

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

St Hilda's School

December 2019



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St Hilda's School
919/6080
298140
St Hilda's School High Street Bushey Hertfordshire WD23 3DA
0208 9501751
secretary@sthildasbushey.co.uk
Miss Sarah Jane Styles
Mr Trevor Barton
2 to 11
183
EYFS 72 Years 1 to 6 111
3 to 5 December 2019
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School's Details

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St Hilda's School is an independent day school for male and female children aged 2 to 4 years and female pupils aged 4 to 11 years. The school was founded in 1918 and is part of the Aldenham Foundation, which is a charity and company limited by guarantee, whose board of governors oversee the running of the school.
- 1.2 The school comprises three sections: nursery, for children aged 2 to 4 years; lower school, for pupils aged 4 to 7 years; and upper school, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection the nursery rooms have been re-developed.

What the school seeks to do

1.4 The school aims to provide a well-balanced, academic education within a supportive, caring community, encouraging each child to give and achieve her personal best. It seeks to develop pupils into independent individuals with a deep respect for others, who are fully prepared to take the next step in their education with enthusiasm and confidence.

About the pupils

1.5 Most pupils come from professional and business backgrounds, from a culturally diverse group of families living in the local area. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified fifteen pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include a wide range of difficulties, eight of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for three pupils, two of whom receive additional support for their English. The curriculum is modified for pupils identified as the more able in the school's population, and for other pupils who have special talents in sport, drama, dance, art and music.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

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, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

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, 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.

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 a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management.

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.

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 published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School</u> <u>Standards) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework</u>.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.10 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.11 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.13 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.14 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.15 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
- 2.16 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.17 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.
- 2.18 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports 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.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. 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'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
 - Pupils show high levels of achievement in relation to their abilities across the age range.
 - All pupils show extremely positive attitudes towards their academic studies.
 - Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of knowledge, skills and understanding.
 - Pupils are able to communicate with each other and their teachers at a high level. They exhibit excellent listening skills.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils demonstrate an extremely well-developed sense of self-belief and self-confidence whilst showing humility towards others.
 - Pupils display assurance and confidence in their decision-making.
 - Pupils behaviour is excellent. They are caring, courteous and respectful of each other and all members of their school community.
 - Pupils flourish in roles of responsibility and have empathy and understanding of the needs of others outside their own community, regularly organising fundraising and community activities.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:
 - Strengthen pupils' self-reflection by ensuring that pupils always receive high-quality written feedback which enables them to understand how to move their learning forward.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve highly and make excellent progress across all ages. The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, and the school's own assessment data, shows attainment to be above in relation to national age-related expectations, including in English and mathematics. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make excellent progress from their starting points with a large majority exceeding expectation for their age. Throughout the school, all groups of pupils achieve high standards across the curriculum. Their excellent progress owes much to leaders' regular monitoring of pupils' attainment and progress where data is used extremely effectively to identify pupils' needs at an early stage. Pupils with SEND also make significant progress so that their attainment meets their expected levels. This is because school leaders ensure that teaching and curriculum provision are well-matched to pupils' needs and abilities. The most able pupils respond confidently to the challenges provided with the result that their learning accelerates. Leaders' insistence on high expectations in teaching ensures that pupils strive for and achieve high standards in their learning.
- 3.6 Pupils show strong knowledge and understanding across the range of subjects and are highly effective in applying their skills across different subjects. Pupils' creative and artistic abilities are extremely well-developed and this is seen both in music activities, where pupils sing tunefully with excellent tone and harmony, and in the high-quality and varied art works on display around the school. For example, pupils used shading extremely effectively to depict perspective in their cross-curricular work with history on the life of T.S. Lowry. Pupils display excellent English, mathematics and science skills and their knowledge and understanding of these subjects are outstanding. Children in the EYFS use emerging language skills with confidence to share and develop their ideas and nouns, verbs and

sometimes similes are used successfully by pre-prep pupils. In science, older pupils are able to give examples of how different materials behave, including differential behaviour of various metals, demonstrating understanding of properties of conductivity and insulation at a high level. Pupils used mathematical problem-solving skills with confidence. Younger pupils accurately identified varying denominations of money using coins and number sentences when playing money dominoes and older pupils were able to determine affordability of products by rounding. This achievement is the result of supportive, knowledgeable teaching and excellent use of questioning which encourages pupils' critical thinking and reasoning. All pupils in the questionnaire agreed that lessons are extremely engaging.

