

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

St Hilda's School

October 2019



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School's Details

School	St Hilda's School
DfE number	919/6092
Address	St Hilda's School
	28 Douglas Road
	Harpenden
	Hertfordshire
	AL5 2ES
Telephone number	01582 712307
Email address	office@sthildasharpenden.co.uk
Headteacher	Mr Daniel Sayers
Proprietor	Mrs Mary Piachaud
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils on roll	138
	EYFS 22 Juniors 116
Inspection dates	1 to 3 October 2019

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1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 St Hilda's School is an independent preparatory school for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years. The nursery is co-educational and all other year groups are for female pupils. Founded in 1891, the school was purchased by the current proprietor's family in 1950. It is now administered and governed by a board of directors, comprising the proprietor and two other directors, one of whom is a family member.

- 1.2 The school comprises the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged from 3 to 4 years and the junior school for pupils aged from 5-11 years.
- 1.3 Since the last inspection, enhancement to the grounds has enabled the development of outdoor education.

What the school seeks to do

1.4 The school aims to deliver a first-class education which will allow every pupil to maximise their potential, together with providing a happy and secure environment based on Christian values in strong partnership with parents. The school seeks to instil a sense of confidence, independence and responsibility in pupils, and to provide a broad and stimulating range of extra-curricular activities.

About the pupils

1.5 Pupils come from a range of professional and other backgrounds, mostly from white British families living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 24 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia and dyspraxia, 13 of whom receive specialist learning support. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Four pupils in the school have English as an additional language (EAL) whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. The needs of the most able pupils are met within the classroom and beyond, facilitated by additional specialist staff.

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) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these 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 statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range 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 met or as not met. 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 Standards)</u> Regulations 2014, <u>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. These include 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. They also include 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

School name	National Curriculum name
Form 1	Year 1
Form 11	Year 2
Form 111	Year 3
Form 1V	Year 4
Form V	Year 5
Form V1	Year 6

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
 - Pupils demonstrate outstanding attitudes to learning, being highly engaged and actively involved in lessons.
 - Pupils are intellectually curious and highly effective collaborators.
 - Pupils are confident communicators with excellent speaking and listening skills, which support effective learning across all subjects.
 - Pupils linguistic, mathematical aesthetic and creative skills are highly developed for their age.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
 - Pupils demonstrate high levels of confidence, self-esteem and self-discipline and show strong perseverance when challenged.
 - Pupils have an outstanding moral code, their behaviour is excellent.
 - Pupils from the youngest right through the school are excellent decision makers, determined to make independent choices.
 - Pupils have strong social skills and support each other effectively to solve problems and achieve common goals.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:
 - Ensuring that in line with the excellent practice already established in English and mathematics, in other subjects pupils of all abilities can learn even more effectively through the more accurate use of assessment when planning challenging activities for them within lessons.

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' attitudes to learning are outstanding. They are focused, settling to tasks with enthusiasm and energy. This was seen in the large volume of work covered by all pupils in mathematics lessons, where excellent relationships between pupils and teachers and teacher's highly effective use of open-ended questions in fast-paced lessons, ensured all remained engaged with the task. Pupils show initiative and enjoy working both collaboratively and independently. Pupils commented on teachers' helpfulness and how they make the lessons a good balance of fun, enjoyment and work, and these strengths in teaching were observed. The development of highly positive learning attitudes is in line with the words from the school song to 'blend your minds to learn each day' and is effectively supported by the school behaviour policy and strong lead from the management team. They instil the belief in the whole community that good relations, good manners and a secure learning environment, play a crucial part in the development of intellectually curious pupils, motivated to become life-long learners. All the parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school is governed, led and managed effectively.
- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate strong knowledge and skills across all subject areas, but particularly in the linguistic, mathematical, aesthetic and creative areas of learning. Pupils use descriptive vocabulary and sophisticated sentence structures to great effect. Their knowledge of dramatic techniques is very good and they were able to demonstrate the dramatic effect of 'freeze-framing' and imaginatively act out alternatives to scenes from *Carie's War*. Pupils' creative work is excellent with much creative output, inspired by visiting artists and stimulating cross-curricular projects. Pupils have good skills in

the human, social and physical areas of learning. Younger pupils demonstrate some excellent science skills for their age. For example, they used measuring cylinders and pipettes with accuracy. This was because they were able to transfer skills learnt in mathematics, and they were provided with suitable scientific equipment to use. Pupils' knowledge and understanding is high where marking and assessment support effective planning for activities at different levels of challenge. However, this was not evident in all subjects. Sometimes assessment data was insufficiently used to set activities at different levels of challenge during lessons. A very small minority of pupils felt that feedback and marking did not help them to improve, which was supported by scrutiny of some books in a few number of subjects, although all who responded to the questionnaire felt that teachers gave them help if they had problems. Older pupils' scientific knowledge, is above age-related expectations as is their understanding of human and social concepts. They were able to use French pronunciation with increasing accuracy to ask and answer questions about themselves, with the more able taking initiative to ask supplementary questions. Pupils of all ages and ability have outstanding mathematical skills and knowledge, well above age-expectations. The youngest children confidently group and name different shapes and older pupils are able to solve complex mathematical problems, as when finding the value of the unknown term in a number sequence. This is because of excellent teaching subject knowledge.

