



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION**

**NOTRE DAME SENIOR SCHOOL**

**JANUARY 2017**



## SCHOOL'S DETAILS

<b>School</b>	Notre Dame Senior School			
<b>DfE number</b>	936/6163			
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1081875			
<b>Address</b>	Notre Dame Senior School Burwood House Convent Lane Cobham Surrey KT11 1HA			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01932 869990			
<b>Email address</b>	office@notredame.co.uk			
<b>Headmistress</b>	Mrs Anna King			
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Gerald Russell			
<b>Age range</b>	11 to 18			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	324			
	<b>Boys</b>	0	<b>Girls</b>	324
	<b>Day pupils</b>	324	<b>Boarders</b>	0
	<b>Seniors</b>	269	<b>Sixth Form</b>	55
<b>Inspection dates</b>	25 to 26 January 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 un-met 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, the chair of governors and with chair of the governors' education committee. Inspectors observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, attended form meetings, chapel and assemblies, and visited the learning support and educational resource areas. 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

Mrs Cathy Williamson	Reporting inspector
Mr Anthony Duffield	Team inspector (Head of department, HMC school)
Mr Ben Edwards	Team inspector (Head of sixth form, HMC school)
Mr Alun Jones	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)

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## **1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

### **About the school**

- 1.1 Notre Dame Senior School is an independent Roman Catholic day school for girls aged between 11 and 18. It was founded in 1937 on its current site which it shares with Notre Dame Preparatory School, on the banks of the river Mole in Cobham. The school is part of the international charitable Order of the Company of Mary Our Lady, and the governing body includes representatives of the Order.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection the chair of governors has changed and the school has restructured its leadership to form a more integrated preparatory and senior school with separate head teachers for each section. A theatre and all-weather sports facility have been added and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) is now offered in the sixth form.

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

- 1.3 The school aims to offer a holistic and personalised education, in a secure and stimulating environment. It seeks to encourage and challenge pupils to fulfil their potential academically, socially, creatively and in sports, music and drama, whilst gaining an appreciation of the global world in which they live.

### **About the pupils**

- 1.4 Pupils come principally from professional and business families within the local area. The school is dedicated to the Catholic faith but welcomes pupils from all faiths or none. Most pupils are from White British families but a number of different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds are represented. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils in Years 7 to 11 is above the national average and in the sixth form is in line with national norms. The school has identified thirty-eight pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), mainly dyslexia, working memory and processing issues. It has one pupil with an education, health and care plan. Nine pupils have English as an additional language (EAL) and their needs are supported by adjustments in lessons and by additional lessons as required. More able pupils are identified in the school's internal register of able, gifted and talented pupils; their needs are addressed through lesson planning and extension activities.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

### **Recommendations from previous inspections**

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in March 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
  - Ensure that data on the progress of pupils is used consistently to improve learning and raise standards.
  - Monitor the quality of teaching more consistently, and identify ways in which it can be improved still further.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met both the recommendations of the previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

## **2. KEY FINDINGS**

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

- Pupils develop high levels of subject knowledge, skills and understanding as they learn in trustful collaboration with each other and with their teachers.
- Pupils' communication skills are excellent.
- Pupils of all abilities have exceptionally positive attitudes to their learning.
- Pupils' excellent study skills enable them to focus successfully on their progress.

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

- Pupils have notably strong moral values that guide them in their studies, behaviour and relationships.
- Pupils and staff are united in their aspirations, and nurture supportive relationships which are grounded in mutual respect.
- Pupils contribute strongly to their community whilst developing into mature, caring individuals.

### **Recommendations**

2.3 In the context of these excellent outcomes the school may wish to consider:

- Extending the opportunities for ambitious, creative learning to more pupils in Years 7 to 11, following the success of this in the sixth form.

