



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**NOTRE DAME PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

**INTERIM INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## Notre Dame Preparatory School

The senior school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of School/College **Notre Dame Preparatory School**

DfE Number **936/6570**

Registered Charity Number **1081875**

Address **Notre Dame Preparatory School  
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Cobham  
Surrey  
KT11 1HA**

Telephone Number **01932 869991**

Fax Number **01932 589480**

Email Address **headmaster@notredame.co.uk**

Head **Mr David Plummer**

Chair of Governors **Mr Glen Travers**

Age Range **3 to 11**

Total Number of Pupils **340**

Gender of Pupils **Mixed (12 boys; 328 girls)**

Numbers by Age  
0-2 (EYFS): **0**      5-11:      **260**  
3-5 (EYFS): **80**      11-18:      **0**

EYFS Gender **Mixed**

Inspection dates **22 Mar 2011 to 23 Mar 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 February 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.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31<sup>st</sup> August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

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.

# CONTENTS

	Page
<b>1 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL</b>	<b>2</b>
The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and basic skills	2
The quality of the pupils' personal development	3
The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management	3
<b>3 ACTION POINTS</b>	<b>5</b>
(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements	5
(ii) Recommendation(s) for further improvement	5
<b>4 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE</b>	<b>6</b>
(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	6
(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage	6
(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage	6
(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage	7
<b>INSPECTION EVIDENCE</b>	<b>8</b>

## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Notre Dame Preparatory School is a Roman Catholic day school. It is part of the 400 year old international foundation of the Company of Mary Our Lady. The school opened on the present site in 1937. The school shares a common seventeen-acre site with its sister senior school on the banks of the River Mole just outside Cobham. The schools are organisationally independent but are linked by a common governing body. The preparatory school provides education for 340 pupils from the ages of 3 to 11. There are 80 children, including 12 boys, in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). The remainder of the pupils are girls. The school is dedicated to the Catholic faith but welcomes pupils of any faith or none. Pupils come principally from the local area, and parents are mainly from professional and business backgrounds. The school seeks to implement the vision of the foundress, Saint Jeanne de Lestonnac, to prepare young people for their role as responsible citizens of the wider world, following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. Emphasis is placed on the recognition and nurturing of individual potential in all areas of endeavour. The school sees a close and harmonious relationship between pupils, staff and parents as essential. Since its previous inspection in 2007, significant building and reorganisation have taken place. A performing arts centre is currently being built.
- 1.2 The average ability of pupils, as indicated in standardised tests, is slightly above the national average within a wide range of ability. No pupil has a statement of special educational needs. In total, 68 pupils have been identified as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), while 27 pupils receive specialist learning support. A significant proportion of pupils come from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are 83 pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), and 11 receive extra support for their spoken English.
- 1.3 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 pupils' overall achievement from the EYFS onwards is outstanding and represents the successful fulfilment of the school's aim to strive for personal academic excellence. Pupils are highly successful in developing their knowledge, understanding and skills in their academic and extra-curricular activities. They effectively research and are keen to study, reflecting the emphasis now placed on these aspects of their work. They are highly articulate, and listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. For example, older pupils led an act of worship in which they imaginatively explained why a 'can do' attitude to life, a school aim, was important to them. Pupils write fluently and neatly for a wide range of purposes. Many read voraciously. Pupils are highly competent mathematicians and successfully undertake experiments in science. Many are accomplished musicians. Pupils put their high quality skills in information and communication technology to good use in other subjects. Pupils are successful across a wide range of activities, for example in cross-country running where the girls are the Surrey champions, and in athletics and netball. Many pupils excel in dance and drama.
- 2.2 Attainment is judged to be high in relation to age-related expectations. Pupils follow a demanding and imaginative curriculum and are successful in entry to the senior schools of their choice, including the award of scholarships. Most gain places at the senior school. This level of attainment, and work seen during the inspection, indicate that pupils make good progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Pupils with LDD make good progress as they receive support that is carefully targeted to their needs. Pupils with EAL make sound progress in their spoken English; arrangements are not fully in place to assess precisely their levels of spoken English. Those pupils who are gifted and talented are well supported and make good progress. Pupils and parents are pleased with this progress. Pupils are fully committed to their studies and work well in groups or individually. They are particularly appreciative of the positive ethos in the school and the support their teachers provide. Inspection findings support the positive views of pupils and parents.
- 2.3 The pupils' progress is supported by the excellent and stimulating curriculum. Their personal development benefits from a carefully planned programme of personal, social and health education. Parents and pupils commend the wide range of clubs and opportunities outside the classroom, a view with which inspectors concurred. As well as sporting activities, pupils have opportunities for drama, dance and music. The range reflects the pupils' eclectic interests, including word games, and a scissors club for children in the EYFS.
- 2.4 The pupils' successes are due, in large part, to the excellent teaching. Teachers use methods well suited to their pupils. Teachers know their pupils well and care is taken to ensure that they build on what they have already learnt. The brisk pace, combined with an atmosphere of mutual respect, maintains concentration and stimulates the pupils' interest. Marking is detailed and thorough, and often gives pupils targets to aim for. Whilst there are good examples of marking providing useful guidance for pupils as to how they might improve their work, such guidance is not consistently provided. Regular and detailed assessment is used effectively to

track pupils' progress and enable them to improve further in order to support them in their move to senior schools.

