

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Saint Martin's School**

Full Name of the School	<b>Saint Martin's School</b>
DCSF Number	<b>334/6002</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>528967</b>
Address	<b>Malvern Hall, Brueton Avenue, Solihull, West Midlands B91 3EN.</b>
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Email Address	<b>mail@saintmartins-school.com</b>
Headmistress	<b>Mrs Jane Carwithen</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr Mark Hope-Urwin</b>
Age Range	<b>2¾ to 18</b>
Gender	<b>Girls</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March 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 Saint Martin's School provides education for day girls between the ages of two and three-quarters and eighteen. It was founded in 1941 in the centre of Solihull and moved to its present site on the edge of the town in 1989. The preparatory, junior and senior schools are closely grouped on the same campus. The senior school is based in the listed, historic Malvern Hall and the school is surrounded by extensive grounds and playing fields.
- 1.2 The last inspection took place in 2002. Currently 508 girls attend of whom 115, from the Nursery to Year 3, are in the preparatory school (Alice House); 114 are in Years 4 to 6 in the junior school and a further 279 are in the senior school. In total, 47 girls study in the sixth form.
- 1.3 The school's stated mission is to provide education of the highest quality in a happy, supportive, stimulating and well-disciplined environment where girls succeed. Specific aims to achieve this for pupils, for staff and for all members of the community are clearly defined. For pupils, these include developing self-esteem, the skills of communication and independent thinking, and a positive awareness of the spiritual dimension to life. The school also seeks to enhance the ethos of continuous improvement through staff development and teamwork, to value every girl and member of staff and to develop a positive partnership between pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.
- 1.4 The present headmistress has been in post for two and a half years. Since the last inspection, two new information and communication technology (ICT) suites have been built, a new library installed and accommodation for the sixth form extended to provide a spacious common room.
- 1.5 The main entry points to the school are at the ages of rising three, seven and eleven. Nursery pupils are accepted on a 'first come first served basis' in the term in which they become three. Entrants at the age of seven take tests in verbal and numerical skills intended to establish their potential and understanding. From the age of eleven onwards, reasoning tests and papers in English and mathematics are set. Sixth form entrants are expected to have achieved at least five passes at grade B at GCSE to include those subjects to be studied at A level and at least a grade C pass in both English and mathematics.
- 1.6 Pupils come from a wide local catchment area. Most are from families with professional or business backgrounds. Just over one-tenth are from ethnic minority backgrounds and most of these pupils are of Asian origin. The school has identified 55 pupils as having learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) of whom 47 receive specialist learning support. Of the small number of pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) very few need support for their English.
- 1.7 Pupils are entered for national tests at the age of seven and for public examinations at GCSE and A level. According to nationally validated baseline tests, pupils' ability is on average well above that of pupils in all maintained schools up to Year 11. In the sixth form average ability is above that of pupils who choose to stay on into maintained school sixth forms. If pupils are performing in line with their ability their results are expected to be well above the average for all maintained primary schools in national tests at the age of seven, and well above the average for all maintained secondary schools at GCSE. If pupils are performing in line with their ability at A level, results will be above the average for pupils in maintained sixth forms.

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- 1.8 A separate day-care facility, advertised as 'Day Care at Saint Martin's', and an after-school care facility are operated under a licence agreement by a well-established provider. This facility is registered with and inspected by Ofsted and has not formed part of this inspection by ISI.
- 1.9 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 educational experience offered throughout the school is of a high quality and caters imaginatively for the interests, aptitudes and needs of all pupils. It is fully consistent with the school's aims to provide a broad, balanced, and challenging education in a caring environment and to enrich the curriculum through extra-curricular activities. The previous report praised this provision and since then both curricular and extra-curricular opportunities have been expanded at all stages. The school has recently introduced an 'international dimension' across the curriculum for all pupils. Through specific reciprocal links with schools in a number of countries including Nepal, Uganda and Trinidad, pupils learn about the differing lives and culture of children and young people across the world and develop international friendships by corresponding with 'pen pals'.
- 2.2 Pupils of all ages are given ample opportunities to develop linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, aesthetic and creative skills and to become proficient in speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy. The emphasis laid on oral literacy, in addition to basic skills, in the Nursery and Reception classes prepares these pupils well for the next stage of their education. Pupils from Year 1 in Alice House and in the junior school study the National Curriculum and, in addition, are introduced to a programme of guided reading, and from Year 3, to French, Spanish and German. They are encouraged to speak in public, for example the Alice House pupils contribute to assemblies by telling their peers about something that interests them. Science and technology are taught as individual subjects and pupils use computers from the Nursery onwards.
- 2.3 For pupils in Years 7 to 9 in the senior school, the National Curriculum is augmented by the addition of Latin, classical civilisation and German. The GCSE science course is introduced a year early in Year 9 giving pupils generous time to study all three sciences in greater depth. Although girls are able to join in many extra-curricular activities, the time allocation for performance subjects in the curriculum is limited at this stage.
- 2.4 Breadth is maintained at GCSE as all pupils are required to take English language and literature, mathematics, the sciences and French, and then add three other subjects from a wide range of options. At A level the choice of subjects is expanded and considerable efforts are made to provide for pupils' developing interests. All subjects previously studied, with the exception of food and nutrition and Latin, are available and economics, business studies, psychology and music technology are added. The timetable is arranged so that almost all pupils are able to study the combinations of subjects they choose. Pupils in Years 12 and 13 are encouraged to take courses offered by the Open University Young Applicants in Schools Scheme if they wish to study subjects outside the school curriculum, for example photography. Year 13 are offered a course in critical thinking.
- 2.5 Pupils at all stages experience well-designed programmes of personal, social and health education (PSHE) that are appropriate to their age and support the school's aims to develop pupils' self-esteem and confidence and to prepare them for a rapidly changing society. From the Nursery to Year 2, PSHE is incorporated into the timetable. Years 3 to 6 are now participating in an effective scheme devised by the Department for Children, Schools and Families for this age group called 'Social and Emotional Learning' (SEAL). The well co-ordinated PSHE programme in the senior school is taught by form tutors with the assistance of visiting speakers, and is supplemented in Years 10 and 11 by ethics lessons. A useful cross-curricular audit has identified the ways in which individual subjects make further valuable contributions. However, the effectiveness of PSHE lessons in the senior school is

