of assemblies to the whole school and speak highly in interviews with inspectors of class assemblies and house competitions where all have an active role.
- 3.7 Pupils' written work is of a high standard and is neatly presented. Pupils competently complete extended written work, as seen in Year 8 pupils' essays comparing Byron and Chatterton and in those written by Year 12 pupils considering the issues surrounding euthanasia. They acquire an excellent knowledge of specialist technical language. In a Year 12 business lesson, pupils were encouraged to use correct terminology relating to products of their choice and expanded their vocabulary with reference to the car industry. In a Spanish lesson, Year 13 pupils demonstrated an extensive knowledge and correct use of the language in a discussion about coup d'état. Pupils develop their communication skills further in drama and music lessons through opportunities to present their emotions through lyrics and performance. In a Year 7 drama lesson, pupils used physical skills with great imagination to emphasise the meaning of the spoken word and to highlight emotions during monologues. In a Year 10 music lesson, pupils expressed their emotions and conflicts very clearly through music composition.
- 3.8 Pupils develop strong study skills during their time in school. Study skills are reinforced by a course in Year 7 and older pupils acquire effective revision strategies as a result of the supportive guidance and one-to-one mentoring implemented by the school and external providers. In interviews, pupils spoke highly of the support given by teachers both in and out of the classroom, and by the learning support department. Pupils use a range of sources to synthesise and form their own opinions. In a religious studies lesson in Year 13, pupils analysed their own feelings along with the views of society and considered how they felt religion had 'framed' gender issues over the course of history. Year 12 pupils prepared annotated notes for a business lesson, including information and pertinent points to discuss based on their independent research. Year 8 pupils responded positively in a geography lesson when tasked with researching and identifying key features on a map of India using an atlas as source material.
- 3.9 The achievement of pupils at GCSE and A level in 2022 was above the national average for maintained schools. Regular marking, feedback and an effective progress tracking system ensure that the pupils are consistently able to make gains in their learning. Pupils with SEND and EAL make similar progress to other pupils over time. This good level of attainment is a consequence of the pupils' excellent attitudes to learning and the support and constructive criticism provided by their teachers. Pupils with SEND or EAL benefit from teaching that reflects an informed awareness of their individual needs. Pupils make excellent progress when teaching is focused and challenging. This approach, however, is not consistent across all subjects in the school where at times a lack of challenge does not enable pupils to achieve their high academic aspirations.
- 3.10 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding, supported by the school's formal system of testing, target setting, evaluation and feedback. Pupils are attentive and focused and respond positively to well-planned lessons and value the support offered by teaching staff in class, individual tutorials and drop-in clinics. They are adept at applying previously learned material in new situations. This was seen in a Year 11 geography lesson when pupils highlighted how different communities and locations could prepare for weather hazards using their prior knowledge of extreme weather patterns. Pupils in Year 8 used their prior knowledge of co-ordinates of a line to extend their understanding to those co-ordinates using negative numbers. Pupils of all ages respond extremely

positively to teachers' high expectations, developing their knowledge and understanding. In responses to the questionnaires the vast majority of parents agreed that teaching enabled their child to make progress and most pupils agreed that their teachers have good subject knowledge and that they know how to help them to learn. This was supported in lesson observations during the inspection.

