



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST MARY'S SCHOOL ASCOT

INTERIM INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St Mary's School Ascot

Full Name of School	St Mary's School Ascot		
DfE Number	868/6002		
Registered Charity Number	290286		
Address	St Mary's School Ascot St Mary's Road Ascot Berkshire SL5 9JF		
Telephone Number	01344 623721		
Fax Number	01344 873281		
Email Address	genenquiries@st-marys-ascot.co.uk		
Head	Mrs Mary Breen		
Chair of Governors	The Hon Charles Martyn-Hemphill		
Age Range	11 to 18		
Total Number of Pupils	380		
Gender of Pupils	Girls		
Numbers by Age	11-18:	380	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	13	Capacity for flexi-boarding: 0
Number of Boarders	Total:	367	
	Full:	367	Weekly: 0
Inspection dates	10 May 2011 to 11 May 2011		

PREFACE

This report is according to the *Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) schedule for INTERIM inspections*. The inspection is a two-day visit with a focus on compliance with regulatory requirements. ISI inspections occur every three years and have two formats, interim and standard, which usually occur in an alternating pattern. The school's next inspection will therefore follow the standard schedule, which includes two visits totalling five days and places greater emphasis on the quality of education and care in addition to reporting on regulatory compliance. The school's previous inspection was in January 2007.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

Under the Care Standards Act 2000, an inspection of boarding was carried out at the same time by the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted), Children's Services and Skills. The report of this inspection is available separately at www.ofsted.gov.uk under Children's social care/Boarding school.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 St Mary's School Ascot is a Roman Catholic boarding school for girls aged between eleven and eighteen located in extensive grounds in South Ascot, Berkshire. The school was founded in 1885 by a religious order, the Congregation of Jesus, and since 1984 has been run by the St Mary's School Ascot Trust. The trustees are guardians of the school while the governing body is responsible for day-to-day governance and the strategic direction of the school. The headmistress and the great majority of the teaching staff are lay people.
- 1.2 The school's principal aim is to foster the intellectual, spiritual and personal development of girls and women within the context of the Catholic boarding school. Since the last inspection in 2007 the school has opened a new performing arts centre and theatre, built a number of new bedrooms and modernised common room facilities. The school has 380 pupils on roll, with 367 full-time boarders and 13 day pupils. Two hundred and sixty-one pupils are in Years 7 to 11, with 119 in the sixth form.
- 1.3 The ability profile of the pupils is above the national average, with most pupils having an ability that is above or far above the national average. Very few pupils have an ability that is below average. The school has identified 44 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, of whom 43 receive specialist support from the school. For 21 of the pupils, English is an additional language but none of these has been identified as needing support with English in the classroom. Pupils' homes are in many parts of the UK with a small minority from overseas.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills

- 2.1 The overall achievement of pupils is excellent and fully meets the school's principal aim to foster intellectual, spiritual and personal development through a rigorous academic education. The excellent quality of the curriculum and of teaching, as well as pupils' own eagerness to learn, ensures that throughout the school the pupils think and act critically and creatively, and are firmly grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding. Pupils of all ages take part in a rich extra-curricular programme and achieve considerable success in a wide variety of activities including drama and music examinations, mathematics Olympiads and sporting competitions.
- 2.2 Academic attainment is outstanding. In their well-judged oral contributions in lessons and in their often meticulous written work, pupils demonstrate very high levels of attainment. Pupils attain at GCSE and A-level results far above the national average for girls in maintained schools and above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. Results in IGCSE are higher than worldwide norms. The progress pupils make in developing knowledge, skills and understanding in a wide range of subjects as they advance through the school is outstanding. Results at GCSE level show that pupils make exceptional progress from Years 7 to 11 compared to the average for pupils of similar ability, and results at A level indicate that this progress is maintained during the sixth form.
- 2.3 The pupils' attitudes to learning are outstanding. They are highly motivated, have high aspirations and demonstrate a strong work ethos. In lessons they respond very well to their teachers and are eager to participate. Written work is well organised and shows that pupils take great pride in presenting their work carefully. The pupils successfully develop their interests, their critical faculties and independent thinking skills. The most able pupils are given scope to achieve at the highest levels.
- 2.4 The curriculum is of excellent quality and contributes significantly to the school's aim to foster pupils' intellectual, spiritual and personal development. It ensures very good and progressive experience through a well-chosen range of subjects, and makes excellent provision for the development of high skill levels in speaking, literacy and numeracy. Teachers' expertise and the quality of resources and accommodation in art, drama, information and communication technology (ICT), physical education (PE) and science help the school to make excellent curriculum provision for aesthetic, creative, technological, physical and scientific education. Human and social education is very well catered for through humanities, religious education and skills for life, a very well designed programme of personal, social and health education. Languages provision, which includes modern foreign languages and classics, is a strength of the school. The balance of subjects in Years 7 to 9 is well judged, and at Years 10 and 11 girls choose, with good advice from their teachers, from a wide range of subjects. The sixth-form curriculum is flexible and well designed to allow girls to make choices which are closely matched to their aspirations and further education and career plans. There is a good careers education programme and a strong element of university preparation in sixth-form provision.
- 2.5 Extra-curricular provision is outstanding and the girls enjoy being able to participate in a wide range of activities including art, drama, dance, music and sport. There are

regular school trips in the UK and abroad, and numerous societies, clubs and projects including the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. The scope of extra-curricular activities reflects the strength of staff expertise and the high quality of resources and accommodation.