- constrained by the time allocation which is split between two twenty minute sessions each week.
- 2.6 The academic curriculum is supported and enriched in the junior and senior school by extensive and stimulating extra-curricular activities that encourage pupils to develop new skills and experience fresh challenges. The vast majority of girls in both the junior and senior school participate in the extra-curricular programme and their involvement is monitored by form teachers and tutors. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme is popular, offering older girls chances to undertake community service and challenge themselves on testing expeditions. Girls enter a wide variety of local and nationally organised competitions which allows them to develop their talents in such areas as public speaking, creative writing, science and mathematics. Extra-curricular activities also provide scope for older and younger girls to collaborate: senior school girls are joined by representatives from the junior school to produce the school magazine, *The Chronicle*, and senior school girls support many activities in the junior school. Extra-curricular activities in Alice House are not yet as well developed as they are in the rest of the school.
- 2.7 The school has established many worthwhile links with the local and wider community. Visiting speakers enliven the pupils' learning, as do the many educational trips and residential visits. Older girls undertake work experience placements and accompany their parents as part of the 'Take your Daughter to Work' scheme.
- 2.8 Pupils are carefully prepared for the next stage of their education and for adult life. Meticulous planning makes for smooth transitions between Alice House and the junior school and between the junior school and the senior school. For example, pupils from Alice House are invited into the junior school for taster days. Communication between staff in different parts of the school is effective, ensuring continuity for pupils in terms of the curriculum and pastoral care. In the senior school, careers education and guidance begins in Year 7 with a general introduction but gains momentum in Year 9 as the first option choices are made. A carefully co-ordinated series of activities ensures that girls from Year 10 onwards are well prepared to make A level and higher education choices. Girls have individual interviews with staff to discuss their plans, they are able to take aptitude tests to direct their thinking, and they attend careers talks from visiting speakers. A well-organised scheme of advice about application procedures for higher education enables sixth formers to despatch application forms early in the Autumn term, well before the deadline.
- 2.9 Curriculum planning is thorough and effective in all parts of the school ensuring that all pupils have equal access to all aspects of provision. In Alice House and the junior school both long and short-term plans are detailed and comprehensive, providing continuity and consistency. The curriculum is regularly reviewed and updated and the paperwork that supports it is thorough and extensive. In the senior school the curriculum committee is an important forum for the discussion of curricular issues and proposed initiatives. Ideas are passed on to the heads of department meetings and to general staff meetings for further discussions; staff appreciate their inclusion in formulating curriculum strategy. The curriculum is regularly monitored and reviewed at senior management and head of department level.
- 2.10 Provision for pupils requiring learning support is good in Alice House and the junior school, and is beginning to develop well in the senior school. Such pupils are identified at an early stage in Alice House and the junior school. Their needs are met either by suitably adapted teaching in mainstream lessons where teaching assistants offer valuable support, or by individual or small group sessions with the learning support co-ordinator. In the senior school the learning support co-ordinator screens pupils for LDD, and draws up and then informs staff of learning plans for these pupils. Many, but currently not all, lessons are then

adapted appropriately. Staff are able to refer pupils to her if they are concerned. Individual or small group tuition is provided when necessary. Any pupils for whom English is an additional language receive support for their English if it is required. The school is providing an ever increasing range of opportunities to challenge girls identified as able, gifted or talented.