### 3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils develop high levels of knowledge, understanding and skills according to their abilities; increasingly so as they progress up the school. This was observed across all areas of learning, is in line with the school's aim to offer pupils a holistic education and reflects the high quality of teaching throughout the school. Pupils' strong linguistic skills including those in modern foreign languages were observed in lessons and assemblies. Their mathematical, technological, social and scientific skills and understanding develop well, enabling almost all pupils to attain excellent results in these subjects at GCSE. Many examples were observed in lessons; younger pupils demonstrated outstanding knowledge in physics when identifying the problems associated with high altitude free fall, with the most able pupils displaying notably high levels of understanding. Pupils' aesthetic, creative and performance skills are outstanding, as evidenced by the quality of their work in art, drama and textiles, and the high levels of attainment at GCSE and A level. In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, almost all pupils said that the school provides them the opportunity to learn and to make good progress.
- 3.3 Pupils express themselves clearly and fluently, and they develop excellent public speaking skills as a result of the many opportunities that they have to present to an audience. The school encourages presentations in lessons; a notable example was observed in business studies where pupils were confident and articulate in presenting their analysis of their imaginary 'Cobham coffee bar'. Pupils help to lead assemblies and chapel services; these experiences build their confidence and expertise. Pupils throughout the school use technical subject specific language accurately, encouraged by their teachers; younger pupils in music referred to syncopation and cross-rhythms when referencing the music in *West Side Story*. Pupils listen attentively in class and to each other. They enjoy reading; younger pupils who were enthused by the book *Skellig* had gone on to read another book by the same author, and a slightly older group of pupils displayed excellent understanding as they identified the distinction between poet and narrative voice in a difficult poem. Pupils' writing demonstrates a strong awareness of their potential audience. The extensive library facilities at the centre of the school provide resources and exhibitions of pupils' work, to encourage the development of these skills.
- 3.4 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They work extremely effectively in teams and groups both in class and in extra-curricular activities, and readily take the opportunities that they are provided to work independently. Pupils are self-motivated; they are attentive, concentrate well and are willing to contribute to discussion. They respond enthusiastically to opportunities for creativity and for taking leadership in their own learning. Teaching in the sixth form is particularly rich in such opportunities, and excellent examples were observed in art and textiles where pupils took responsibility for their coursework; reviewing, evaluating and researching independently to improve and develop their work. In a few lessons, particularly lower down the school, teaching is more circumscribed and pupils are more likely to respond to teaching prompts than to initiate their own learning.



- 3.5 The majority of pupils, especially those of higher ability, develop excellent study skills, aided by training which is offered at key stages in their studies and by subject staff who teach specific skills. Pupils are able to evaluate their work in order to improve; younger pupils in food technology discussed their folders and practical sessions, successfully identifying what was well done and suggesting areas for improvement. In sociology, older pupils accurately evaluated their work on gender roles in the family against an examination mark scheme. Pupils of all abilities have excellent note-taking skills, summarising and prioritising with clarity and concision. Older pupils use a wide range of resources, for example pupils in geography exhibited outstanding analytical skills and the ability to synthesise information when studying the impact of tar sand extraction in Alberta. More able pupils demonstrate an advanced ability to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise during the development of their projects, such as those submitted for the EPQ. Outstanding scientific research and experimental skills were observed in entries for a national science awards competition.
- 3.6 Attainment levels over time demonstrate that pupils throughout the school make at least appropriate and often good or excellent progress, relative to their starting points. This analysis uses the national data for the years 2013 to 2015; the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results in GCSE examinations have been consistently above the national average for GCSE, and standardised measures display that pupils are making appropriate progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Results in 2016 are in line with previous years, with a fifth of pupils achieving at least ten A or A\* grades. Standardised measures of progress demonstrate that pupils on average consistently achieved above expected levels in all subjects between 2014 and 2016.
- 3.7 At A level, national data for 2013 to 2015 demonstrate that results have been above the national average, and standardised measures indicate that pupils in the sixth form are making good and in some years excellent progress relative to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Results in 2016 are in line with previous years, with a third of pupils achieving A or A\* grades in all of their subjects. Around a third of pupils undertake the EPQ project each year, with over half attaining A or A\* grades in 2015 and 2016.
- 3.8 The school's response to the recommendation from the previous inspection to use progress data more consistently has been highly successful and has contributed strongly to improving learning and raising standards, resulting in good progress and high levels of attainment. This is particularly significant in the sixth form where small class sizes, committed teaching and individualised learning enable pupils to reach their full potential. Pupils with SEND or EAL make progress that is at least as good as that of their peers, due to the school's effective support for pupils with particular learning needs which contributes strongly to their success. This high quality of teaching supports pupils' own commitment to their studies, demonstrating that school leaders have met the recommendation from the previous inspection to improve the quality of teaching through more consistent monitoring.

