



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ST FRANCIS' COLLEGE

MARCH 2017



CONTENTS

SCHOOL'S DETAILS	1
PREFACE	2
INSPECTION EVIDENCE	3
1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION	4
About the school	4
What the school seeks to do	4
About the pupils	4
2. KEY FINDINGS	5
Recommendation(s)	5
3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS	6
4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	8

SCHOOL'S DETAILS

College	St Francis' College			
DfE number	919/6029			
Registered charity number	287694			
Address	St Francis' College Broadway Letchworth Garden City Hertfordshire SG6 3PJ			
Telephone number	01462 670511			
Email address	bursar@st-francis.herts.sch.uk			
Headmistress	Mrs Bronwen Goulding			
Chair of governors	Mr Alan Goodwin			
Age range	3 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	380			
	Boys	0	Girls	380
	Day pupils	317	Boarders	63
	EYFS	29	Juniors	90
	Seniors	200	Sixth Form	61
Inspection dates	22 to 23 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 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 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 two governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the boarding house and the facilities for the youngest pupils. 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 Andrew Farren	Reporting inspector
Dr Pamela Edmonds	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Andrew Colpus	Team inspector (Head, Society of Heads school)
Mrs Lucy Elphinstone	Team inspector (Head, GSA school)

1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 St Francis' College is an independent day and boarding school for girls aged between 3 and 19 years. It is a registered charity, governed by a board of members. Since the previous inspection, the school has created a new preparatory school building and refurbished its sixth form and boarding facilities. The current headteacher has been in post since Easter 2015.
- 1.2 Founded in 1933 as a Roman Catholic day and boarding school for girls, St Francis' College is now a Christian day and boarding school welcoming girls of all faiths or none. The school has its own preparatory department for pupils up to Year 6, which includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). From Year 7 onwards, pupils are in the senior school, which includes the sixth form for pupils in Years 12 and 13. The school provides accommodation for boarding for pupils in Year 6 onwards.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a stimulating education, based on Christian values, which enables young women to thrive in an ever-changing global environment. It seeks to build intellectually creative minds through a rigorous and supportive educational experience, with a focus on close individual care. It also aims to be a community that values the unique qualities of each member and promotes social responsibility, self-esteem and self-development.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come mainly from families in the local professional community together with girls of an international background. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils on entry is above average. The school has identified 39 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include specific learning difficulties, all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan or a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for 59 pupils, of whom 51 receive language support. The most able pupils have access to a programme of enrichment, and departments regularly update the register of those who are more able.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils make good progress overall.
- Pupils with SEND or EAL make good progress because of the support provided.
- Progress can sometimes be limited because pupils lack sufficient opportunities to learn independently and show initiative.
- More able pupils are not always given work that challenges them.
- Pupils achieve well in a wide range of activities beyond the classroom.

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

- Pupils develop a keen sense of right and wrong.
- Pupils are considerate, polite and kind, caring for their school.
- Pupils can be over-cautious about making mistakes and this sometimes holds them back from trying out new things.
- Some pupils do not always feel their views are heard.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure that all pupils develop effective independent learning skills and initiative.
- Ensure that more able pupils progress well by working consistently at levels that reflect their ability and needs.
- Ensure pupils understand that making some mistakes in their learning is part of the journey towards getting things right.
- Ensure that all pupils make their views known to the school and receive responses which are clear enough to show these have been taken seriously.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is good.
- 3.2 In the EYFS, all pupils reach the expected levels of development for their age; most exceed them. The preparatory school does not enter pupils for national tests at the ages of 7 and 11, but on the basis of inspection evidence, including from standardised test data provided by the school, attainment by Year 6 is judged to be above that expected nationally for pupils of the same age. The evidence available from observation shows that progress is good. In the senior school, examination results at GCSE and A-level are above the national average for pupils in maintained schools. Results at IGCSE are higher than worldwide norms. These levels of attainment show that pupils make excellent progress by Year 11 in relation to those of similar ability nationally; sixth formers show good progress on the same basis. Pupils with SEND and EAL make good progress in line with their abilities because of the support they receive. More able pupils do not always make enough progress. The school is only partly successful in identifying such pupils from the data it holds about their performance. At present, it cannot ensure that their needs are being met consistently through targeted teaching that provides them with sufficiently demanding work. The school's senior leadership had identified this as an area requiring development. Pupils' progress is tracked by the school, but the data available are not always used with sufficient precision to guide teaching about each pupil's needs and this sometimes limits the progress they make. The large majority of sixth form leavers in 2016 applying for university places gained their first choice.
- 3.3 Pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and skills appropriately whenever they are given the opportunity to do so. For example, in a religious study lesson, they empathically acted out and reflected on a Jewish ritual demonstrating a genuine deepening of their understanding and knowledge, while very young children in EYFS enjoyed their success in identifying three-dimensional shapes. Pupils also have positive attitudes to learning. In their questionnaire responses, the large majority of pupils said they found lessons interesting and teachers enable them to know how well they are doing. They produce a large volume of good quality written work and express pride in the results. The pupils' approach to their work is shaped very much by an emphasis on neatness and presentation. There is less focus on being able to analyse and synthesise concepts and ideas. Teaching in the prep school and much of the senior school does not consistently help them to develop their study skills, work more independently, and use their initiative. In the sixth form, however, a more self-sufficient ethos prevails and there is a stronger sense of independent, self-managed learning, encouraged in the context of application to universities and other post-school settings.
- 3.4 Pupils often receive appropriate encouragement and constructive oral feedback in lessons, but they sometimes hesitate to ask for help when they need it. They are too concerned they will make a mistake and as a result, do not take risks in their learning, for example, to find out something new or to test an idea. Pupils do not always know what they need to do to improve their work as the quality of marking is inconsistent. In a few cases, marking is minimal with insufficient commentary to help pupils evaluate their current work or guide them through the next steps. Improving marking and promoting good practice were identified as areas for development in the previous inspection; work remains to be done on both fronts. Pupils demonstrate their readiness to respond to stimulating and challenging teaching, when for instance, they investigated complex compositions using excellent analytical skills in music, and created impressive speeches about the slave trade in a history lesson.
- 3.5 From the EYFS onwards, pupils make good progress in acquiring communication skills, both written and spoken, and with their reading. They apply these skills diligently across all subjects, using them with varying degrees of sophistication depending on the opportunities presented in the teaching, sometimes with very good results, as seen in a Year 3 science lesson when