- 2.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

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

- 2.12 Pupils' achievements throughout the school are good, maintaining the standards found at the last inspection; pupils continue to display positive attitudes to learning. At all stages the girls are firmly grounded in the knowledge and skills they require for their studies. Their ability to apply these skills ensures that they make rapid progress in the subjects and activities available to them. Thus the school's aims to enable each girl to reach her potential and to strive for excellence in all areas of school life are largely fulfilled.
- 2.13 In Alice House and the junior school, pupils listen carefully to each other and pay close attention to their teachers. The girls are able to articulate their thoughts, read fluently, answer questions with great confidence and use vocabulary appropriate to the subject. A Year 2 pupil was able to demonstrate both understanding and creativity by reading her own work on similes at an assembly. Mathematical knowledge is used effectively. Pupils manipulate ICT well; Nursery children can drag and drop images across the screen and Year 4 pupils showed skill in using spreadsheets to display data in pie charts and bar graphs.
- 2.14 In the senior school, girls acquire a thorough knowledge and understanding of their subjects. They are highly articulate, listen attentively to each other and to their teachers and demonstrate well-developed literacy skills. They use technical language confidently and are able to apply mathematical concepts adeptly in other subjects, for example in the sciences and in economics. They often show a capacity for logical thought. They use ICT appropriately and with ease. Their ability to work independently is uneven. Many girls tend to be diligent, but passive, learners. However, others are developing the capacity to think for themselves creatively and critically as a result of the high expectations some teachers have of them and of the encouragement and challenge offered.
- 2.15 No significant differences in relative attainment between different groups of pupils, subjects or curricular areas exist at any stage in the school. Pupils with LDD or EAL achieve well in relation to their abilities.
- 2.16 Results of national tests taken by pupils at the age of seven show that on average, for the last three years for which comparative data is available, achievement has been far above the national average for all maintained primary schools and pupils' attainment is good in relation to their abilities. Pupils make rapid progress over time as demonstrated by their written work.
- 2.17 Pupils' attainment in public examinations is good in relation to their abilities, especially at A level. Over the last three years for which national comparative data is available, both GCSE and A-level results were well above the averages for all maintained schools and in line with the averages for maintained selective schools. The 2007 GCSE results show a significant advance on the average for the three preceding years, with girls achieving A or A\* grades in nearly three-quarters of the examinations taken. Standardised measures indicate that progress from Year 7 to GCSE is well above national norms, and this progress is maintained in the sixth form.

- 2.18 Pupils throughout the school are successful in many other areas beyond the standard classroom curriculum. Girls of all ages pass national instrumental music examinations often with merits and distinctions, though comparatively few proceed to the highest grades. They do similarly well in national speech and drama examinations. Pupils in Alice House and the junior school gain many badges and certificates, or just have fun, in diverse pursuits such as karate, dancing, sport, language lessons and skate boarding. In the senior school, the Young Enterprise groups thrive, and girls gain numerous bronze, silver and gold awards in the UK maths challenges, and in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award. Year 10 girls compete for CREST (Creativity in Science and Technology) awards and last year the associated Chairman's Award was won. Apart from successes in team sports, individual athletes have represented England in the schools' UK Olympics and in equestrian vaulting at championship level in 2007.
- 2.19 At all stages the vast majority of pupils have developed mature attitudes to learning. With few exceptions they approach their work eagerly, occasionally with exuberance. They work well both individually and collaboratively, sharing ideas and helping each other to solve problems. In Alice House and the junior school, written work is usually carefully completed and work in lessons finished in the time available. Most senior girls can take their own notes efficiently and without fuss. Their books and files are well organised. Throughout the school pupils settle quickly in lessons, co-operating responsively with their teachers, and showing persistence in mastering new skills or concepts.

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

- 2.20 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness and development of pupils across the whole school is now a major strength and has improved significantly since the last inspection. The school amply fulfils its aim to encourage a positive awareness of the spiritual dimension to life and the development of a moral code, including the value of mutual respect and tolerance.
- 2.21 The strong spiritual awareness shown by pupils of all ages has been fostered by plentiful opportunities to develop spiritually, in self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence. The school has a broadly Christian ethos, but welcomes and values the contribution which those from other faiths bring to the community. *The Chronicle* contains an engrossing first-hand account of the Hajj pilgrimage. Pupils are further successfully enabled to extend their understanding of major world religions through the religious education (RE) curriculum, and the inclusive themes for assemblies. Close links with St Alphege's Church, both formally through the carol and commemoration services, and informally through workshops arranged by the church, encourage pupils to explore the Christian faith. The school chaplain visits regularly and takes communion services. Through subjects such as art, geography, RE, music and modern foreign languages, pupils broaden their appreciation of cultural issues and ethnic diversity. The school is a close-knit and civilised community in which individuality is valued and supported, teamwork is expected and empathy is nurtured. The behaviour of the girls epitomises the school's motto "The Grace of God is Courtesy".
- 2.22 Pupils' moral awareness is firmly embedded and from an early age all pupils develop a clear understanding of right and wrong, a theme which is developed both pastorally and academically. At all stages, pupils know and accept the disciplinary code of the school; sanctions are regarded as fair and consistently applied. Girls in the junior and senior schools have a highly developed awareness of their responsibilities to the global environment and eagerly support whole-school initiatives to become 'eco-friendly'. Pupils enthusiastically research and debate moral and social issues in such subjects as PSHE, ethics, geography and science; a particularly lively and stimulating debate about teenage pregnancy took place in a

