

School inspection reports

30 April to 2 May 2024

Notre Dame Senior School

Burwood House

Convent Lane

Convent Lane

Cobham

Surrey

KT11 1HA

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They have appointed school leaders who are trained and knowledgeable, so that they have the skills to promote the wellbeing of pupils. Leadership decisions are made which ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Decisions taken reflect the school's ethos in promoting pupils' happiness and success. Resources are suitable to support the pupils' educational and pastoral needs.
2. The school has a broad, balanced curriculum appropriate to pupils' needs. Teachers plan lessons well. They assess pupils' understanding regularly, so that they can be sure that pupils are making good progress overall. Examination results for all pupils, including those who have a special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have been consistently good over time. Leaders have created an environment in which pupils are happy and successful. However, maintaining this balance can, at times, result in teaching which limits challenge and academic aspiration for examination success.
3. The programme for personal, social and health education (PSHE), which includes relationships and sex education (RSE), is well-considered. It promotes pupils' firm understanding of the importance of tolerance and mutual respect, while supporting the growth of their self-knowledge and self-confidence.
4. The school's expectations of pupils' behaviour and its procedures to minimise bullying are clearly stated. Pupils understand the boundaries set and the associated policies are implemented effectively. Appropriate supervision is in place and pupils' attendance is monitored systematically. Suitable arrangements for health and safety are rigorously enforced. The school environment is secure, well maintained and conducive to learning.
5. The curriculum and the PSHE programme ensure that pupils appreciate the nature of Britain's democratic modern society. They understand the importance of the principles of equality and respect for diversity, irrespective of differences in background and belief. Pupils willingly accept responsibility roles in school. They are keen to contribute to wider society by volunteering and through charitable fund raising. The comprehensive careers programme supports pupils in making informed and objective decisions about their future.
6. Safeguarding principles are embedded across the school. All staff are trained and alert to their responsibilities. Swift and effective action to support pupils' wellbeing is taken when needed.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that classroom teaching consistently creates a climate of academic aspiration and encourages all pupils to explore their full potential.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders at all levels understand the school's aims, which place equal emphasis on promoting pupils' wellbeing, their happiness and their success. The result is a calm, purposeful atmosphere in which pupils know that they are valued as unique individuals. This means that they enjoy their learning and achieve well.
8. Governors have a range of professional skills which they use generously to support the school. They are appropriately trained, which ensures that they understand their statutory duties. They make sure that school leaders have the training, knowledge and skills that they need to fulfil their roles effectively. Nominated governors provide oversight in specific areas such as safeguarding. Some governors are members of the founding religious Order. They ensure that decisions not only meet the Standards but also reflect the school's ethos.
9. Governors' meetings include regular reviews of policies. They consider reports from school leaders and discuss the effectiveness of policies and their implementation. Governors ensure that leaders liaise with other agencies, such as social services and the police, as needed. They are committed to promoting diversity and equality. The school is a member of a national school inclusivity alliance. School leaders at all levels actively promote awareness of diversity. In doing so they ensure that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met, providing appropriate facilities and equal access to the curriculum for all. There is a suitable accessibility plan. Leaders liaise with the local authority as required as required on the funding for pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
10. School leaders regularly review all areas of school life and how successfully they are meeting the Standards. Their self-evaluations analyse what is going well, but are less clear on what the school is planning to do to improve further in relation to subject-level planning. Leaders are alert to actual and potential risk. For example, senior leaders identified the need to develop the school's resources for information and communication technology (ICT). In planning for this, governors and leaders considered and mitigated the practical risks involved in having a building site in the centre of the school during term time. They also gave careful thought to the potential impact of disruption on pupils' wellbeing. These risks have been managed effectively through consultation and careful planning.
11. School leaders have ensured that all required information is readily available for parents and other stakeholders. Complaints are managed in line with the published policy. Most complaints are resolved without the need to progress to a panel hearing. Leaders are vigilant on matters of health and safety so that the school environment is well maintained and secure.
12. Governors and leaders are well trained in safeguarding, so they understand their responsibilities. The nominated governor for safeguarding has regular meetings with the designated safeguarding leaders (DSLs). He encourages them to contact him beyond these meetings if necessary. Governors oversee the recruitment processes to check that they are robust, and that information is recorded as required. Local governors are frequent visitors to the school. They meet with staff and pupils to gather a first-hand understanding of how effectively leaders' decisions promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

13. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

14. The curriculum is broad and balanced. Pupils are literate, fluent in writing and in speech. They have good mathematical skills. Pupils develop a clear understanding of scientific concepts and use subject-specific language confidently. Pupils use ICT appropriately, for example, to research a topic, but the skills to use the potential of ICT to enrich learning are less well developed. Pupils' creativity is evident in the high-quality artwork on display around the school.
15. Pupils who have SEND learn well and make good progress with the school's support. Individual action plans are created in discussion with pupils and shared with teachers. The effectiveness of these strategies is monitored regularly and details of expenditure for pupils who have an EHC plan is reported to the local authority as required.
16. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are assessed for fluency on joining the school. Extra support is provided as needed. At present, all pupils who speak English as an additional language speak fluent English and require minimal support.
17. Teachers generally have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well. Teachers create a positive learning atmosphere and consequently, pupils are not afraid to make mistakes. Teachers are astute in assessing pupils' understanding through regular assessment tasks and in lessons. Careful questioning, for example, in lessons in Latin and French, allows teachers to identify and correct misunderstandings swiftly. At times, teachers encourage pupils to deepen their understanding independently. In sociology lessons, for example, pupils make rapid progress as they work collaboratively on a sample examination question with minimal teacher intervention.
18. Teachers give regular feedback to pupils about their work. However, the quality of this is inconsistent, with some feedback leaving pupils unclear on how to improve their work. Sometimes pupils are not challenged in their learning to move beyond their comfort zones. In some cases, pupils who find a task straightforward are given more work of the same level, rather than something more demanding. Decision-making around the curriculum and examination entry does not consistently support a culture of academic aspiration. For example, decisions on entry to foundation level examinations may be made early in pupils' GCSE pathway, limiting access to higher grades. Teachers do not always encourage pupils to discover and fulfil their full potential. Pupils make good progress and consistently achieve good outcomes at GCSE and A-level over time. Most pupils go on to university, and some choose to follow an apprenticeship route.
19. Pupils are keen to learn. They can think independently and make links between areas of learning. Pupils in Year 7, for example, discuss differences between English society at the time of the Black Death and the social freedoms of modern Britain. Pupils are confident in explaining and supporting their own ideas, for example, pupils in Year 8 are able to defend their views on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
20. Leaders provide a range of extra-curricular opportunities in which pupils have fun while extending their skills. For example, in robotics club, pupils create machines from children's building bricks to enter a national competition. Other clubs such as sports, dance and debating are also well supported and enjoyed by pupils.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

22. School leaders state that the pupils' happiness is as important as their academic success. This commitment underpins its pastoral structures. An extended and effective pastoral team support pupils' mental health and wellbeing. Pupils understand the school's support structures and know that they can seek help from staff if they need it.
23. Warm, mutually respectful relationships with teachers are evident in classrooms, encouraging pupils to feel secure. This supports their growth in self-knowledge, self-confidence and resilience. Pupils are supportive of each other and respectful of other's views.
24. Pupils know the importance of healthy eating and an active lifestyle. The physical education (PE) curriculum helps them to develop their skills in individual and team activities. This is further supported by the many extra-curricular clubs.
25. PSHE teaching, with units on health, self-knowledge and wellbeing, ensures that pupils are well prepared for adult life. Pupils know that discrimination of any sort is unacceptable. They have a clear understanding of the importance of mutual respect and tolerance, underpinned by the school's focus on kindness and friendship.
26. Leaders create specific opportunities for pupils to reflect on matters beyond the material. In annual 'days of reflection' pupils are encouraged to think about their relationships with others and about their personal development. The physical environment of the school, with displays about the Order's founder and the regular use of the chapel for assemblies, promotes pupils' awareness of the spiritual and moral values which are core to the school's ethos.
27. RSE teaching ensures that the pupils have objective information on personal and sex education. In a talk from a visiting speaker, pupils were encouraged to be non-judgmental and confident in talking about their own sexual health and wellbeing. Pupils value the frank and open atmosphere created in RSE lessons. This gives them the information that they need as they mature into adulthood.
28. Pupils know the school's clear expectations of positive behaviour. These include the expectation that pupils take responsibility for their own actions. Their demeanour at breaktimes and in lessons shows that they respect these requirements. They behave sensibly and are polite. Records show that the school deals with any misbehaviour appropriately. Leaders ensure a consistent and fair approach. Bullying is rare and managed firmly with appropriate sanctions.
29. Staff duty rotas ensure that there are appropriate levels of supervision. Attendance and admission registers are completed and kept as required. Contact is made with the relevant local authorities should a pupil join or leave the school at a non-standard time. Attendance levels are monitored and absences followed up appropriately.
30. The school premises and grounds are well maintained. Interiors are bright, colourful and clean, creating an environment conducive to learning. All health and safety checks, including those relating to fire prevention, are carried out rigorously, properly recorded and actions taken as necessary. There is an appropriate accessibility plan in place. The medical room caters appropriately for pupils who are ill or injured and there are suitable numbers of staff trained in first aid.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

31. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

32. The broad curriculum supports pupils to be conscious of the wider world and of their responsibilities to it. For example, the global implications of climate change for humanity are considered in geography and biology lessons. The recent establishment of a Model United Nations helps to widen pupils' understanding of global issues such as economic inequalities.
33. Displays around the school remind pupils of the core values of kindness and compassion. Pupils appreciate that all groups of people are equally deserving of respect. In discussions, pupils show their understanding of the moral and legal imperatives on matters of equality and diversity. The PSHE programme reinforces pupils' understanding and challenges their thinking.
34. The careers guidance programme is comprehensive. Pupils are encouraged to think of their personal strengths and interests. The programme includes sessions on employability skills, writing application letters, and work experience. Teachers provide guidance on subject choices, with individual discussions linking subject choices to aspirations. Careers fairs and presentations from outside speakers, including former pupils, further ensure that pupils are given impartial and up-to-date information to help them to make an informed choice.
35. Pupils develop their understanding of economic matters through PSHE units on financial management, consumer rights and interpreting pay slips. A life skills programme in the sixth form includes practical sessions on applying for student loans and catering on a budget. Financial awareness and business skills are further developed by involvement in the Young Enterprise challenge. Pupils' clear understanding of the importance of developing these skills helps to prepare them for adult life and the world of work.
36. Pupils understand the political structures which underpin life in modern Britain, including the role of the law and of the police in helping to maintain a fair society. They know how democracy functions and its value. Pupils see democracy in action in the school by voting for pupil leadership roles and contributing to the school council. In this way, pupils develop an understanding of what it means to be responsible and active citizens.
37. Pupils show a principled understanding of right and wrong, as seen in class discussions in theology and in pupil suggestions for debating club topics. The school council, chaired by the head pupil, takes its duty seriously in putting the pupils' views to senior leaders. Pupils in Year 10 act as informal peer mentors and sixth-form pupils are paired with new pupils to act as their 'big sisters'. Charitable events run by the pupils have raised considerable amounts of money for disaster fund appeals, a regional hospital and local charities supporting disadvantaged families. Pupils working towards the Duke of Edinburgh's (DofE) Award Scheme volunteer in school and in the locality.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

39. Governors have up-to-date safeguarding training so that they understand their responsibilities and are proactive in discharging them. They ensure that safeguarding is a standing item in full governors' meetings and conduct the formal annual review of safeguarding arrangements as required. The designated governor is in regular contact with the DSLs. Governors are conscious of the potential risks posed by the internet. Leaders provide effective oversight of the school's monitoring and filtering systems.
40. Leaders have invested in suitable training, including in the Prevent strategy, for an extended team of DSLs which includes all heads of year. The composition of the DSL team enables the DSLs to be confident that they have close understanding of the pupils and relationships with their families. The extended team also enables leaders to ensure that there is always a DSL contactable, including over weekends and holiday periods. The DSLs provide thorough training to the staff in formal sessions each term. They also provide regular updates, in which they alert staff to any changes in safeguarding trends observed in the school. As a result, staff are confident in their understanding of their responsibilities and duties should they have any concerns.
41. The DSLs meet regularly. They have clear systems for ensuring that concerns are managed promptly and appropriately. The DSLs act with speed and determination when concerns are raised. They liaise with social services and parents as appropriate, putting the needs of pupils first. Leaders have established positive relationships with the relevant agencies, and regularly attend joint meetings.
42. The PSHE programme supports pupils to be well informed about internet safety. Leaders review the effectiveness of the school's monitoring systems regularly. Swift action is taken by DSLs in response to any alerts of attempts to access inappropriate sites.
43. Those involved in the recruitment process have a comprehensive understanding of the pre-employment checks which statutory guidance requires. All checks are completed and recorded appropriately on a single central record. Leaders carefully monitor this process, ensuring that appropriate action is taken should there be any delay in completing a check.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 44. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	Notre Dame Senior School
Department for Education number	936/6163
Registered charity number	1081875
Address	Burwood House Convent Lane Cobham Surrey KT11 1HA
Phone number	01932 869990
Email address	office@notredame.co.uk
Website	www.notredame.co.uk
Proprietor	Notre Dame Cobham
Chair	Mrs Wanda Nash
Headteacher	Mrs Anna King
Age range	11-19
Number of pupils	442
Date of previous inspection	5 to 6 February 2020

Information about the school

45. Notre Dame Senior School is an independent day school for female pupils aged between 11 and 19. It is situated in countryside close to the Surrey town of Cobham. Notre Dame Preparatory School is on the same site and shares some facilities. Each school has its own headmistress, and its work is overseen by the same governing body.
46. The school was founded by the Roman Catholic religious Order of the Company of Mary, Our Lady, and the governing body includes members of the Order. The school is a registered charity and a company limited by guarantee.
47. The school has identified 192 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
48. English is an additional language for 18 pupils.
49. The school states its aims are to provide a secure, stimulating and harmonious environment in which pupils are valued as individuals so that they can grow in self-confidence, independence and self-esteem. It intends that pupils develop a sound set of values and attitudes while being encouraged to fulfil their potential. The intention is that the pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives and understand their responsibilities to the wider community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 April to 2 May 2024

50. A team of 4 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

51. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

52. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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