- 2.6 Teaching at the school is excellent and fully meets the school's aims. The teaching is consistent in its focus on rapid and secure learning and the application of intellectual, physical and creative skills. It shows excellent subject knowledge and is very well organised. Careful account is taken of the ability and prior experience of the girls, and teachers show strong awareness of how to motivate their pupils and make the most of their potential, including those identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and the most academically able girls. The school's teaching and classroom resources are of excellent quality and teachers use them well. Teachers mark and assess with care and accuracy, indicating how pupils can improve their work and giving suitable targets.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 2.7 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent and reflects the school's aims. The pupils' spiritual development is outstanding and reflects the very strong Christian ethos. The pupils show a keen awareness of right and wrong and the importance of tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality. Their outstanding social development owes much to the ethos of the school and the emphasis placed on the individual. The girls enjoy their community life and are polite, co-operative and respectful to their teachers and each other. They have a strong cultural awareness underpinned by the rich extra-curricular programme.
- 2.8 The arrangements for welfare, health and safety make an outstanding contribution to the quality of the pupils' personal development. The school successfully implements its thoroughly organised policies and procedures for welfare, health and safety. There are excellent arrangements for the pastoral care of pupils. The school knows its pupils very well, and there are carefully managed systems to allow staff to monitor the progress and development of each pupil, and to share this information with each other and with parents. The pupils say they like being at the school, feel at ease raising concerns and are confident that their views are valued. However, in the pupils' questionnaires, some girls stated that they felt more could be done to explain how sanctions and rewards are decided. The school is aware of this and, although it acts sensitively and responsibly, with the best interests of the girls in mind, it is not always successful in explaining its reasons to the pupils.
- 2.9 The quality of boarding education is outstanding. Boarding provision is very effective in supporting the education of the girls through good facilities for study, with after-school and weekend access to learning resources, including the internet, the library and some subject department facilities. The boarding accommodation is of high quality and provides a pleasant, domestic environment. Pupils say they like boarding and enjoy being with their friends. Boarding is an essential and positive part of the character of the school, and there is extremely good provision for activities in the evenings and at weekends.

The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management

- 2.10 The quality of governance is excellent. Governors have a clear view of the school's essential aims as a Catholic boarding school, its current provision, its achievements and its areas for development. Governors bring a valuable range of relevant professional expertise to the school and are aware of their collective responsibility for the welfare and safeguarding of the pupils.
- 2.11 Leadership and management are of excellent quality and are highly effective in promoting the school's aims as a Catholic girls' boarding school. The senior leadership displays dynamism and commitment, and has established clear priorities designed to maintain and develop the high standards of the school. The highly effective leadership team is rigorous in monitoring all aspects of the work of the school. Subject leaders and other middle managers are given good practical and professional support and they meet the high expectations the senior team places on them for pupils' personal development, their progress and their achievements. All those in the most senior positions understand and meet in full their responsibilities for welfare, health and safety and safeguarding, and have undertaken appropriate training in this regard. The school operates highly organised arrangements for the recruitment and appointment of staff and has a suitable single central register of appointments. The school's premises and grounds, which are extensive and complex, are carefully maintained.
- 2.12 The quality of links with parents is excellent. Parents and parents of prospective pupils get to know key staff very well and are closely involved in the educational experience of their daughters. The school's website portal ensures that parents receive all the required information and understand to whom they should express their views or concerns. Heads of houses are instrumental in maintaining these close links for their pupils. Reports are frequent, exceptionally thorough and cover all aspects of the pupils' education and behaviour. Parents are given the opportunity to attend regional meetings chaired by the headmistress and frequently attend talks arranged on a range of subjects relevant to parenting teenagers, such as internet safety. Sunday Mass is well attended by parents as are sporting fixtures and concerts, exhibitions and events. Parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were overwhelmingly positive about the school's provision. The school has a well-established procedure for recording concerns and complaints, and there have been no formal complaints in the last two academic years.

3. ACTION POINTS

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 3.1 The school meets all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendation for further improvement

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

1. Improve the way it presents and explains sanctions and rewards to pupils.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed a small sample of lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

The National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools were inspected by a team of three Ofsted inspectors over three days.

Inspectors

Mr Peter Jones

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Katherine McCarey

Assistant Headteacher, GSA school



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