- Year 10 ethics lesson. Parents recognise, and are supportive of, the values promoted by the school.
- 2.23 Pupils' well-developed social awareness is fully promoted throughout the school by a broad range of activities such as sport, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, music and drama. In Alice House pupils learn to share, take turns and to help each other. The SEAL programme in the junior school has prompted pupils into thinking carefully about how their actions affect others. Each form group throughout the school is a supportive community in which pupils have the chance to develop leadership skills and in which newcomers are warmly welcomed. The house system, extending from Year 3 to the sixth form, led by sixth formers and junior house captains, gives further opportunities for pupils to contribute to the community and provides younger pupils with many fine role models. A variety of house competitions encourages the development of pupils' talents. The school council, led by the head girl and her deputies, and attended by year group representatives from the senior school, gives pupils a chance to take part in practical decision making. Charitable giving is regarded as an important part of social development. A wide range of local and national charities is supported on a regular basis, often on the initiative of the pupils. Through the PSHE programme and other subject lessons, pupils learn something of the nature of public institutions and services in England and acquire an informed awareness of social issues beyond school.
- 2.24 Pupils' cultural awareness throughout the school is outstanding and is aided by the blossoming 'international dimension' initiative and by activities both on site and further afield. Creativity and aesthetic awareness are fostered in a number of areas of school life, for example in opportunities to take part in music ensembles, Shakespearian plays and dance programmes. A recent enrichment week included sessions on Chinese calligraphy, cooking and music. Pupils of all ages enjoy trips to art galleries and theatres. Foreign language exchanges and other trips abroad allow many pupils to experience other cultures at first hand.
- 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 throughout the school is generally good and at times outstanding. It is consistent with the school's aims to provide an outstanding learning experience through excellent teaching and learning. The previous report praised the general standard of teaching but noted that in the senior school insufficient priority was given to developing pupils' independent learning skills. It recommended that the quality of all teaching could be raised to the highest standard by enhancing the role of the heads of department. The school has responded to this by making teaching and learning a priority in whole-school planning. All departmental meetings begin with an agenda item on teaching and learning and all development plans give prominence to the promotion of effective teaching and the sharing of good practice. Staff fully support this initiative. However, the teaching of older girls in the senior school does not yet consistently challenge pupils to think and study independently.
- 2.27 At all stages teaching is effective in enabling pupils of all abilities, including those with LDD or EAL, to acquire knowledge, increase their understanding, develop skills and make good progress according to their abilities. Specialist teaching for those with LDD or EAL is of a high quality. The school's individual educational needs department provides continuity of support for girls from Year 3 to the sixth form. Liaison with mainstream teachers is good in the junior school and is developing in the senior school. In all parts of the school, work is usually skilfully tailored to meet the needs of pupils with differing abilities. For example, in the Nursery children are given different activities to match their level of attainment, and in

the junior school special worksheets and assignments in larger text were provided for pupils with LDD. Teaching assistants provide much valuable support for individual pupils. In the senior school, open-ended projects enable pupils to make progress at a rate suitable to their individual abilities, and pupils work at a pace suited to their needs in ability sets in mathematics, French and science. Practical help is given where needed, for example the provision of specific resources for those with LDD. Staff throughout the school give generously of their time to assist girls who require help outside lesson times.