- 3.7 In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) all children of all abilities make excellent progress, achieving or exceeding the national expectations by the time they leave Reception. This is because of the very effective tracking and observation used by staff when planning for pupils' next steps. Progress is also rapid because pupils are included in creating and understanding their own next steps and their interests are woven into as many activities as possible, both inside and outside the classroom. In the rest of the school, pupils of all ages make excellent progress in numeracy and literacy and very good progress overall, from their starting points. Pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), make excellent progress from their individual starting points, because of individual support both outside and within lessons. The overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that teaching enabled pupils to make progress and that their child's individual needs were met effectively. Very occasionally, progress is less rapid when teaching is not focused on the individual abilities of pupils. Pupils consistently gain places at their first-choice selective senior schools and many achieve scholarships. The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests but evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' books and the school's own assessment data, show attainment overall to be above average in relation to national age-related expectations for pupils of all abilities including those with SEND. Attainment for many of the pupils in some year groups is well above average.
- Pupils are highly effective communicators. They speak confidently, sharing ideas with partners when planning an investigation or in response to assembly questions. This is because of the consistent whole-school approach to the use of 'talking partners', where pupils are encouraged to articulate their thoughts through pair and group work. This was observed in almost all of the lessons during the inspection. The youngest pupils listened attentively to one another at snack time and shared ideas about different musical sounds. The older pupils listened well to each other and followed instructions during a successful harvest festival rehearsal. Younger pupils effectively applied their competent writing skills. They were able to complete a large amount of writing about how to prepare for Diwali, because of teachers' high expectation for the quantity of work to be completed. In an English lesson they confidently and accurately demonstrated knowledge of subordinate and main clauses and understood and articulated newly acquired phonics. Pupils have knowledge of, and effectively use, a wide range of vocabulary when speaking and writing. They glean information from source material to great effect, as evidenced when analysing leaflets and applying the information successfully in designing their own.
- 3.9 Pupils of all ages and abilities have outstanding numeracy skills and knowledge, well above age-expectations. Their mental arithmetic is fast and accurate. They draw on excellent levels of previously learnt and linked concepts, and have confidence in competently explaining their reasoning. Their high achievement and rapid progress is the result of well-planned and suitably paced teaching, offering

different levels of challenge chosen by pupils, and excellent use of assessment information. Pupils apply their skills very effectively to other subjects and in everyday situations; for example, the youngest pupils demonstrated competent understanding of numbers up to and beyond ten, with the most able automatically using information to state that 13 cakes are needed for snacks, as there are 11 pupils in reception and two nursery visitors. All were able to state that 15 cakes were more than the 13 needed.

- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate strong information, communication and technology (ICT) skills which they apply in many subjects. For example pupils use podcasts to complement work undertaken in English on 'Willie Wonka' and to create animations representing the Great Fire of London. They are confident using presentation software, and when coding and blogging. They also use film editing techniques to great effect in their final year at the school, to produce a record of their time there. Pupils are very competent users of ICT because they readily engage in the many planned opportunities to use their skills in cross-curricular work.
- 3.11 Pupils use study skills to good effect. They are able to proofread with care and are able to analyse and deliberate from a young age. Younger pupils justify opinions about why an umbrella is made out of plastic, not felt or tissue, because plastic is waterproof. Pupils use their knowledge of number to extrapolate and solve simple algebraic equations. The most able pupils develop their thinking skills effectively because the lessons are conducted as a suitable pace, so meeting the recommendation from the previous inspection. Pupils were able to hypothesise and analyse, as evidenced when considering the challenges faced by farmers with respect to cocoa fair trade.
- 3.12 Pupils enjoy great success in academic, sporting, dramatic, artistic and musical areas. A large number of pupils gain distinction in their drama examinations and achieve high level results in music examinations. In sports, pupils have achieved team or notable individual success, representing the school at the Independent Schools Association national finals in athletics, cross country, triathlon, swimming, trampolining and county badminton. A number of pupils have achieved scholarships to local independent schools in drama, art and music as well as academic scholarships. Pupils have competed and achieved well in nationally in art and at district level in chess. This is because of the proprietor's commitment to provide facilities and resources which makes best use of the space available.

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 resilience and self-determination. The very youngest pupils were observed carefully pouring their own drinks at snack time, stating, 'I want to do it by myself'. The older pupils recounted how they felt they had gained in self-confidence in maths. 'We keep practising, we've definitely improved and got faster because teachers don't tell us the answer, they help by asking good questions.' Pupils' self-understanding is strong. They are able to recognise that responsibility is an expectation of the school and this sits comfortably with them. All pupils in Year 6 have positions of responsibility and many of the younger pupils complete classroom jobs. They demonstrated high levels of self-confidence when performing at the harvest festival rehearsal. Pupils' positive personal development is supported through the staff mentoring system for older pupils and by the warm, caring school ethos and very effective systems of pastoral care. Leadership actively places a focus on seeing each child as an individual and seeks to bring out the best in them, whatever their abilities or where their interests lie, successfully meeting the school's aims to nurture each pupil's individuality. All the pupils, and a very large majority of the parents who responded to the questionnaire, felt that the school helps pupils to be confident and independent.
- 3.15 Pupils have a strong moral code, seen in their very good behaviour in all lessons and around school. All pupils and all parents who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Pupils are keenly aware of how to conduct themselves in any situation. They share,