- 3.9 At the end of their time at the school, most pupils gain places on their choice of selective courses at a wide range of universities, art colleges, drama schools and apprenticeships. The overwhelming majority of parents' responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that the teaching enables their children to make good progress and to develop skills for the future.
- 3.10 Pupils of all abilities develop good and sometimes excellent numerical skills, and these are applied effectively across many areas of the curriculum. Examples were seen in science, food technology, business studies and geography, where a high degree of competence and accuracy was observed. In mathematics, A-level pupils of all abilities exhibit excellent algebraic processing skills. The school's curriculum caters extremely well for the wide range of abilities amongst pupils, allowing all to progress at an appropriate pace. In 2016, all pupils gained at least a C grade in mathematics at GCSE. The most able pupils achieve gold and silver awards in national mathematics competitions.
- 3.11 Pupils develop a high level of competence in information and communication technology (ICT) and its applications. Sixth form scientists confidently use a range of online resources for data transformations, simulations and statistical analysis, and pupils in textiles use design software effectively to create bespoke patterns for their work. Lower down the school, pupils in theology produced animated videos to describe the Pillars of Wisdom in Islam and their work on Confirmation demonstrated advanced presentation skills. These skills develop throughout the pupils' time at school due to school leaders ensuring that ICT is embedded in the curriculum and governors investing in high-quality, up-to-date and reliable technology.
- 3.12 Pupils are successful in a range of academic and sporting competitions. Netball teams are open to a wide range of abilities, and teams compete successfully at county level and in national tournaments. Swimming teams enjoy success against local schools and at county level, and several athletes reach the finals of regional biathlon competitions. Cross-country and athletics teams have seen many successes in inter-school competitions. Older pupils studying GCSE and A-level physical education use their leadership skills to help coach younger pupils and umpire matches, supporting the committed staff team and enabling younger pupils to improve their skills. The investment made by governors in high-quality sports facilities contributes strongly to pupils' sporting success.
- 3.13 Pupils are confident and able performers. Many enter national speech, drama and music examinations; the majority achieving merits or distinctions. School choirs reach a sufficiently high standard to tour and perform in a range of venues including churches and cathedrals such as St Stephen's in Vienna. The majority of pupils join The Duke of Edinburgh Award (DofE) scheme, many gain bronze and silver awards and some achieve gold. Young Enterprise groups have been category winners over several years at county finals. Science pupils achieved bronze and silver level awards in a national science competition and won a national chemistry competition in 2016.