- 2.28 With few exceptions the teaching captures the interest of pupils and inspires them to apply themselves intellectually, physically and creatively in ways appropriate to their age. In most lessons throughout the school, pupils are motivated by being given clear objectives for their work and the teaching usually incorporates an appropriate variety of tasks such as games, brainstorming, debates, practical work, role play, videos, ICT and discussions. Teachers take care to involve all pupils in their lessons, discreetly encouraging the less confident to speak out. The best lessons provide an effective challenge for all pupils and stretch the most able. Some less successful lessons in the senior school are too focussed on examination requirements and this limits opportunities for pupils to question, think and learn for themselves.
- 2.29 Throughout the school the teaching successfully encourages excellent behaviour. Almost without exception pupils approach their work responsibly and with great enjoyment.
- 2.30 Teachers in all parts of the school and in all subjects show a thorough knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. Teachers know their pupils well and understand their needs. Lessons are carefully planned and in almost all cases take into account the previous learning and achievement of the pupils.
- 2.31 The teaching is supported by an appropriate range and quality of resources and these are effectively used by staff. Provision of ICT equipment has increased since the last inspection and, as a result of this and further in-service training, ICT is now better integrated into teaching at all stages, for example the use of data projectors in modern foreign language teaching. Departments throughout the school are well supplied with textbooks, practical equipment, and specialist items such as keyboards for music. In Alice House and the junior school, well-organised resources are imaginatively used to engage the pupils' attention. Throughout the school lively displays of pupils' work and interesting posters adorn the corridors. Use of the junior library is constrained by its small size. However, Alice House and the junior school are able to supplement provision well by borrowing topic boxes from the local authority. The senior school library is potentially an excellent facility but is little used by the older girls. Arrangements for liaison between the librarian and heads of department are insufficiently developed.
- 2.32 Pupils' work is assessed regularly by homework and class assignments, tests and internal examinations. Marking usually conforms to the school policies, given in detail for both Alice House and the junior school, and for the senior school. The best marking is frequent, clear, encouraging and includes comments that help pupils improve their work, but this practice is not universal. Each girl in the senior school keeps a personal evaluation file of her achievement in examinations which she discusses with her form tutor twice a year.

- 2.33 Arrangements for monitoring the performance of pupils are thorough. Pupils' achievement and progress in the junior school are evaluated by the use of nationally validated measures in Reception, Year 2 and Year 4. Outcomes are analysed by the deputy in charge of this section of the school and shared with staff so that any trends or anomalies can be identified and followed up. Results of nationally validated measures of baseline ability and progress are available in the senior school, and are used by some but not all departments. A comprehensive system of recording data to enable staff to track each pupil's progress is currently being set up.
- 2.34 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 care devoted to the well-being and development of all the girls, both academically and personally, is outstanding and is an improvement on the high standards noted in the last report. Excellent management procedures enable the school to fulfil its aim to be a happy, supportive and well-disciplined environment where girls succeed.
- 3.2 Staff at all levels and in all parts of the school provide support and guidance of a very high quality. Form teachers/tutors, who hold the first line of responsibility for the care of the girls, keep a close watch over both their academic and personal development. Any concerns are sorted out quickly, referring to more senior staff or the matrons as appropriate. Form teachers/tutors meet their small groups of pupils twice daily and in Alice House and the junior school, classroom assistants and playground supervisors also make valuable contributions to the care of the children. A well-established mentoring scheme is most successful in helping some pupils in Year 11 develop strategies to cope with the approaching examinations.
- 3.3 Staff are assisted by excellent pastoral arrangements supervised by the deputy heads of the senior school and of the junior school and Alice House. Other staff (the key stage co-ordinators) have special responsibility for co-ordinating the care, both academic and pastoral, of pupils in two or three year groups. They liaise closely with the form tutors and the deputy heads. Policies relating to the care and welfare of the girls are clear and familiar to the staff, who always act in accordance with recommended procedures. Pupils' progress and development are monitored and recorded at every stage so that any cause for concern can be identified quickly and communicated to other staff as needed for immediate remedial action. Regular meetings of staff at all levels enable further checks to take place and concerns to be raised. As a result of all this, staff know the pupils as individuals, and care for them with exemplary concern and insight.
- 3.4 The quality of relationships between the staff and pupils, and among pupils, is outstanding. In class the atmosphere is relaxed but purposeful. Pupils are kind, thoughtful and supportive of one another, based on a strong sense of community which is fostered by the school leadership. Older pupils set a good example. In Alice House, pupils value friendship and show concern for each other, while in the junior school, pupils respond well to the SEAL programme which places a strong emphasis on respect and consideration. Pupils feel confident and know that they are listened to. They say that the teachers are very approachable and that there is always someone they can turn to if they have a concern. Respect for others, tolerance and sensitivity for people as individuals are very strong features of the school's care for its pupils.
- 3.5 The measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are clear to all, and are designed to reward good behaviour, thereby minimising the need for sanctions. Procedures to guard against harassment and bullying are most effective. Any unacceptable behaviour is dealt with promptly. Pupils report that bullying is extremely rare but that they are confident that any such matter would be sorted out swiftly. In the senior school, general issues can be raised at the school council.
- 3.6 Child protection measures are securely in place. Every member of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, receives regular training, and the clear safeguarding policies are well known by

