

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### St Mary's School, Hampstead

Full Name of the School	<b>St Mary's School, Hampstead</b>
DCSF Number	<b>202/6084</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1006411</b>
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Email Address	<b>enquiries@stmh.co.uk</b>
Headmistress	<b>Miss Angela Rawlinson</b>
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mrs Marion Jeffrey</b>
Age Range	<b>2½ to 11</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> May 2008</b>

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A (1) (b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

### **Characteristics of the School**

- 1.1 St Mary's is a Roman Catholic school seeking to provide an education founded on a belief in Christ and the Catholic faith. It aims to inculcate spiritual and moral principles firmly rooted in daily life. It seeks to recognise the dignity and worth of each child, and aims to demand high standards from pupils, while encouraging them to strive for academic excellence as they progress in intellectual development. St Mary's also aims to encourage an active partnership between home, school, parish and the wider community.
- 1.2 St Mary's was founded in 1926, as a Roman Catholic school for girls. In 1992 parents formed an educational trust to take over the school, buying out the order of nuns to whom it belonged. The school maintains a close contact with the order's convent next door, including the use of some of its rooms when needed. St Mary's is housed in a range of buildings, all interconnected, at the heart of which is the original listed Victorian house, which retains many original features and the atmosphere of a family home. While many pupils live locally, the school's catchment area includes all of Hampstead, and much of North West London. The school has remained fairly constant in size since the last inspection in 2001, having 284 pupils aged 2½ to 11. Of these, 37 are boys, who normally leave at the age of 5. The girls leaving at the end of Year 6 mainly go on to London day schools, though some go to boarding schools further afield.
- 1.3 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds. Many of the parents are professional, and many have had no previous involvement in independent education. The school is non-selective up to Year 2. Pupils entering Year 3 take an assessment test though this is used more for monitoring than for selection. National standardised baseline testing in the Reception year indicates that pupils' average ability is above that of the national average, and therefore if pupils perform in line with their abilities they would be expected, in national tests, to achieve results above the national average for all maintained primary schools. The school has 37 pupils identified as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) and 58 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). Pupils come from a range of cultural backgrounds, including European, Asian and Far Eastern.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The quality of the educational experience offered by the school is good and fulfils the school's aims very well, particularly in its academic and extra-curricular provision. Since the last inspection, it has maintained a broad and well-balanced curriculum and developed as a reflective learning community. High academic standards are achieved alongside the development of strong personal qualities in each pupil. The Catholic ethos and emphasis on spiritual and moral principles are evident in the education that the pupils receive, and extend beyond the school to parents and the local community.
- 2.2 The education provided contributes very well to the linguistic, scientific, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative development of pupils and to the acquisition of skills in speaking, listening and literacy. A recent literacy audit and appropriate training have developed excellent teaching and learning strategies and a high level of skill in the pupils. The school achieves a good balance between more formal work such as comprehension and examination preparation and work that develops creative and imaginative skills. Pupils' skills in mathematics and information and communication technology (ICT), although good, are less well developed, and the school is actively looking at undertaking a numeracy audit, and providing training in this area. The teachers are currently taking the European Computer Driving Licence qualification. The National Curriculum is followed, with the application of literacy and numeracy strategies, and the addition of French, Latin as an extra-curricular activity, and, at the top end of the school, preparation for Common Entrance and London Consortium examinations. The school also makes very good provision for religious education as directed by the Diocese of Westminster, and for personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE). Some good examples of reflection and work on lateral thinking skills were valued by the pupils.
- 2.3 Foundation Stage pupils follow the Foundation Stage curriculum and the six areas of learning, and have many opportunities for independent learning. The Foundation Stage team make excellent use of the outdoor learning environment and the indoor spaces, offering a stimulating and exciting start to school life.
- 2.4 Pupils' experiences are very well enriched by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. These include 'drama queens', the 'green fingers' gardening club, pod casting, origami, cooking, Mandarin, ukulele club and illustration club, which are offered as exciting and unusual options in addition to an extensive variety of sports clubs. The gym squad enjoys particular success in national and international competitions. These extra-curricular activities which take place before and after school and during lunch times are well supported and are run by enthusiastic staff and some parent helpers. Other extra-curricular activities for specific age groups or invited pupils are provided, such as the art club, the non-verbal reasoning practice club and a science club offering able pupils particular challenges.
- 2.5 Participation in activities is carefully monitored and teachers seek out those who have not signed up and encourage them to do so. The curriculum is further enhanced by an extensive programme of field trips and visits. Very good links with the local community also extend the curricular horizons of pupils.
- 2.6 Pupils are very well prepared for the next stage of their education. In Years 1 and 2, boys who are moving on to their next school are given individual support when needed, to help them in acquiring the skills for transferring to the school of their choice. Preparation for girls' transfer to senior school begins in Year 4 with an initial meeting with parents, and