- 3.7 Pupils across the school are very effective communicators and develop their language skills exceptionally well. They are confident and articulate speakers, able to communicate with each other and their teachers at a high level. Children in the EYFS, when learning in the outdoor environment, determined the appropriate ingredients for their nutritious woodland animal vegetable soup, confidently articulating their ideas, using relevant and descriptive vocabulary and discussing their reasoning clearly whilst reflecting on whether particular plants were safe to eat. Older pupils contributed effective ideas with enthusiasm and high levels of cooperation when using syllables to create a class haiku poem. By the time they leave the EYFS, children have developed strong phonetic skills which enable them to read proficiently and older pupils apply reading and comprehension skills extremely well to support and extend their learning. Pupils' written communication is highly developed across the curriculum and their writing is accurate, fluent and often vibrant with high level language being used to good effect by all age groups. Younger pupils' work demonstrates confident use of speech marks, exclamation marks and use of capital letter sentences for effect, while older pupils accurately used apostrophes, similes and suffixes. Pupils exhibit excellent listening skills with both their peers and their teachers. For example, younger pupils shared their thoughts and ideas on likes and dislikes of animals after listening intently to the teacher's questions in Spanish dialogue, replying in full sentences using exemplary pronunciation, listening carefully to their peers and respecting each other's opinion.
- 3.8 Pupils' mathematical skills and understanding are at a high level across all ages. For instance, children in the EYFS used their knowledge of capacity effectively to assist with solving the problem of moving water from the water butt to the mud kitchen. Older pupils are able to apply their high-level mathematical knowledge and understanding in problem-solving activities relating to place value, different mathematical operations, and fractions and decimals, including the multiplication and division of fractions and are able to formulate a strategy to answer the question. All pupils are confident to explore techniques and strategies, understanding that mistakes are an important learning tool. Pupils successfully apply their mathematical skills to other subjects. In interviews, pupils said that everyone loves mathematics and that mathematics is everywhere. They gave examples of how mathematics is used in many areas and activities, such as shopping, finding coordinates in geography for map reading, and reading musical scores. Pupils make outstanding progress in mathematics because they are well-challenged through effective assessment, high teacher expectations and tasks which enable all pupils to succeed, including the most able.
- 3.9 From evidence seen around the school, in books and from discussions with staff and pupils, it is evident that pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) to enhance and reinforce their learning extremely effectively. Pupils use ICT to research, evaluate and as a presentation tool to support both class-based learning and project-led learning, where they display high-level word processing skills. The development of pupils' competency in ICT is supported by leaders' and governors' investment in high-quality resources to develop skills and a curriculum that encourages the use of ICT across a wide range of learning. For example, older pupils' books demonstrated the use of ICT skills in histograms to illustrate issues such as income price and expenditure of goods, while pie charts were created to illustrate favourite skills and internet maps used to produce a virtual street for a survey about the locality of different shops.