- all. Admissions and attendance registers are kept correctly. The school complies with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act.
- 3.7 All necessary measures to reduce the risk of fire and other hazards have been taken. Regular tests of fire equipment and fire practices are recorded. External agencies are used as required. Fire practices are held four times each year.
- 3.8 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective and the school has due regard for health and safety statutory obligations. Policies and procedures are followed. Risk assessments are carried out as necessary and the mini-buses are checked daily by the maintenance staff to maximise safety. Well-equipped medical rooms are available and the matrons play a key role in looking after pupils who feel unwell or have hurt themselves. Injuries and accidents are recorded, and the bursar walks the premises regularly to check both on health and safety as well as maintenance issues. The health and safety committee is composed of a range of staff including those whose work requires particular vigilance in this area, and is chaired by the headmistress.
- 3.9 Pupils are encouraged to develop healthy eating habits and to take regular exercise. The catering manager and the kitchen staff provide nutritious food which meets a range of dietary requirements. All the pupils eat the lunch provided by the school and the tuck shop now stocks fruit rather than chocolates or sweets. Pupils' eating habits are discreetly monitored by staff on duty, and any concerns are reported. The library contains useful books on drugs and healthy eating and these topics are covered fully as part of the PSHE programme. Sport is strongly encouraged and the timetable ensures that all girls take part in sufficient exercise.
- 3.10 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**

- 3.11 The quality of links with parents and the community is outstanding. The whole school has taken sizeable steps forward since the last inspection to fulfil its aims to develop a positive partnership between pupils, parents, staff and the wider community.
- 3.12 Parents throughout the whole school are overwhelmingly satisfied with the education and support provided for their children. Of those who responded to the parental pre-inspection questionnaire, almost all were satisfied with the information provided by the school and the opportunities to discuss their daughters' progress. Parents commended, almost unanimously, the guidance their children received, the high standards of behaviour and the effectiveness of the teaching in helping their daughters to progress. The proportion of negative responses was too small to be significant. Parents speak of a caring, happy environment in which individual pupils of all abilities are encouraged and supported.
- 3.13 Opportunities abound for parents to be involved in the life of the school and they are always welcome to visit the school and to email or telephone with concerns. In Alice House and the junior school, they accompany trips, talk to the pupils about different religious and cultural festivals, and make finger puppets and Easter cakes. They attend and participate in assemblies; the presence of a robed and bewigged barrister was one of many particularly popular visitors. In the senior school, parents contribute to the breadth of their daughters' education in many ways. They speak at assemblies, support the 'Take your Daughter to Work' scheme, assist with work experience placements, advise the school magazine editorial team and give information about career opportunities.

