



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ST JOHN'S PRIORY SCHOOL

FEBRUARY 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	St John's Priory School			
DfE number	931/6009			
Address	St John's Priory School St John's Road Banbury Oxfordshire OX16 5HX			
Telephone number	01295 259607			
Email address	office@stjohnspriory.co.uk			
Headmistress	Mrs Tracey Wilson			
Proprietor	Mr Giorgio Mystkowski and Mr Karl Durham			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	94			
	Boys	57	Girls	37
	EYFS	28	Juniors	66
Inspection dates	8 to 9 February 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 and with the proprietors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with 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 Sara Wiggins	Reporting inspector
Mr Alexander McCullough	Team inspector (Headmaster, ISA school)
Mrs Evelyn Gibbs	Team inspector (Head, IAPS, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 St John's Priory School is an independent day school for boys and girls aged between three and eleven years. Founded in 1847, the school is a limited company and governance is provided by the two proprietors who are also the directors of the company and took on these roles in 2011. They are assisted in the governance of the school by an educational advisor.
- 1.2 The school occupies a grade 2 listed building which was once a priory, with the addition of a separate building which houses the art studio. The head teacher has been in post since September 2014.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to create an environment in which children feel safe, confident and cared for and have freedom to enjoy learning. It is committed to providing an education of the highest quality. Children are challenged and encouraged to achieve their potential in all areas within an engaging, broad and rich curriculum that meets all learning styles and preferences. The school aspires to encourage the development of tolerance, understanding and respect for others and to ensure that the children are well prepared for their next stage of learning.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds with most coming from Banbury and the surrounding villages. Evidence supplied by the school indicates that the ability of the pupils is above the national average. Fourteen pupils have been identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia and autistic spectrum disorder. One pupil has English as an additional language (EAL) and receives support. Data used by the school have identified several pupils as the being the most able in the schools' population and the curriculum is modified for them and for other pupils because of their talents in a range of sporting, artistic and musical disciplines.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 This is the school's first inspection by ISI. The previous inspection of the school was conducted by Ofsted.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- The development of pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills is excellent.
- Pupils' communication skills throughout the school are high and enable them to develop high levels of study skills.
- Pupils' highly positive attitudes to learning, from the EYFS upwards, and their willingness to work collaboratively are strengths.
- Pupils do not always use their excellent writing skills across areas of the curriculum where overly prescriptive teaching methods are employed.

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

- Pupils' contribution to others, the school and the community is excellent
- Pupils are strongly socially aware and work willingly together to solve problems and achieve common goals.
- Pupils have high levels of self-knowledge, self-esteem and resilience, including an understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance, so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure that pupils' excellent writing skills are not limited by an over reliance on worksheets.
- Ensure that marking consistently identifies appropriate areas of progress and that end-of-unit targets are evaluated by pupils in line with adopted school practice.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils, including those in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), achieve highly, in accordance with the school's aim to provide an education of the highest quality in which children are challenged and encouraged to achieve their potential in all areas. There is an engaging, broad and rich curriculum that meets all learning styles and preferences. In the parents and pupils' pre-inspection questionnaires, the overwhelming majority were supportive of every aspect of the school.
- 3.3 The development of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding is excellent. The innovative, imaginative curriculum and well planned teaching make significant contributions to the pupils' success and to strong development of pupils' higher order thinking skills. Pupils' engagement with their studies is assured through the memorable experience which starts each half term topic. During the innovation week, their skills are strongly developed in each topic studied, where they take a problem and develop a solution to it in any way of their choice. For example, pupils are successfully challenged to create an item that will hold water or design an animal to survive in a chosen climate. Pupils' skills are further enhanced by a plethora of themed days, themed weeks, and a varied programme of activities during and after school. In discussions, pupils stated that the curriculum allowed them to learn facts about a broad range of topics and enabled them to apply this knowledge in a variety of ways, for example, through making artistic models, creating electronic presentations and class performances. The youngest children made excellent progress as they created their own monsters using a variety of 2D shapes and chose colours for a particular purpose. Older pupils learning about the 'Blue Abyss' learnt about the oceans around the world, sea creatures and the depths at which they lived. Pupils' artistic abilities are strongly enhanced through opportunities that enable them to be creative, using a variety of different materials in imaginative ways. Systematic planning and assessment, the excellent oversight of the senior leadership team and the support of proprietors have enabled a highly cohesive approach to the development of knowledge and skills across the curriculum.
- 3.4 The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence shows pupils' attainment to be high in relation to national age-related expectations. This is demonstrated by the proportion of scholarships and awards that pupils win to selective senior schools; their performance in lessons; subject interviews; written work and their response to the demanding nature of the curriculum, which requires them to take responsibility for their learning. The pupils show at least good progress and often rapid progress in relation to their starting points. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL) and those who are identified by the school as being more able and talented, progress equally well. All pupils benefit strongly from the innovative curriculum which provides a rigorous age- and stage-related framework that enables teachers to identify individual pupils' learning needs. Pupils with SEND benefit greatly from the specialist teaching provided and the support of teachers and teaching assistants in their class lessons. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, the majority of parents concluded that their child's educational needs are met effectively by the school and that teaching enables good progress and develops skills for the future.
- 3.5 Pupils' achieve success in academic, sport, performing and other arts as a result of careful planning and enthusiastic teaching. An all-inclusive approach ensures that all pupils take part in a variety of sporting, dramatic and musical activities. Most take individual instrumental lessons, including drumming, piano and flute, and they achieve considerable success in their