pupils conferred about their knowledge of investigating. In a few lessons, communication by pupils is limited by the style of teaching, for example when questioning was narrow and did not provide opportunities to expand ideas or promote further exploration through discussion or creative writing.

- 3.6 Children in the EYFS gain a good understanding of numeracy and of shape and space. As they move through the school, the pupils' mathematical skills continue to grow. These are used across a range of other subjects, but sometimes pupils have only limited opportunities to show their initiative through mathematical investigations and problem-solving work. Pupils acquire the basic skills of information and communication technology (ICT) and demonstrate a readiness to use them, and the capability to do so well, when given the chance to do so. Examples included Year 8 pupils producing a computer-generated visual dictionary in English, or during a Year 4 geography lesson when ICT was being used to research the life of women in an Indian village. Pupils were runners-up in a national ICT project competition when they created a prosthetic hand, linked to a 3-D printer. In general, though, pupils would benefit from more opportunities to work independently and take initiative in their learning in lessons, through the use of ICT. The school has already identified this area as a priority for improvement.
- 3.7 The very large majority of pupils and their parents in their questionnaire responses felt that the school provides a suitable range of subjects and extra-curricular activities. Pupils are very positive about the school's curriculum and they respond enthusiastically to what is on offer. There is a very good take-up of clubs and team membership. Pupils participate and achieve well in a variety of competitions within school and in inter-school, including national, events such as Maths Challenges, chemistry, poetry, and joint art and science competitions. Pupils enjoy, and make good progress in, developing their skills in sports and music activities, which include the choir, orchestra and other music groups, as well as drama. The boarders benefit from a good range of on- and off-site activities, further extending their achievements during their residence in school.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 4.2 Pupils care strongly about their school and relate positively to its ethos and aims, which emphasise valuing one another as individuals and serving the school and the wider community. From the EYFS onwards, as they move up the school, pupils gain confidence and self-esteem so that they become young people who can express their views clearly and honestly, and are not afraid to deal frankly with sensitive or contentious issues whilst maintaining courtesy and consideration for others' views. This was demonstrated during interviews, when pupils engaged in a balanced debate about the effectiveness of voicing their views in influencing the development of the school. They develop strong self-discipline, which is seen in their attention to the quality of presentation in their work and in their consistently very good behaviour in all settings. They are resilient, persevering when challenged and committed to giving their best in everything they do, within lessons and in other activities, continually seeking to understand how to improve their performance, and the significance of their personal decisions. They are open to knowing themselves well, and display a readiness to reflect on their actions and to modestly consider implications for self and others, as observed in their empathic engagement in a religious studies lesson exploring a Jewish ritual dealing with personal responsibility in life.
- 4.3 In their questionnaire responses, parents were overwhelmingly positive about the school's effectiveness in supporting their children's personal development and of the pastoral and welfare arrangements, including within the boarding provision. Pupils were similarly appreciative of their opportunities to learn and make progress in all aspects of their development. Pupils' scope to build further on their strengths in self-understanding and decision-making is restricted to some extent by being given too little opportunity in some lessons to explore issues more independently without too much teacher-led activity. Pupils do not use their initiative in these circumstances and become over-reliant on being directed and receiving instructions for every step in their learning. At other times, when teaching stimulates a hunger for independent investigation, the same pupils show they can successfully pursue topics themselves with no hint of passivity or concern about taking a legitimate risk in their learning, or of making a mistake on the path of discovery. Boarders have opportunities to make decisions about their extra-curricular activities and enjoy this responsibility. A very large majority of pupils surveyed said that teachers are supportive and helpful with any problems with work and this view was expressed during discussions with pupils. They also stated that whilst most lessons are interesting, there are some which do not allow them to use their initiative and study skills to the full, and are less motivating.
- 4.4 Pupils of all faiths, and all ages, display a reverence in accord with the school's Christian ethos. This is seen in their moments of quiet reflection in Chapel, in the joy expressed when they sing, make music, or read poetry, and in the vibrant and wide-ranging art work displayed throughout the school. They have an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life as was clear during discussions, where they stressed that the most important things in life are principles, values, and belief in goodness. They enjoy assemblies, which are suitably aimed at different age-groups, such as the senior topic on respect, and a similar junior theme when pupils in Year 2 sang "hello" to all the children in the world. Pupils benefit from the school's own religious and cultural diversity, particularly with boarders from overseas, which enables them to appreciate each other's cultures, religious traditions, celebrations and spiritual perspectives. Pupils demonstrate sensitivity and tolerance to those from diverse backgrounds and traditions in their everyday relationships within and beyond the classroom. They also develop a fuller understanding from the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) and religious studies programmes, which include visits to different faith centres and speeches from people