- 3.11 Pupils have excellent numeracy skills and apply them confidently across the curriculum. They develop their skills and make good progress through the regular reinforcement of basic mathematical concepts. Year 12 pupils showed a detailed understanding of the transformation of graphs. Those in Year 8 showed excellent skills when looking at number equalities, developing their skills through competing in groups and working through progressively harder examples. The use of numeracy in other subjects enables pupils to develop their knowledge as seen in chemistry in Year 10 where pupils presented data on the rate of reaction between magnesium and hydrochloric acid graphically. Year 7 pupils used their prior knowledge of the relationships between numbers when looking at the ratio of atoms in simple molecules and Year 10 geographers used bar charts to illustrate population distributions. Mathematics competitions and challenges are well advertised and promoted, and pupils respond enthusiastically to these opportunities to further develop their skills and passion for mathematics.
- 3.12 Pupils have excellent skills in information and communication technology (ICT). Pupils are proficient in using a range of software to support their learning, making regular use of online platforms to store notes and to present and receive feedback on assignments. In a Year 11 history lessons, pupils used their ICT skills to research online and to prepare a presentation for use as a learning resource. Year 12 pupils made excellent use of an online resource in mathematics to develop their understanding of trigonometry and graphs and Year 10 pupils made excellent use of a careers package to research soft and hard skills required in a specific role in preparation for writing a letter of application.
- 3.13 Pupils develop a wide range of interests outside the classroom and are keen to extend their learning both in lessons and in the extensive range of extra-curricular activities. They enter a wide variety of competitions in which they achieve notable success, including for essay writing, and in art, mathematics and business. Sports teams consistently achieve success in regional and local competitions in netball, football, cross country, volleyball and badminton. Many pupils gain bronze and silver awards in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme. Pupils participate successfully in many musical activities through choirs, orchestras, bands and ensembles and in ABRSM examinations. They achieve well in drama in LAMDA lessons and examinations and the many high quality drama productions in school are eagerly anticipated and well supported.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 The development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem is excellent. Pupils understand the importance of taking responsibility for their own development academically and pastorally and they value the support of others. Pupils are confident and resilient individuals. They want to learn and make the most of themselves, looking ahead positively to what they can achieve. Pupils feel that their opinions are valued, and they are treated with respect. Pupils in a Year 8 Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lesson showed great empathy and an excellent understanding of the plight of refugees coming to this country. The topic was compassion, and pupils' mature understanding of this was reflected in their discussion of how they would feel in this situation. In a Year 12 history lesson, pupils showed great skills of self-reflection when looking at strengths and weaknesses in their essays in comparison with the examination board mark scheme. Pupils with SEND develop their self-confidence equally well and are aided in this by learning support staff who work closely with the pastoral leaders to ensure personalised support is in place. The excellent level of pastoral care, pupil and teacher relationships and relationships amongst the pupils themselves create an environment which allows pupils of all ages to grow in self-confidence. The school's leaders and governing body

have been highly successful in building a community in which all pupils are able to develop strong personal characteristics based on the values of the school.

- 3.16 Pupils have a good sense of right and wrong. They appreciate the need for rules and systems and can explain their importance in keeping all members of the school community safe. Pupils feel able to discuss and challenge rules, such as when a new lunch rota was proposed and adopted following a discussion about it in the class council. Pupils told inspectors that instances of poor behaviour are rare at the school and that the community spirit of the school is, to a large part, responsible for this. The behaviour of pupils observed in the inspection was excellent throughout the school in both formal and informal situations. All pupils understand that they have an important role to play in upholding the warm ethos and culture of the school.
- 3.17 Pupils develop a clear appreciation of how the choices and decisions they make are influential in determining their success academically and in later life. The close friendships they form serve as a constant sounding board for their own ideas and potential decisions. They value the supportive relationship they have with staff and particularly their tutors, who act as both a source of advice and as excellent role models. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson pupils showed maturity when deciding whether to move to a more difficult task or to remain at the level they were working in order to consolidate their knowledge. In Year 10 pupils faced individual problems and decisions when designing and producing a piece of natural form art, showing a willingness to persevere and make their own decisions and to learn from their mistakes. Pupils are involved in making decisions in the class council where the proposals they put forward are presented to the school's leaders. These have resulted in such changes as the establishment of a year 7 study club and the introduction of assertiveness training.
- 3.18 Pupils relish the opportunities they have to work collaboratively. This occurs regularly in academic lessons but is also evident in form time. In the sixth form pupils imaginatively and insightfully discussed the concepts of teamwork and leadership in a PSHE lesson. They readily appreciated that all individuals have different strengths, and that people can lead in different ways, and this contributes to effective teamwork. Pupils are encouraged to form clubs to the benefit of other pupils and sixth form pupils are allocated to support individual forms, building strong relationships. Many pupils are part of a mentoring system that assists younger pupils. Older pupils volunteer to work at the local primary school where they act as teaching assistants. The school encourages the development of community spirit through the strong house system, where members of Year 11 play a prominent part and pupils work together in vertical groups towards a common goal. Pupils take pride in their school, as shown through their observation of the school uniform, care of their belongings and respect for the school's premises. The school's leaders have successfully embedded an ethos of respect, support and kindness throughout the school community where pupils value their relationships with individuals and groups and make a positive contribution to the school and local community.
- 3.19 Pupils of all faiths and none are comfortable in the school, where Christian values form the basis of school life. They know and understand the values of the school, which permeate every aspect of their life. All pupils attend mass at regular points through the school year on the understanding that they do not have to take part in the service but show respect for those that wish to. Pupils value this opportunity to reflect within the school day. School assemblies, prayers at the start of lessons and the opportunities for reflection offered in the oratory and the lunchtime faith club all aid the spiritual understanding of the pupils. Pupils' abilities to consider ethical matters is highly advanced, as evidenced in extended writing in history, religious studies and English. An example was seen in Year 12 religious studies essays which considered the question of whether good, bad, right and wrong are meaningless ethical terms. The range of artwork displayed around the school shows a clear appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. This was also evident in the many displays by the pupils related to the current PSHE topic of compassion, including compassion in mathematics, demonstrating the whole school approach to its values.
- 3.20 Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the importance of tolerance and respect for all. They show an excellent understanding of diversity and value the highly diverse nature of their school