music examinations and in local competitions. Given the relatively small size of the school, pupils have accomplished some notable achievements, including a significant number of awards in local and regional sporting, music, drama and art competitions, and national success in swimming.

- 3.6 Pupils have excellent ICT and numeracy skills within a curriculum that strongly supports collaborative and independent learning. Pupils skilfully used their coding skills to create programmes showing a submarine at the bottom of the ocean and then made it rise to the surface to enable oxygen to be taken on board. Constructive leadership promotes the sharing of specialist subject knowledge across the school and enables pupils to research confidently, develop their ideas and make full use of technology in the curriculum. Pupils develop their competence in numeracy through both the careful, well planned approach to the development of specific skills and through an imaginative approach to learning. This has resulted in the youngest children using their bodies to create two dimensional shapes, and the older children applying these skills in problem solving and investigative work. The cross-curricular nature of the curriculum lends itself particularly well to applying skills and knowledge learned in one subject to another.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate highly positive attitudes to their learning; they are happy and enjoy school life. Pupils have the ability to work independently as well as being willing and able to work collaboratively as team members. They settle to tasks quickly and are keen to achieve and produce a high volume of work. This is due to the excellent relationships that exist throughout the school and the pupils own approach to self-improvement. Children in the EYFS willingly contribute their own ideas in lessons. They imaginatively suggested adding a clown fish to their mimed story, which enabled a variety of different actions to be added to their musical adventure. Pupils use their excellent study skills to draw upon a wide range of sources and hypothesise. As a result, they are reflective about their learning, for example when considering the ocean they reflected on sustainability and developed their appreciation of the natural world. They ask questions and seek clarification in lessons. Pupils confidently use their prior learning to develop their knowledge, as they review work to understand how to improve it in the future. They concentrate very well even when faced with challenging tasks.
- 3.8 Pupils' competence in speaking, listening, reading and writing is excellent and strongly supported through engaging, well planned teaching which ensures activities that motivate and inspire. Pupils' mature speaking skills start in the EYFS where children very competently enacted the story of the gingerbread man to the school and followed with greeting their parents for a morning tea event when they carefully explained their work to parents, including the making of gingerbread biscuits, the use of their role-play area and its application to other areas of learning. The safe family community environment enables pupils to explain and discuss their learning in class with their teachers and peers. They listen to each other and their teachers, remain focused, ask pertinent questions freely in discussion and can clarify and explain, for example, giving answers to what 'overfishing' means and offering sensible solutions to the issues presented.
- 3.9 Pupils enjoy the opportunities that are provided to learn other languages through their lessons and this further develops their high levels of competence in communication. Their fluent writing skills allow them to develop their knowledge and further their skills across a range of subjects. However, on occasions, there is over reliance on worksheets which limits their ability to express their own ideas. Fluency in handwriting, sentence construction, spelling, grammar and punctuation enables them to write with confidence including when taking notes following online research. They are confident using technical vocabulary. Pupils' strong reading skills are