subsequent meetings are held throughout the next two years. Most pupils attain a place at their first choice of school and many are awarded academic or subject related scholarships.

- 2.7 Curriculum planning is excellent, both thorough and effective in promoting progression and continuity of learning across the school. Long-term planning covers Years 1 to 6 and indicates what topics will be taught in each term. Medium-term plans give clear guidance on the objectives and teaching strategies, while the short-term weekly or daily plans set out the learning objectives for each session as well as assessment opportunities and the resources that will be needed. The Foundation Stage adopts an inter-disciplinary topic approach to planning and ensures full coverage of all aspects of the Early Learning Goals and the National Curriculum.
- 2.8 Planning documents and curriculum provision allow for the needs of all pupils to be met, with good provision for pupils with LDD or EAL and also an increasing focus on the needs of the gifted and talented pupils. Liaison between the learning support teachers and the classroom and subject teachers is very good.
- 2.9 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

### **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.10 The level of knowledge, skills, understanding and application is good and in line with the school's aim of pursuing academic excellence. Standards have been maintained since the last inspection.
- 2.11 Evidence in workbooks, displays and lessons observed showed pupils to be well grounded in knowledge, skills and understanding in the subjects and activities provided; pupils can apply these skills and think and act critically and creatively. Subject knowledge and the recall of previously learnt work were noticeably good and this may be in some part attributable to the universal practice of learning objectives being stated and negotiated at the beginning of each lesson. In Reception, pupils had very good knowledge of how to compile a pictogram independently. They could complete a tally and say how many more they needed to make 20. In Year 3, pupils applied well-reiterated rules to French pronunciation with consistent success. They applied criteria intelligently to evaluate work in history. Teachers' questioning revealed lessons well understood, with grammar rules being recalled with some familiarity. Sophisticated thinking was seen at school council and girls understood the reasoning behind school rules.
- 2.12 Pupils' work shows strengths in English, mathematics and science, with those of all abilities making very good progress. No significant differences in achievement were discerned between different areas of the curriculum or different groups of pupils. Pupils' attainment in national tests at the age of eleven is high in relation to ability; results in all three core subjects over the last three years have been far above the national average for all maintained primary schools. Nationally standardised baseline testing indicates that pupils' progress is also high in relation to their ability.
- 2.13 The school celebrates many individual and team sporting achievements: girls have represented the school in athletics, swimming and gymnastics at regional, national and international level. In addition, recent events include the chapel choir singing in the Royal Albert Hall and the junior choir winning first place in the North London Festival of Music and Dance.

- 2.14 Pupils develop good skills and attitudes for work and study. Pupils of all ages listen attentively to their teachers and to each other. They speak in an articulate manner, contributing ideas to class discussions. They read and write effectively and some excellent creative writing was seen.
- 2.15 Pupils apply mathematical skills and concepts in structured lessons and were able to use graphs in other curriculum areas, notably in science, though instances where such skills were incorporated in other subjects were rare.
- 2.16 Pupils made creative use of technology in music and computer programs were well used to promote literacy and numeracy in learning support lessons, but opportunities to enrich learning through ICT were often limited, and software was not used to enhance the impact of some of the many vibrant and colourful displays of work around the school.
- 2.17 At all stages of learning pupils are encouraged to reason and argue cogently. In one Year 5 lesson, a pupil was clearly thinking independently and made insightful comments about the interrelationships between two languages. In a Year 4 science lesson, pupils were asked to assess the environmental impact of hypothetical changes to the school grounds. Further opportunities for reasoning and initiative are afforded by extra-curricular activities, such as the newly launched school bank, an active ecology group, the school council, who had to decide on how to spend surplus funds, and the social entrepreneur programme.
- 2.18 Many pupils particularly enjoy working collaboratively, in role-play activities for example, and opportunities to work independently, though fewer, are used well by the pupils where offered. Lessons usually start promptly, pupils settle quickly to task and little time is wasted. Pupils persevere well and very little incomplete work was seen in books. Most pupils demonstrated widespread enjoyment of work and activities both inside and outside the classroom.