community. Whether it is by age, gender or nationality, pupils interact positively and without prejudice. Their interactions in school with staff and other pupils are courteous and based on mutual respect on all sides. The presence of international students and the organisation of cultural exchanges offer further opportunities for pupils to understand and respect the cultural diversity of society. In discussions with inspectors, pupils were unanimous in their belief that diversity is a normal part of life and that they operate within a tolerant and inclusive community which does not exclude those from different backgrounds, faiths, or beliefs.

- 3.21 Pupils' social awareness is excellent. Pupils understand the importance of the community in school and in the wider world. They interact with others confidently and instinctively, whether as part of a team or as a leader. Pupils enjoy each other's company and have excellent relationships with adults in school. Pupils engage positively with moral and social causes such as Black Lives Matter, without prejudice or cynicism. In responding to societal issues pupils have established a women in activism group where the wider concerns of society are discussed. Pupils work together with high levels of success on performances in drama, music and dance as well as on the sports field. The DofE programme provides further opportunities for pupils to develop their teamwork and leadership skills, as do the numerous committees that they are involved in. Each form supports a charity each year, raising large sums of money, reflecting their determination and enthusiasm to support the community and the wider world. The school helps the pupils to organise and run many of these events with members of staff overseeing what happens but not directly running the event. Older pupils offer support to younger ones, mentoring them academically and pastorally, to help build their confidence and skills.
- 3.22 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of staying both mentally and physically healthy. They recognise the importance of being physically active and embrace the concept of sport for life as encouraged by the wide range of extracurricular sporting activities available to them. Pupils know what constitutes a balanced diet as they are encouraged to make sensible choices from the healthy range of foods available at mealtimes, supported by PSHE and science lessons where they learn about nutrition. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of mental health and balance in life in response to regular discussion of these topics in the school's well-being programme. They are confident that any concerns that they might raise related to issues in, or outside, school will be listened to and dealt with appropriately and discreetly. In responses to the questionnaire the overwhelming majority of parents and pupils feel that the school is a safe environment and in interview all pupils universally and without hesitation said they were happy in school. This is because the school has an excellent pastoral care system in place, which includes counselling and mental health support.

## 4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions 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 form meetings. Inspectors visited the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Dr Ruth Weeks	Reporting inspector
Mrs Karen Wilcock	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, GSA school)
Mr William Norton	Team inspector (Head of department, HMC school)