take turns, wait for others and support one another both while learning and in play. They respect the classroom rules they helped to create, and they honour the decisions and respect the support given by the 'pupil playground squad' in helping to solve any minor playtime issues. In lessons, pupils were frequently observed respectfully listening to the opinions of others, giving them time and space to talk. They show kindness and courtesy to each other and adults. Pupils genuinely value one another feeling they are part of an extended supportive family, so successfully meeting the school's aims to develop caring, confident pupils. This is because all adults and older pupils in the school community effectively model high stands of manners and right behaviour.

- 3.16 Pupils demonstrated strong decision-making skills both in their personal choice of friendship groups and in choices on how and what to study. A very large majority of the pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt they are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. The very youngest pupils make decisions about the next steps they need to take to achieve goals and are motivated by seeing them recorded on the display board in their classrooms. In mathematics, pupils regularly choose from challenge options if they wish to extend their learning further or need to reinforce new concepts with further practice. Pupils have a clear understanding that chance and failure are part of the learning process and are prepared to apply this philosophy to their learning. Older pupils enjoy the opportunity to take the lead and they felt that teachers were instrumental in helping them to be good decision-makers. In personal, social, citizenship, and health education lessons (PSCHE), pupils articulated the need to take greater responsibility for their actions as they grow older. This is because of the strong school ethos of giving the pupils freedom to make many independent choices at every stage of learning and in everyday life.
- 3.17 Pupils have highly developed social skills and actively apply these in their interactions with each other in lessons. They collaborate well with one another to fulfil tasks, such as in science to pool ideas to plan investigations, or to make suggestions on how to use appropriate scientific equipment accurately. This is because of the consistent commitment by staff to actively engage pupils. Pupils enjoy pair work and small group work and achieve very good results using this approach. Pupils have sophisticated skills of reasoning and negotiation. They value one another's opinions, and consequently work together well to produce high standard results, as seen in the many creative arts projects around the school, such as the group painting echoing the style of Lowry. They are supportive of each other on the games field and during rehearsals where everyone's contribution is valued.
- 3.18 Pupils' contribution to others, the school and the immediate community is excellent. They demonstrate high levels of commitment to improving the life of others. The older pupils learn they can make a difference to the lives of the younger pupils and because of this, understand that their actions can affect those in the wider world too. School choirs visit local communities and pupils raise money in support of a number of local and international charities. The school council initiated movie night. All Year 6 pupils have roles of responsibility as house captains, library monitors or music captains. Pupils relish opportunities to contribute to the school council, volunteer their services as the playground squad and participate in whole school events such as house music and sports competitions.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate good understanding of the different cultures represented in their own school and speak with high levels of respect and tolerance for those from diverse backgrounds in the wider community. The school makes the most of the opportunities available to celebrate difference, with visits from parents representing different faiths and cultures, and through creating opportunities such as setting up 'pen pals' with schools in Australia, or presenting such topics as 'mutual respect', for discussion in assembly. Pupils have a good understanding of other cultures, as seen in their art work based on cloth weavings from Ghana.
- 3.20 Pupils have an excellent understanding of staying safe and keeping healthy. From an early age their knowledge of staying safe online is of a very high standard. In discussion pupils could explain, various measures to check validity of websites, how to ensure that information is reliable and when to get help if they are concerned. They are also aware of the benefits of exercise, sleep and a balanced diet

through a comprehensive science and PSHCE programme of study. Pupils could articulate how to make healthy choices from food available at lunch. They put their knowledge of healthy exercise into practise through the many opportunities to exercise in sports lessons. Governors and school leaders have ensured facilities, particularly outdoors spaces, are available to enable pupils to enjoy and benefit from a range of physical activities. Pupils understand the challenges of staying safe in the wider community supported by a recent school visit to a local safety centre, where they completed activities and challenges to put safety advice into practise.

3.21 Pupils have a comprehensive understanding of the non-material world. They embraced the spiritual aspect of their harvest festival rehearsal and had a collective enjoyment of both their own and others' contributions. Pupils have a deep appreciation for the natural world taking delight in creating imaginary stick figures when whittling wood, or squealing with delight in the joy of a shared experience testing the waterproof qualities of plastic on a teacher's raincoat whilst the teacher was in it! They spoke with amazement of the variety in nature when spotting a rare butterfly on 'go wild day'. They engage effectively with nature producing some outstanding work re-using every day materials, in art. This is because of the many opportunities taken by the leadership and governance to provide learning in the natural environment and so engender in the pupils a deep appreciation of it.

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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 proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. 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 Vivien Sergeant Reporting inspector

Dr James Raymond Compliance team inspector (Headmaster, GSA school)

Mr Mike Crossley Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPs school)