### **Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils**

- 2.19 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and development of the pupils are excellent. The school has continued to build on the very good practice identified in the last report, and has benefitted from strong leadership and very committed teaching. Thus the school is very successful in meeting its aims to provide a happy and caring environment, to recognise the dignity and worth of each child, and to value the contribution of the pupils within the school community.
- 2.20 The detailed spiritual, moral, social and cultural policy clearly defines each of its four elements and outlines a wide range of opportunities which can be presented to pupils to develop these elements. Evidence of spiritual, moral, social and cultural development can be seen in many places, including in lessons, in assemblies, at break times and in displays around the school.
- 2.21 Pupils show a well-developed spiritual awareness in their personal beliefs and faith, and learn to link their beliefs to everyday life. Some prepare for their first communion in school and pupils of all faiths join in collective acts of worship. Pupils perform music in assemblies to enhance the spiritual aspects of the occasion, as in one assembly neatly linking the efforts and achievements of Christopher Columbus to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. On Fridays all pupils are given a quiet time for reflection. Pupils learn to value themselves and each other, to which end they celebrate success each week in the 'good work' assembly. Their evaluation of each other's work, which is integral to the teaching approaches the school uses, teaches confidence and self-esteem, a goal summarised by the school's exhortation to pupils to "do your best to be your best".

- 2.22 Pupils develop very well morally and show a high moral awareness, demonstrating from the youngest to the oldest a strong sense of right and wrong. All know about the school's aims encapsulated in the "St Mary's Way", publicised all over the school and reinforced by staff who are firmly committed to "catching the pupils getting it right" and telling them so when they do, as a very positive reinforcement of right behaviour. Pupils of all ages take part in ethical discussions and make decisions about moral and ethical issues, such as Sunday trading and purchase of fair trade products.
- 2.23 Social development and awareness are excellent, pupils being given many opportunities to develop socially, to accept responsibility and to take initiative. Young pupils may be chosen as leader for the day, with responsibility for things such as taking the register to the office. Older pupils may be elected by their peers to the school council, which recently held constructive discussion on wide-ranging topics including the content of a DVD to be made showing the school day, and the need to re-do some of the displays around school. The 'eco-council' involves pupils in working towards becoming an 'eco-school'. Year 6 pupils have various responsibilities with younger children, including support with reading, assisting those in Year 2 in gym club and helping new pupils in Year 3 settle into the school. In all these areas pupils receive great support from the staff in their social development. This is augmented by support from parents, not least through the excellent home-school work book used in the school's Sex and Relationships programme of study. Pupils develop a good understanding of the public institutions in England, demonstrated by those in Year 4 who could talk confidently about the National Health Service, the fire service and the judicial system. Reception pupils knew that Queen Elizabeth is the Head of State. Pupil 'eco-councillors' work closely with the local authority on their eco-school project, and are thus beginning to learn something of the way in which local councils operate.
- 2.24 Pupils develop very well culturally and show a strong awareness, acquiring an appreciation of their own and others' cultures. In the Nursery, festivals such as Hanukkah and Diwali are explored, while during the inspection pupils made exotic kebabs for each other after reading a traditional African tale written in both English and Somali. Pupils are able to join the Mandarin club, and multi-cultural evenings are arranged for parents and children to share together. Visits to theatres and art exhibitions, and performance of a wide range of music from various cultural traditions, enable pupils to gain further cultural insights into the world around them. While much of the religious education is based on the Roman Catholic faith there are modules within it on the other major world faiths, giving pupils an understanding that promotes respect for the beliefs and traditions of a diverse world.
- 2.25 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