- 3.10 From an early age, higher-order thinking skills are encouraged, with the result that pupils show excellent levels of ability when analysing and hypothesising. Older pupils engage well in independent learning supported by the high expectations of the teachers. This was evident in a lesson where all pupils showed strong analytical skills when discussing an historical portrait of Henry VII by Sittow. They asked pertinent questions to advance their knowledge and offered sensible suggestions such as about the possible significance of the image of the red rose. Scrutiny of pupils' books demonstrated that pupils confidently draw on a wide range of sources, including website research to analyse and synthesise information and then present it using ICT skills. Topics researched well include the possible impact of leaving the European Union and the snowy owl. Senior leaders ensure that teaching throughout the school provides opportunities to challenge the pupils' higher-order thinking, enabling them to develop strong independent learning skills. Pupils at all ages, concentrate, focus and behave well and this creates an excellent learning environment where pupils can practise and develop their study skills in a positive and nurturing environment.
- 3.11 Many pupils show high levels of achievement in a wide range of pursuits. Pupils are successful in areas such as regional mathematics where, in the recent Aldenham Maths enrichment challenge, teams of girls achieved first and second place and individual pupils have achieved bronze medals in the UK Maths Challenge, National Bonus Record. Pupils also take part in local and county sports fixtures and tournaments, representing regional teams in events such as the Watford District and Hertfordshire Inter-District swimming gala and the East region biathlon and British Biathlon Championships in Leeds. In the Watford Festival of Speech and Drama, a silver medal was awarded in verse speaking. Pupils take examinations in practical and theoretical music, and speech and drama examinations.
- 3.12 Pupils of all ages, needs and abilities show extremely positive attitudes towards their learning and an outstanding work ethic. These entirely beneficial attitudes are very much nurtured by the ethos of the school and by staff who challenge and support pupils of all abilities. Pupils' great desire to give their very best and do as well as they can is a significant strength and contributor to their positive learning outcomes, and demonstrates that the school fully meets its aims in this regard.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-understanding for their age throughout the school. Children in the EYFS are confident in their environment, working together, discussing ideas and developing perseverance. They are at ease with each other and their teachers. All pupils are self-confident, willing to express their views and are proud of the atmosphere of kind consideration within the school and of the difference that they make to others through their actions. Pupils understand how different types of friendships may affect relationships and consequently their self-esteem. Pupils are certain that they are well-prepared for the next stage of their educational journey and they speak confidently about what they gain from opportunities they are given to improve as a learner. Pupils' highly developed personal skills are promoted by the very warm relationships provided by staff who know each individual exceptionally well and carefully monitor their welfare. This very much reflects the philosophy of both leadership and governance to develop determination and academic excellence in a kind and loving atmosphere where all deserve to be treated well and exceed their potential. From an early age, a strong emphasis on resilience, resourcefulness and perseverance helps pupils to develop self-understanding and self-discipline. However, pupils' self-reflection is not always as strong as possible because it is not always informed by high-quality written feedback in all subjects.
- 3.15 Pupils display assurance and confidence in their decision-making ability. In the EYFS, decision-making opportunities allow the children to exhibit strong levels of independence from a very early age. Children were observed deliberating and working collaboratively, without teacher involvement, to co-operate together to devise a plan to transfer water from place to place. This successful teamwork supports children as they develop their own success and well-being and stands them in good stead for

future learning. Older pupils are able to consider options evaluatively and are willing to take risks in their learning. Scrutiny of their work in books identifies that pupils give their own feedback effectively, particularly in science club activities, where they self-reflect using the success criteria from the task. This was reinforced in pupil discussions, where older pupils said that they felt that decision making reflected on their success, supporting them to become more independent. Pupils' understand that decisions are an opportunity to make change and leaders offer the opportunity for pupils to have an influence on school provision through the school council suggestion box. Pupils' decision-making skills are further enhanced by problem-solving tasks related to residential trips. In discussions, pupils explained the importance of perseverance and demonstrated their determination to improve. They said that they are not afraid of failing but see this as an opportunity to learn from their mistakes. Pupils' resilient approach, leads to a robust sense of well-being and a positive attitude in accordance with the school's aim to develop the pupils into independent individuals, with a deep respect for others, who are fully prepared to take the next step in their education with enthusiasm and confidence.