enhanced through themed weeks such as the national story telling week, during which they visited their local library and older pupils shared stories with younger children.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils' contribution to others, the school and the community is excellent. This strongly supports the school's aim which aspires to encourage the development of tolerance, understanding and respect for others and to ensure that the children are well prepared for their next stage of learning. Pupils are highly engaged with their local community. For example, they visit historic houses for history projects; attend writing workshops; gardening and planting sessions; sing at nursing homes and participate in Remembrance Day proceedings in the town. Pupils develop further their understanding of their local community as they raise money for those less fortunate than themselves in support of local charities.
- 4.3 Pupils are strongly socially aware, aided through the family ethos within the school. In lessons, they consider the importance of families, be they their home or their school family, and talk about the support families can provide. Pupils are strongly aware of the values held within their school and have high levels of emotional maturity. They appreciate other cultures and show sensitivity for those from different backgrounds. This is supported by both the pupil and parent responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire. The overwhelming majority of responses confirmed that the school encourages respect for other people. They understand school rules and sanctions and enjoy the many opportunities provided, from the earliest ages, to take on positions of responsibility. They accept responsibility for their own behaviour and show tolerance and understanding towards others who may find this more difficult. Their understanding is strongly reinforced through the well-conceived PSHEE curriculum, which has a noticeable impact on pupils' ability to work effectively with others and to solve problems and achieve common goals. They work together in lessons as they undertake scientific investigations or solve numeracy problems. They demonstrate their learning to each other, with older year groups performing plays to younger pupils. Themed days enable them to work across the age groups and provide support for each other. Pupils demonstrate a willingness to listen and respond and guide each other to the right question. For example, they use opportunities for peer assessment to appraise techniques, and to provide helpful advice and support for the work undertaken. These skills are advanced as teachers consistently reinforce pupils' understanding of key ideas through a series of mini plenaries and individual clarification.
- 4.4 Pupils develop extremely high levels of self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline and resilience, including an understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance, so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. Throughout the school, pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem is greatly enhanced by the excellent relationships with their peers and their teachers. They are confident and quietly assured in lessons and in discussions with adults. This successfully supports the school's aim to create an environment in which children feel safe, confident and cared for and have freedom to enjoy learning. Pupils are proud of their own and of the achievement of others. Pupils commented on how pleased they were that others had gained in confidence and were now able to present their projects to the class through the strong culture of praise and encouragement. In discussions and during lessons pupils demonstrated that they are acquiring self-help skills and strategies for working out things for themselves. They confidently use the 'self-help desks' within the classroom which, for example, enable them to check a thesaurus, or consult explanatory notes on a variety of areas, such as instructions on correct use of punctuation. The pupils' self-knowledge is excellent and enabled by the variety of support systems developed by staff. Pupils know where to go if they should need quiet reflection time by themselves.

- 4.5 Pupils are adept at describing themselves, their personality traits, abilities and talents. They are very aware and accepting of their strengths and weaknesses and those of their peers. Thus, they have a well-developed understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance. They value the success criteria and targets set at the beginning of each unit of work. However, this is not consistently used across all year groups or all subjects and thus limits progress. Pupils strongly understand that the decisions they make are important determinants of their own success and well-being. They recognise the importance of making the right decisions in terms of behaviour, never to give up and to ask sensible questions. Younger children chose which activities to select to enhance their learning and older pupils take part in an additional curricular programme, designed to enhance their skills in a variety of areas including physical challenge, economic understanding, artistic endeavour and community contribution. This enables pupils to develop their learning and to discover unknown potential. They design their own projects and deliver them in a variety of ways, for example planning and creating opportunities to raise money for local charities.
- 4.6 Pupils know how to stay safe and understand how to be physically and mentally healthy, particularly in terms of diet, exercise and a balanced lifestyle. This is strongly encouraged through their active involvement in their curriculum. The school council recently requested a 'keep fit February' and so mornings began with a 'wake up and shake up' activity on the playground. One year group has been considering the importance of living long and staying strong whilst the whole school is aware of the importance of eating nutritious healthy food. They eat fruit out of choice and have a strong understanding of food groups and their contribution towards their health. Pupils understand the importance of road safety and take school road safety licences to encourage them to keep themselves safe and not always rely on the adults who care for them. They are supported in their understanding of their health as they visit an optician, listen to speakers such as doctors and dentists and take part in a 'wellbeing' week. Older pupils develop an understanding of injury prevention as they attend an education programme at their local hospital. The regular visits to a local farm, woodland tours and trips away from home strongly encourage pupils to take controlled risks, as for example when they make dens, help to light fires and then use the heat to roast marshmallows. These visits further support their excellent appreciation of the non-material aspects of life and develop their spiritual understanding. In their questionnaire responses, the clear majority of parents agreed that the school promotes an environment which successfully supports their child's personal development. Inspection evidence firmly supports this view.