## **The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)**

- 2.26 The quality of teaching is good and has improved since the last inspection. No lesson was unsatisfactory, most were good and many were excellent, enabling pupils of all abilities to acquire new knowledge, make progress according to their ability, increase their understanding and develop their skills. Pupils for whom English is an additional language are sensitively integrated into lessons and participate well, for example taking a role in assembly. Able pupils are given challenges encouraging them to pursue interests and develop intellectually. Pupils with LDD are well supported in one-to-one lessons or in small group work, are assessed, and are consulted about their individual education plans, as well as parents and teachers.
- 2.27 Teachers sometimes encourage pupils to think for themselves, setting tasks and challenges which require shaping, development and problem-solving, rather than simply completion or practising a known format. This was seen in some individual project work in several age groups, while Year 2 pupils were asked to work out how to respond to unkindness; and Year 5 worked to design an animal model with moving parts. Pupils' work becomes increasingly teacher-directed through Years 1 to 6, though more independent work is sometimes encouraged as part of the wide range of learning opportunities, particularly in history. In the best lessons, pupils were led towards discovery, as, for example, in science where the teaching "makes you learn but you don't realise it because you're having fun". However, the approach across the school is not consistent and further opportunities to foster independent enquiry and research are too few. Instances of independent note-taking are infrequent, although some work for older pupils is set over a sufficiently longer period of time to allow for a more creative and individual approach. A sharper focus on the intellectual development of the pupils and the provision of more opportunities for independent learning are needed to enhance the substantial work that the curriculum teams have done to improve teaching and learning in Years 1 to 6.
- 2.28 Teaching is well planned, resulting in a wide range of activities that engage and excite pupils without any of the over-reliance on worksheets noted in the last inspection report. At the Foundation Stage planning is a regular team effort, with observations made during previous sessions used to steer activities. Throughout the school the range of activities nurtures pupils' enthusiasm in their work, and different ways of reinforcing or extending learning are devised; for example, pupils make models, give presentations and act out playlets. Excellent planning was seen in physical education (PE), where teaching methods and time management were particularly effective.
- 2.29 Teachers know their pupils well and lessons are planned to take into account particular strengths, needs and prior attainment. Pupils identified as being very able are encouraged to participate in enrichment activities to deepen their learning. In interviews, some pupils not in the very able group said they felt they could sometimes do more than was asked of them.
- 2.30 Teaching demonstrates appropriate knowledge and understanding of the subject matter being taught. In French, teaching is largely in the target language; in science, excellent use is made of scientific terminology; and excellent use of technology in music lessons fuels pupils' passion for this area of the curriculum.
- 2.31 Teaching is well supported by an adequate quality, quantity and range of resources. The method for acquiring these resources is straightforward and teachers feel well supported. Excellent use is made of the fairly limited space for PE, a department showing a good range of resources and effective use of equipment, so that every pupil can participate. In other subjects, however, the shared use of computers hampered efficient use of time and the wider integration of technology into some lessons.

- 2.32 Assessment of pupils' work is regular and thorough. At the Foundation Stage, teachers keep observation books and folders for ongoing assessment. In Years 1 and 2, daily observations, as well as weekly assessments such as spelling tests and reading records, are supplemented by techniques devised to engage pupils in their own learning. By Year 3, pupils are becoming more adept at this type of assessment: the use of 'traffic lights' as well as the 'two stars and a wish' system is shifting the emphasis towards greater pupil involvement in their learning and performance. Pupils write their initials on comments written by teachers marking their work, to acknowledge points for improvement. These comments provide a basis for pupil targets, further strengthening the relationship between assessment and learning.
- 2.33 Interesting, well-paced teaching encourages pupils to behave responsibly and teachers throughout the school have high expectations of behaviour. The emphasis is clearly on managing behaviour positively, with liberal praise for the exemplary behaviour so often witnessed during the inspection week.
- 2.34 The school harnesses a range of standardised tests and performance indicators, and this data is analysed and used to assist planning. A matrix of target setting at pupil, teacher and whole-school levels keeps a robust focus on the quality of teaching and learning, though some of the target setting and reporting to parents lacked specificity. This work is being further augmented as the scheme of self-assessment begins to support an ethos of responsible, reflective and enthusiastic learning in the school.
- 2.35 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