#### **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils have an exceptionally well-developed moral code, and understand that they are responsible for their own behaviour and for the well-being of others. Inspection observations and discussions with pupils found that relationships between staff and pupils are positive and that behaviour in school is exemplary. Older pupils question the necessity for some rules such as those regarding mobile phone use or uniform regulations, but they accept them with grace and humour. Pupils genuinely care for each other, celebrate each other's successes, and are supportive and quick to help when someone is in any difficulty. Almost all parents in their questionnaire responses said that the school actively promotes good behaviour.
- 4.3 Pupils develop highly effective social skills. They work together in class and in activities to achieve success in their studies, extra-curricular activities, and a wide range of competitions and projects. In an English lesson, pupils with EAL were carefully involved with a difficult literary analysis, encouraged by their peer group leader and their teacher. Pupils of all ages are excellent team players and enjoy problem solving together, as observed in a drama activity where younger actor groups solved problems as they became confident in physical representation, trusting the guidance of older pupils. Pupils successfully reflect the school's strong ethos of respect and consideration, promoted through assemblies and modelled strongly by the school's leadership.
- 4.4 Pupils' commitment to their community is excellent and they display their care and concern for their friends, their school and the local community in practical ways. Older girls train as peer mentors to help resolve friendship issues, and sixth form 'big-sisters' befriend new pupils in Year 7 and help them settle into school. Pupils of all ages serve on their school council, and the head girl and prefect team-run school events such as Rag Week which raises large amounts of money for charity. Pupils perform concerts for local residents and some take up the option of visiting elderly people each week at a local residential home. At Christmas, pupils collect and fill a large number of shoeboxes with presents for disadvantaged children. Some pupils volunteer to help disabled adults on visits to Lourdes, others work in their holidays in schools linked to the Order in countries such as Albania or Spain. Pupils who are engaged in the volunteering element of the DofE scheme are involved in a wide range of work in school and the community, such as helping in local hospices, coaching sports teams and helping to run Brownie and Scout groups. The chaplaincy team is open to girls from a wide range of faiths, it raises money for charity and helps to run services and assemblies in school.
- 4.5 Pupils are extremely welcoming and respect all members of their school community whatever their situation or cultural or religious background. They value diversity and are considerate and sensitive to those with particular needs or whose backgrounds or traditions are different from their own. For example, pupils use electronic translators to help new members of the school from overseas feel at home. The school contributes to this open and understanding attitude through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme and the theology curriculum which provide pupils a good understanding of other faiths and cultures. The leadership team's emphasis on open access to clubs, societies and sports teams, and its careful provision for pupils with disabilities contributes strongly to the development of pupils' positive attitudes to their community.

- 4.6 Pupils develop high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They speak confidently to adults and can explain their point of view politely and clearly. Pupils are not unduly self-reflective but understand themselves well and are not afraid to try new things. They are exceptionally self-disciplined and conscientious about their work, often returning to a piece that they had not done well in order to improve it. Pupils are undeterred by past failures; a group of sixth form pupils felt they had not done well enough on an assessed essay, and re-drafted their work voluntarily which raised their grades significantly. By the time pupils leave the school they are well equipped to take their place in higher education, on apprenticeships or to meet the challenges of a 'gap' year. Pupils are mature and thoughtful when considering the next steps in their education. They understand that the choices they make will have implications for their future lives and careers, whether it be opting for subjects for GCSE or choosing an art college or university course. In interview, pupils said that they are very much involved in the decision-making process when preparing their university applications, and younger pupils appreciated the opportunity to choose their foreign language options.
- 4.7 Many pupils have a sensitive understanding of non-material aspects of life, often expressed in their creative and expressive arts. Examples were observed in excellent displays around the school such as the exquisitely rendered art display reflecting on life and death in war, and younger pupils gasped in wonder as they watched a physical theatre performance where dancers portrayed patriotic images using body shaping. A pupil-directed assembly on Saint Valentine and the nature of love and affection displayed excellent sensitivity and awareness, and younger pupils visibly appreciated the registration prayer chosen by one of their peers. Pupils in interview said that they take the opportunities provided by the school to reflect on life and their place in the world, especially in theology lessons and on 'Reflection Days' where they take part in a range of activities linked to a Christian value such as friendship or forgiveness, and can think about questions around the particular theme.
- 4.8 Pupils have an outstanding knowledge of how to stay safe and healthy. They understand the principles of healthy eating and the importance of regular exercise. Many appreciate and use the school sports facilities including the swimming pool and fitness suite. Pupils have a keen awareness of the need to strike a healthy balance between work and leisure. Older pupils are aware of the symptoms of mental illness and know that they can seek help through school if necessary. The school supports pupils by providing healthy meals, secure arrangements for safeguarding, first aid and health and safety, and by the provision of sports and recreational facilities. The PSHE programme contributes to the well-being of pupils by providing them information about a wide range of topics ranging from the dangers of drugs and smoking to how to recognise and avoid a rip tide. Almost all parents in their questionnaire responses agreed that the school creates an environment which successfully supports their children's personal development and actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.