- 3.16 Pupils develop an appreciation of their good-fortune and contemplate the non-materialist aspects of life. This was evident when pupils', of their own volition, donated their hair to a charity that makes wigs for children with cancer and pupils also devised a sponsored circuit morning for the whole school to raise money for their chosen charity, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC). This is underpinned by the recently introduced 'Value of the Month' where all pupils explore different values such as 'selflessness and 'thoughtfulness'. In one assembly, older pupils presented the audience with a 'recipe for friendship' which included the ingredients of forgiveness, kindness and encouragement. This demonstrated the pupils' developing deep and meaningful appreciation of spiritual and moral aspects of life. Pupils develop a strong understanding and tolerance of all faiths through regular opportunities through assemblies, religious education (RE), and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) lessons. In discussions, pupils stated they were thankful to be learning about Christianity, Hinduism and other religions. Their positive attitudes in this regard are enriched by visits to places of worship for different faiths as well as parents of those faiths sharing their customs and beliefs in the nursery and whole school assemblies. Older pupils' mindfulness is developed through the recent introduction of weekly activities to develop strategies and reflective thinking to support pupils' well-being.
- 3.17 Pupils' moral understanding is at a very high level. In the EYFS, children quickly and amicably resolve small squabbles, understanding the importance of being fair and taking turns. In pupil questionnaires, they reaffirm that they are taught responsibility from a young age, which increases as they get older. Displays by both younger and older pupils identify the importance of friendship and kindness. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors felt that the code of conduct, golden rules, assemblies and PSHEE lessons such as fundamental British values activities, have helped to develop their understanding of right and wrong where rules and laws are discussed both in class and whole school assemblies. They are fully aware that all actions have consequences, either good or bad. Pupils behave exceptionally well and are highly responsible members of the school community from an early age and pupils work endorsed their strong understanding of the effects of their behaviour and their influence on others. This is reinforced by the school code of conduct which provides a whole school framework in which clear boundaries are set and followed. These are key to promoting high standards of moral understanding which are underpinned by an effective reward system.
- 3.18 Pupils display excellent social skills and awareness of others. They show kindness, courtesy and respect for each other and members of the school community. Co-operation between the pupils is excellent. From an early age, they support and encourage each other and relationships are particularly open and friendly. For example, in the EYFS children were seen spontaneously celebrating their peers' success when they were able to correctly identify the object from the sounds bag. Older pupils were observed working positively and constructively together to solve some challenging mathematical problems and the most able pupils wholeheartedly supported their peers to achieve success. Pupils regularly work together in pairs or groups making suggestions to each other to further improve their work. This is

supported by the strong sense of community where pupils demonstrate teamwork and close working relationships with each other, supported by the positive role modelling of the staff in this regard.

- 3.19 Pupils make a positive contribution to the lives of others within the school. The pupils take their positions of responsibility very seriously, be it prefect, member of the school council or the newly formed eco rep; they fulfil these roles with great pride and conscientiousness. Older pupils provide excellent role models for the younger pupils. A particular strength is where the older pupils take on the role of 'buddy' to support the younger members of the school community in a variety of activities such as reading, talking with and helping to supervise. Pupils undertake a range of charitable work based on pupil and staff led initiatives both in the local and wider community. Recent endeavours have supported Watford Hope Trust, UNICEF, World Religion Day, NSPCC and participation in the Comenius project through the British Council.
- 3.20 Pupils show enormous respect and value for different faiths and a deep understanding and appreciation of their cultures, displaying a willingness to share their diverse experiences. Pupils and parents give presentations to develop peers understanding of the beliefs and traditions of their differing cultures. This is reflected in their work where pupils demonstrate understanding of the importance of these traditions to the religious beliefs to the families associated within the school. In pupil discussions, pupils said that they all got on very well with each other, in line with the school ethos of kindness. This is confirmed emphatically by inspection evidence, not only by the respect between pupils that was observed, but also from pupils' work.
- 3.21 Pupils exhibit a strong sense of consideration for their own personal safety and well-being. They understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and make active choices in their daily life by successfully adopting healthy practices, such as understanding the need for a balanced healthy diet and selecting healthy food options. Older pupils have a robust understanding of food allergies and which foods they are not allowed to bring in because of potential risk/danger to other pupils. Pupils are readily able to explain how to stay safe both online and in the real world.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 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 chair of governors and school safeguarding governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings, assemblies and performances. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Julie Lowe	Reporting inspector
Mrs Kaye Lovejoy	Compliance team inspector (Headmistress, ISA school)
Mr Brian Melia	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)