### **3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils**

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care is excellent, and that of welfare, health and safety is good. This is an improvement on the overall good provision noted in the last inspection. Staff take excellent care of the pupils, child protection measures are in place, risk assessments have been completed, and health and safety statutory obligations are given due weight throughout the school.
- 3.2 Staff provide excellent and effective support and guidance for all pupils; they develop positive relationships with their pupils, through which they get to know them well, achieving a situation of mutual respect. The PSHCE programme is extensive, and delivered throughout the school by form teachers who have a good understanding of their pupils. Pupils say that they feel able to talk to staff about any problems they may have and that, when help is needed, staff offer good advice and strategies for resolving problems. The pastoral guidance and support given to pupils are clearly rooted in Christian principles, with written and pictorial reminders of the importance of kindness, truthfulness, forgiveness, honesty and sharing found in all classrooms. Pastoral arrangements ensure that any concerns staff may have about pupils can be raised at the daily morning briefing, more serious issues can be discussed at the weekly meeting of the senior management team and reference can be made at any time to the school's comprehensive set of policies. Thus the school's arrangements for pastoral care, overseen by the deputy head, are both effective and comprehensive.
- 3.3 The school has developed an ethos of positive encouragement, which in turn has led to excellent relationships, both between staff and pupils, and among the pupils themselves. Staff and pupils work with each other in a variety of ways, for example playing together in a break time ukulele group. The excellent behaviour of pupils around the school, and their politeness when addressing their teachers or visitors, are quickly apparent. When pupils do get something wrong they are gently reminded of the correct behaviour, often attached to praise for something else. Thus sanctions are only very rarely needed. The school has a comprehensive anti-bullying policy, although pupils report that bullying rarely takes place, and if it does it is usually the result of a misunderstanding between pupils which can be quickly resolved. Staff are fully aware of the procedures to follow if bullying is suspected or reported, although the close supervision of pupils by staff both during lessons and play allows for continual reinforcement of good behaviour, thus largely diminishing the opportunity for inappropriate behaviour of any kind.
- 3.4 Child protection measures are fully in place. The headmistress is the appointed child protection officer, and she has received the training appropriate for this role. All permanent staff, governors, parent helpers, overseas and supply staff have been checked by the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). Safe recruitment measures are in place, and annual training of staff is undertaken, as outlined in the school's comprehensive child protection policy. The governors have appointed their chairman to have particular oversight of child protection issues.
- 3.5 The bursar has made a thorough risk assessment of the whole building, including a detailed fire risk assessment. Excellent housekeeping, notably in the complete lack of litter and punctilious care of hazardous cleaning materials, was noted during the inspection, and this, combined with pupils' very orderly movement around the school, undoubtedly helps to minimize risk.

- 3.6 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective. The school has a health and safety committee, consisting of the headmistress, the bursar, the premises manager, the chairman of governors and two other governors, which usually meets twice a term. The committee has produced very clear guidance on the production of risk assessments and a good policy for the safe conduct of off-site visits. The school has a policy on first aid and a staff folder for quick reference regarding specific medical conditions. Staff receive regular training on the use of emergency adrenaline pens, first aid boxes are readily available, and sick pupils can be accommodated in the sick room, under the eye of the school secretary. Secure arrangements are in place for pupils waiting to be collected at the end of the day. School attendance and admission registers are completed satisfactorily.
- 3.7 The quality of the catering, with the provision of healthy eating options, is good. Some of the pupils in their pre-inspection questionnaires expressed dissatisfaction with the food. Inspectors, however, saw no reason to support this view, regarding the food as of high quality, good variety, and very attractive presentation.
- 3.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.9 The quality of links with parents and the community described as good and effective in the last inspection report is now excellent. This very strong element of the school's provision not only enhances the pupils' broad educational experience but has also given the school a high profile in the local community.
- 3.10 Over four-fifths of parents filled in the parental pre-inspection questionnaires, and indicated very high levels of satisfaction with all aspects of school life, a view shared by the large number of pupils who were interviewed during the inspection. Parents and pupils appeared to be overwhelmingly happy with their school. Teaching staff were described by parents as being friendly, approachable, flexible, enthusiastic and energetic.
- 3.11 Parents are invited to two parents' evenings a year, with the option for additional meetings if needed. The school sends home two reports a year. A parent described a Foundation Stage report as being very impressive, with a really good level of detail. Reports for older pupils are also detailed in most subject areas and, like the Foundation Stage reports, show an excellent understanding of individual pupils, but lack some clarity in expressing targets and the next steps to develop pupils' skills.
- 3.12 An excellent range of information is provided for parents, by letter, by fortnightly emailed newsletters, by direct contact with the teachers, by well-placed notice boards, by excellent Year Books and by the school website. Welcome booklets for "Starting Nursery" and "Starting Reception" are useful, and a personalised welcome is given to each family in their welcome booklet. Parent information booklets give guidance for the 70 or more parents (all CRB checked) who regularly help in school with reading, PE and activities, or with school trips. Peripatetic music teachers communicate via a "practice book" that is sent home, as well as by phone and email. Regular contact takes place with the learning support department and messages are put into the pupils' spelling books.
- 3.13 Parents are welcomed into school at all times, and in the Foundation Stage they are invited to spend time in the classroom in the mornings and have access to information about the curriculum and planning. They are appreciative of the flexible hours in the Nursery. A flourishing Parent Teachers' Association (PTA) with an active committee organises many fund-raising events to provide resources for the school and also to make generous