- 3.14 The parents' association is extremely active in supporting the school and has been highly successful in its fund-raising activities, such as the Bonfire Night, the Summer Fair and the Commemoration Ball. Money raised has provided mini-buses, ICT equipment and a play area for the Alice House pupils. The parents' association aims to include as many new parents as possible, especially targeting those of girls joining the school in Year 7.
- 3.15 Throughout the school, the provision of information to parents and prospective parents is excellent. The school prospectus, together with its up-to-date insertions, gives prospective parents all necessary information. Parents receive comprehensive handbooks for every stage of their daughters' development. *Saint Martin's News* and *Newsline* keep all informed. Parents throughout the school regularly receive comprehensive, detailed, clear and useful reports about their children's work and progress. In the senior school, all reports contain effort and attainment grades as well as a slip for parents to return with their comments. Parents are pleased with the timing and the quality of reports, which one parent described as "catering in depth and effectively for the individual". Parents are invited to discuss their daughters' progress at consultation evenings held twice a year for pupils in Years 1 to 6 and once per year thereafter. Older girls accompany their parents, allowing for useful three-way discussions. Among additional meetings, one is held for Year 7 parents early in the Autumn term, and one for parents of girls from Year 9 onwards to consider option choices.
- 3.16 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care and attention. An effective complaints policy is in place and all necessary procedures are followed.
- 3.17 The whole school promotes excellent, imaginative and innovative links within the local and wider community. Saint Martin's pupils make a strong contribution to the local area. The girls invite local residents to the Bonfire Night and to their Harvest Festival celebration. The Year 12 girls run a Year 4 football club and organise matches against local primary schools. Senior girls visit the Marie Curie Hospice and many other local day centres and care homes. Most of Year 13 took part in 'St Basil's Sleep Out' which entailed spending the night in a local car park, raising money for Birmingham's homeless. Money is raised for Dogs for the Disabled throughout the year. The school's facilities are used by local schools, swimming and athletics clubs. The local branch of the National Trust meets on the school premises for lectures, and holiday clubs are accommodated at Easter and in the Summer.
- 3.18 Girls compete with pupils from other schools in a number of sporting events and other competitions, for example a local police poster competition, an Anglo-French Society French essay competition and a contest which involved creating a duck catching hutch. Close ties to nearby universities have been established, and one such link has enabled some of the school's physicists to be challenged by joining in a 'Celestial Treasure Hunt' which incorporated the use of a robotic telescope to discover previously unknown galaxies.
- 3.19 On an international level, links are far reaching, still expanding and involve all sections of the school. In Alice House and the junior school, links have been established with schools in Nepal, Uganda and Sri Lanka. Pupils exchange letters describing their life styles, and send presents. In the senior school, the existing links with schools in Nepal, Trinidad and the Gujarat are being expanded, and additional links with schools in Ethiopia and Poland. The school is applying for British Council grants to further extend such liaison. Charity fund-raising is a key element in international links. For the last two years, girls have supported the Chernobyl Children's Project with verve and determination.
- 3.20 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 The school is extremely well governed. The governing body (GB) works enthusiastically with the leadership team (LT) and other staff to protect the ethos of the school and to promote a shared vision for the future. The previous report praised governance but commented that it was not then easy for governors to know teachers. Opportunities for governors to meet teachers and understand their work are now extensive.
- 4.2 The structure of the GB is clearly defined and enables governors to maintain close oversight of the school. The work of the GB is effectively carried out by three sub-committees, executive, marketing and site, which meet regularly and report to the termly meetings of the full GB. Individual governors bring a range of valuable experience to the governance of the school and all undertake training.
- 4.3 The GB is fully aware of its responsibilities to the school. Governors are closely, but appropriately, involved in development planning. The current school strategic plan has been constructed as a result of an analysis of the school's strengths and potential that was undertaken by both staff and governors. From time to time, governors attend meetings of the senior school curriculum committee and keep in touch with curricular developments in Alice House and the junior school. The school receives strong support from governors for initiatives such as the 'international dimension'.
- 4.4 Close liaison between the GB, the headmistress and the bursar ensures that the educational needs of the pupils are well provided for. The executive committee meets twice termly with the bursar to monitor financial planning and to question and discuss strategies for the future development of facilities. The school is currently seeking planning permission for a performing arts centre, and an artificial grass pitch is under consideration.
- 4.5 The GB has an excellent insight into the working of the school. Not only do governors receive detailed and regular reports from the headmistress, but individual governors take a special interest in various areas of the school, attend assemblies, assist with the careers programme, support school events and sit in on lessons. Governors joined with parents, staff and girls in a recent choral event. Staff fully appreciate the support and stimulus which the governors offer them.
- 4.6 The GB is meticulous in discharging its responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of the pupils. One governor, who reports regularly to the GB, has a special responsibility for child protection. She works closely with the designated staff on these issues and has received training. The GB has ensured that health and safety procedures are in place and reviews the policy. All risk assessments for overseas school trips are scrutinised by the governors.

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

- 4.7 The quality of leadership and management throughout the school, rated in the previous report as good, is now excellent. A clear vision for the school, to which all staff are able to contribute, is articulated by the LT and is shared and disseminated by other staff with management responsibilities. Links between the different educational phases of the school, criticised in the last report, are now close and effective. Although the school includes pupils from all educational phases, it operates as one school sharing a distinct ethos, and collaborating closely over all common issues.
- 4.8 Since the last report, a number of changes in the structure of the LT have enabled it to operate more efficiently and more collaboratively. The deputy head in charge of the junior school now includes Alice House in her remit, and a director of studies has been appointed in the senior school. The full LT consists of the headmistress, the deputy for the senior school, the deputy for the junior school and Alice House, the director of studies, the head of sixth form and the bursar. This group meets weekly to organise day-to-day issues but also reserves time to discuss strategic matters. Members of the team also meet regularly in smaller groups to focus on particular areas. Communication and relationships between the members of the LT are extremely harmonious and productive. A carefully structured system of committees ensures that curriculum planning and pastoral support contribute strongly to the educational experience of the girls throughout the school. The deputy in charge of the junior school and Alice House provides clear direction and works closely with the staff who support her in these departments. Subject co-ordinators have now been established in the junior school and it is intended to extend this system to Alice House in the near future. The lack of sufficient secretarial support for the deputy in charge of the junior school and Alice House currently impairs the speed at which educational improvements can be made.
- 4.9 The excellent and carefully constructed whole-school strategic development plan is the central point of an interlocking system of coherent planning documents; it provides the driving force for the implementation of the school's vision. The whole-school plan is based on the findings of the in-depth analysis of the school's position in which all staff, working in cross-phase groups, were involved. It includes a separate plan for Alice House and the junior school, and objectives and targets for the governors' sub-committees. All departmental development plans are constructed in a similar format.
- 4.10 Departments are efficiently run and carefully monitored. Schemes of work are usually clear and well thought-out, and most department handbooks are useful. The best of these cover the necessary information for the running of the department in a clear and practical way, and also contain sections on such topics as strategies to support pupils with particular learning needs. In the junior school, weekly planning meetings are held for the form teachers of Years 3 to 6. The work of the subject co-ordinators from Years 3 to 6 and of teachers from the Nursery to Year 2 is monitored by the deputy in charge of Alice House and the junior school. Academic departments in the senior school are monitored by the headmistress and by the director of studies who conduct termly reviews to include such items as the evaluation of public examination results, progress towards targets, budget requests, and the development and sharing of good practice.
- 4.11 The school has developed a comprehensive set of clearly written, helpful policies and procedures which include all mandatory policies. These are kept in files in each staff room and are also available on the school's intranet, and are reviewed regularly.
- 4.12 Staff are well qualified. New staff appreciate the well thought-out induction programme, and expectations of staff are made clear in the code of conduct detailed in the staff handbook. The school does not participate in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified

teachers. Arrangements for in-service training are generous, with most staff attending externally provided courses each year as well as those run within the school. Training courses are also offered to support staff. The system of performance review is designed to be developmental and focuses not only on effective teaching, but also on pastoral and administrative duties. Support staff are not currently included in a performance review system.

- 4.13 Arrangements for ensuring the suitability of all staff to work with children are meticulous. Both the headmistress and the deputy head for the senior school have undertaken the on-line training for safer recruitment provided by the National College for School Leadership, and one of them is always present at staff recruitment interviews. Checks with the Criminal Records Bureau are made correctly and the central register of appointments properly kept.
- 4.14 Financial resources are astutely managed to provide facilities of a high quality to support the educational needs of the pupils. Departmental heads supply the headmistress with prioritised bids for each year's budget. These are scrutinised, and may be modified, by the headmistress before being passed to the bursar. Major capital expenditure is discussed by the leadership team, is then submitted to the governing body and if approved, is incorporated into the strategic development plan.
- 4.15 The school is administered most efficiently by support staff who cheerfully ensure that things run smoothly and that communication is swift and sure. The buildings and grounds are well cared for by hardworking domestic, maintenance and grounds staff.
- 4.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].

## 5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

### Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 Saint Martin's School has considerable strengths and no significant weaknesses, and is successful in achieving its aims. Notable among these strengths are first rate pastoral care, the strong spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the girls, the close liaison with parents and the imaginative and far reaching links with the wider community. Excellent governance, leadership and management mean that the school has a well-articulated vision and the drive to fulfil it. Characterised by kindness, courtesy and mutual respect, the quality of relationships throughout the whole community is exceptional. Staff in all areas of the school give generously of their time and energy to enhance the educational experience of the girls. Pupils make good progress and achieve high standards in academic work and in extra-curricular activities; their attainment in national tests and public examinations is good. Support staff do not currently benefit from formal performance review and the career development opportunities associated with it. The use of the libraries in both the senior and junior sections of the school is underdeveloped. Teaching is generally good and often excellent, although lessons for older girls in the senior school tend to focus too narrowly on examination requirements, leaving little time for the development of truly independent questioning, thinking and learning. The governors and LT are quick to recognise any areas that need improvement, and excellent planning procedures enable issues to be tackled as soon as practicable.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection report in 2002, the school has improved in many ways. Two ICT suites and a new library in the senior school have been installed. The sixth form centre has been extended to provide a spacious common room. Management structures have been revised to increase efficiency. Teaching staff are now more confident in the use of ICT as a result of in-service training. The improvement of teaching and learning has been given a high priority and heads of department are instrumental in implementing strategies to disseminate good practice. Close liaison between staff now ensures continuity between Year 6 and Year 7. Senior pupils still do not make optimal use of the library. An Ofsted inspection of Early Years provision took place shortly before the inspection by ISI; it reports that provision in all aspects is good and that the one recommendation made at the previous inspection has been implemented. Through its self-evaluation, the school has indicated its awareness of the actions it needs to take to move forward.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no significant weaknesses. In order to improve its provision still further, the school should:
1. broaden the focus in lessons for the older girls in the senior school to allow them more opportunities for experimenting with ideas;
  2. raise the profile of libraries throughout the school with the intention of creating stimulating resource centres that are well used;
  3. introduce formal performance review and career development arrangements for support staff.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March 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 to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### List of Inspectors

Mrs Ann Mayou	Reporting Inspector
Mr David Beck	Former Deputy Warden, HMC school
Mrs Vicky Buckman	Deputy Head, HMC school
Mrs Harriet Granville	Deputy Head, GSA school
Mr Geoff Lee-Gallon	Head, HMC junior school
Mrs Janet Mark	Head, GSA school
Mr Richard Wesley	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mrs Jane Willis	Head of Pre-Prep, IAPS school
Mrs Rosalind Wilson	Former Deputy Head, GSA school