of various backgrounds. Parents and pupils responding to questionnaires praised the school's effectiveness in promoting tolerance and respect for those with different faiths and beliefs.

- 4.5 Pupils are proud of their very good behaviour and treat each other and adults with equally high respect. The youngest pupils in the EYFS learn to take turns and say sorry when they bump into another child. This sense of decency and regard for others continues to develop through the preparatory school, as observed when Year 6 pupils designed anti-bullying posters following an assembly on this topic presented by a visiting speaker. The pupils' sense of right and wrong is securely established and they are keen to apply their acquired principles of justice to different contexts when, for example, a Year 9 class considered the moral issues involved in allowing otherwise illegal drugs to be approved for medical purposes. Pupils are passionate about analysing these matters and keen to learn about the institutions of law and order in our country and overseas. They also become aware of their personal responsibility to keep themselves healthy, physically and mentally, and to have due regard for their own and others' safety, including online. A Year 10 class enjoyed a lesson on meditation and relaxation techniques to alleviate examination stress. Pupils emphasised that sport activities were just as important for them as a way of keeping healthy as an opportunity to achieve personal bests. At mealtimes, including boarding, pupils ensure they have a balanced diet.
- 4.6 Pupils develop good social skills and use them well whenever there is an opportunity. There were some examples of collaboration between pupils within lessons, such as small group problem-solving and pupils helping each other mount displays of their artwork. There are also lost opportunities for pupils to exercise their social skills, as is frequently the case in lessons as opportunities for pupils to work independently or creatively together are overlooked. As pupils are very polite and accommodating, they did not challenge these situations. Pupils have opportunities to show responsibility to others within the school community, as demonstrated when house captains led other pupils in a review of the house system and purposefully invited staff to be included in the deliberations. Very young pupils listened to a story about being kind to others and showed a lively interest in exploring how they could do the same thing. Older pupils participate in a community action programme, which allows them to pursue personal interests locally, such as youth club leadership and work in hospitals and hospices. The programme also provides opportunities to support women in conflict zones around the world. Pupils raise funds for charities in imaginative ways and are encouraged to learn as much as possible about the causes they support. Some pupils felt that although they were well involved in such activities, the school still did not take their views on immediate school life seriously enough: this was expressed by a range of individuals and groups of pupils across the junior and senior age ranges, informally and during interviews. Initiatives such as the mentoring scheme, the review of the "Charter of Respect", and consultation on the anti-bullying policy and "Golden Rules" have all included pupils as stakeholders. Despite this involvement, a common feeling and view expressed, courteously but strongly, by some pupils, was that they did not have sufficient influence on developments, and that the school council's impact was negligible or took too long to bring about agreed changes. Inspectors note that the school's leadership has included a re-emphasis on listening to the pupils' views in its development plan.