contributions to charities. In addition, the PTA arranges many social events that are well attended. Numerous opportunities are made for parents to be involved in their children's environment, such as "Bring your parents to school day" to see how the school works, or "Tasting Days" when parents can see some of the food prepared for the school lunches. Parents also get involved in many projects that the pupils are working on, for example helping with research for their Year 5 local history project. They are invited to attend special events such as the Year 5 Arts Evening, sharing in a celebration of the pupils' work on Kandinsky and making shapes through art, movement and dance. Parents are involved in the Nursery Action Group and in the School Travel Action Group, which won an award for their work in trying to reduce the number of car journeys to and from school. A new parent group for bible studies has evolved out of the meetings held with the school chaplain for parents of first holy communicants.

- 3.14 The school has a comprehensive complaints procedure and reference is made to this in the school prospectus. Complaints have been dealt with very effectively through discussion with a member of staff or the headmistress and a more formal procedure has never had to be implemented.
- 3.15 The school has excellent and varied links with the local and wider communities. At every stage of the school the pupils demonstrate concern for others less fortunate than themselves, and through the 'eco-council', a concern for their environment. Strong links exist with the two Catholic parishes that many pupils belong to and also with the nearby convent. A history of the school is currently being written with help from the sisters. The school has set up a bank on site, with help from a local bank, for pupils to visit as part of their work to learn about public institutions. Links have been developed with a local care home where the pupils take their harvest festival gifts and go to entertain the residents with their singing. Links with the local community involve regular visits from the school chaplain to celebrate weekly mass and to take classes. Sisters from the adjacent convent attend mass and act as prayer partners for first communicants. The social entrepreneurs group invests in an activity of their choice to raise further money for the Hope HIV charity. Pupils also support a local charity for people with disabilities, as well as a charity overseas, the Ladybrand Hospice. The children in the hospice make rosary beads that are then sold by St Mary's pupils and the money is sent back to the hospice. The pupils are part of a very giving and caring school community.
- 3.16 Excellent links with other schools are reinforced by sports fixtures and other events, and the headmistress maintains very good links with senior schools to enable her to give best advice to parents on their choice of school. Specialist teachers from St Mary's visit the local senior schools to share information and good practice.
- 3.17 The school facilitates many events for past pupils and invites pupils who have recently left to social evenings such as meals and bowling, and these are very well attended.
- 3.18 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 St Mary's governors provide excellent direction, enabling the school to fulfil its aims of: providing an education founded on a belief in Christ and the Catholic faith; presenting spiritual and moral principles rooted in daily life; striving for academic excellence and intellectual development; recognising the dignity and worth of each pupil. Many parents, in their replies to the questionnaire sent out before the inspection, expressed very strong support for the school in its achievement of these principles, an achievement which demonstrates that the school has maintained the high standards of governance described in the last report.
- 4.2 The structure and management arrangements of the governors are clearly defined: the school is a charitable trust with six trustees and eleven governors, some serving in both capacities. The sub-committees for finance and general purposes, education and staffing, and health and safety meet not less than once a term; two committees, for nominations and marketing, meet whenever the need arises. The comprehensive governors' handbook provides evidence of the well-organised and efficient nature of the governing body, which exercises effective oversight of the school, including health and safety matters and an annual review of the way in which child protection policies operate.
- 4.3 Governors are aware of their financial, educational and legal responsibilities, and work closely with the school to ensure that strategic planning is relevant to its needs, and that it is appropriately resourced. The school development plan is an excellent working document, in line with the school's aims, fully costed, with appropriate attention to the school's priorities, and with clear indications of the criteria by which success in each area should be judged.
- 4.4 Governors regularly attend school functions, and also organise gatherings whereby they can meet the staff socially. Several teachers commented that they knew many of the governors quite well, and found them approachable. The fact that several governors are, or have been, members of the school's parent body contributes to their being well informed about the school's functions and activities. This knowledge is well demonstrated in the annual report governors present to the parents. The regular reports to them about different areas of the curriculum also keep governors fully in touch with the educational developments taking place, and well placed to support, advise and challenge staff when appropriate.