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

- 2.5 Pupils of all ages have outstandingly well-developed personal qualities. Their self-esteem is high, in line with the teaching of St Jeanne. Pupils are confident, caring and keen to celebrate the success of others. Their spiritual awareness is highly developed. They pray regularly and reflect seriously about spiritual matters, for example in religious education when older pupils reflect on what makes a saint a person of religious importance. They show a secure understanding of other world faiths. Pupils are keenly aware of what is right and wrong. In line with the school's aims, they show a high degree of social awareness, as seen in their contribution to charities such as the Japan Disaster Relief Fund. They are well aware of their responsibilities to each other as members of the school community. They are equally aware of responsibility to the environment; for example, the school's 'eco warriors' collect material for recycling. Pupils conscientiously undertake the responsibilities they are given, for example as members of the school council, prefects and games captains. Pupils' cultural awareness is well developed. A major strength of the school is the way pupils of a wide range of cultural backgrounds work and play harmoniously. They enjoy learning about one another's experiences and traditions.
- 2.6 Underpinning this strong personal development is the excellent pastoral care provided by all staff. The school puts into practice its values. In their comments and responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, pupils showed that they are happy at school and that staff care about them. Relationships between staff and pupils, and amongst the pupils themselves, are excellent. Parents appreciate the care provided for their children. Due attention is paid to encouraging pupils to live a healthy lifestyle. Arrangements for safeguarding pupils and health and safety are secure, and the anti-bullying policy is securely implemented. Fire precautions are securely in place.

### **The effectiveness of governance, leadership and management**

- 2.7 Governance is excellent and provides the school with a clear ethos that reflects the aims of the foundress. Key areas are monitored effectively. Governors are keen to ensure that the preparatory school continues to move forward. The senior management team's development of 'new beginnings' has resulted in the excellent development of the curriculum. The governors provide clear strategic planning and manage finances prudently to enable planning to become a reality, as in the case of the nearly completed performing arts centre. Accommodation is of a high quality. Governors provide effective advice and use their wide range of experience to good effect. They have a secure working knowledge of the school. Governors have a firm oversight of child protection and health and safety, both through their annual reviews and through those among their number with nominated responsibilities. Their support for the school was much appreciated by parents in the pre-inspection questionnaires.
- 2.8 Excellent leadership and management are reflected in the pupils' outstanding overall achievement and personal development. The hallmark of the management is that nothing is left to chance, with meticulous attention to detail. Teamwork is of a high order. Monitoring and evaluation are conducted well, with subject co-ordinators playing a key part. Rigorous checks are made on those appointed to work in the

school. Staff development is given a high priority. Excellent progress has been made in reorganisation and redevelopment of the accommodation. Links with parents are strong, and seen in their involvement with and support for the school, also confirmed in their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. They were particularly appreciative of the attitudes and views promoted, behaviour and the management of the school. A small minority felt that the provision of information about their children's progress is limited. The inspection found no evidence to substantiate this. Effective procedures are in place for dealing with the small number of concerns raised by parents. Parents are supplied with required information on the school's website and in documentation.



### **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) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 3.2 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Implement fully the development plan for the support of pupils with English as an additional language.
  2. Ensure that marking consistently provides pupils with guidance about how they can improve their work.
  3. Ensure that evaluation in the EYFS pays due attention to the Reception age range.
  4. Provide more opportunities in the EYFS for independent learning in Reception.

#### **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE**

##### **4.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.1 Overall effectiveness is outstanding, and fulfils the school's aims through the provision of a happy and caring environment with excellent relationships. The setting is inclusive. All children are treated as valued individuals whose needs are met. A strong partnership with parents enables children to make a secure start to their education. Excellent progress has been made in improving assessment arrangements to plan work that meets children's individual needs. The newly established leadership team in the EYFS has made a promising start and is well placed to ensure continuous improvement for the setting as a whole.

##### **4.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.2 The leadership and management of the EYFS are good. Staff are highly qualified. Provision for the children's welfare is excellent. The implementation of thorough and detailed policies ensures that the safeguarding of children is secure. Adults are strongly committed to equality and diversity. Emphasis is placed on staff development. Regular evaluation ensures that the vision for future development for the Nursery is well defined; however, that for Reception is less clear. Parents are very supportive of the quality of the provision. Effective partnerships with outside agencies provide valuable support for staff. Resources are used effectively to support children's learning, both in teacher-led and independently chosen activities.

##### **4.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

4.3 The quality of provision is good, with some outstanding features. Children benefit from bright, welcoming learning environments, and from opportunities to swim and learn French. A well-equipped outdoor area provides good opportunities to work and play. Thorough initial observations and assessments are used well to identify achievement and to plan work. Well-qualified staff support and extend children's learning effectively. The balance of purposeful child-initiated play and more structured adult-initiated activities is outstanding in the Nursery. In Reception, the balance is more towards teacher-led activities, with fewer opportunities for the children's independent learning across the curriculum. Parents are appreciative of the feedback they receive. Close attention is paid to children's safety and well-being, and enables children to have positive attitudes to their personal health.

#### **4.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage**

- 4.4 Outcomes are outstanding overall. The children make excellent progress across all areas of learning in relation to their starting points, and often have outstanding levels of achievement. The children are active, curious learners who communicate exceedingly well. They count reliably up to ten. Many read, write short sentences and are confident in using computers to reinforce their learning. Children are happy and confident. They are aware of keeping themselves safe. Children understand the need for good hygiene, and are able to identify the need for hand washing prior to meal times.

**Section 3 includes what the Early Years Foundation Stage should do to improve its provision.**

## **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 the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mr Rod Sharman

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Philippa Cawthorne

Head, IAPS pre-prep school

Mrs Julie Lowe

Early Years Co-ordinating Inspector