### **The Quality of Leadership and Management**

- 4.5 Leadership and management at St Mary's are outstanding and have grown in strength since the last inspection. The headmistress, appointed since the last inspection, has adopted a consensual approach to the introduction of policies and structures which enable the school to be accountable in all areas of its activities. All policies are now produced after full staff and governor participation, are reviewed regularly, and are readily available in the staff handbook and on line.
- 4.6 The headmistress has a very clear and analytical vision for the school, underwritten at all times by her guiding principle of doing what is best for the pupils. She has generated warm support among the staff for the structures she has introduced, and has shown firm but sensitive leadership in effecting change. She now feels that a period of consolidation for all these innovations is needed to bed them fully into the fabric of the school.

- 4.7 Management responsibilities are well defined, staff have accepted new responsibilities, and new posts, such as those within curriculum teams, provide good opportunities for professional development. The headmistress and senior management adopt an open policy wherever possible, and staff have commented that they thus feel involved in the decision making process: for example all staff have the opportunity to contribute to the school's development plan.
- 4.8 Monitoring of teaching and learning takes place regularly, and through both the curriculum meetings and through the appraisal scheme, opportunities are often taken to share best practice in both teaching and learning. Measures to attract and retain good teachers are in place, and the school's environment is a happy one in which to work, a view expressed by various members of staff. Provision for in-service training is generous, and appreciated by staff, who avail themselves of it to the full. The school subscribes to the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers. The school has good arrangements in place for checking the suitability of permanent staff, supply staff and governors.
- 4.9 Resources for learning are good, effectively used and easily accessible. The bursar ensures that finance is in place to provide all reasonable resources, and controls expenditure in a very fair manner. The provision of interactive white boards is good, but in the computer room the need for most pupils to share computers means that they are effectively working for far less than the allotted lesson time; this is a factor in limiting the progress they are able to make.
- 4.10 The administrative and other support staff, including nursery nurses, provide a high quality service to the school.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.12 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 St Mary's School has many strong features and is outstanding in some areas, notably in spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils, in the quality of pastoral care, in the school's links with parents and the community, in the quality of its governance, and in its management and leadership. The quality achieved in all other major aspects of the school is good. The school successfully meets its aims and the needs of its pupils. Pupils' attainment is good in relation to their ability, and the high standard of examination results has been maintained in recent years. Thus the school has maintained, and in some areas increased, the high standards described in the previous report. Pupils are given a good educational experience in activities, including visits, in cross-curricular links and in the quality of very much of the teaching. The school's Roman Catholic foundation underlies all its activities and all pupils are encouraged to develop notions of service to others, and respect for all people and for the planet. As a result, pupils develop well-rounded personalities and are beginning to acquire independent habits of learning, though the school is aware that this is still an area for development, particularly in mathematics and ICT. Some pupils demonstrated a good level of thinking skills, and the school is starting to plan measures to promote pupils' greater intellectual development.
- 5.2 The school has introduced various management structures since the report of the last inspection in 2001, and has met all its recommendations. The Ofsted Nursery report of 2004 indicated that the Foundation Stage had no serious weaknesses. Its one recommendation has been addressed, and the very high standard of the Foundation Stage experience has been maintained.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major weaknesses, but in order to progress still further it should:
1. improve pupils' independent learning and the development of their intellectual skills;
  2. take steps to ensure that all areas of mathematics and ICT benefit from the best practice in those subjects.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## **6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 12th to 15th May 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### **List of Inspectors**

Mrs Jenny McCallum	Reporting Inspector
Mr David Goodwin	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mrs Sue Harper	Head of Pre-Prep, IAPS school
Mrs Teresa Rogers	Head, SHMIS school
Mrs Tessa Smith	Head, GSA school