

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### St George's School, Edgbaston

Full Name of the School	<b>St George's School, Edgbaston</b>
DCSF Number	<b>330/6000</b>
Early Years Number	<b>260519</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>3861455</b>
Address	<b>31 Calthorpe Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 1RX.</b>
Telephone Number	<b>0121 625 0398</b>
Fax Number	<b>0121 625 3340</b>
Email Address	<b>admin@sgse.co.uk</b>
Headmistress	<b>Miss Hilary Phillips</b>
Chairman of Governors	<b>Mr Simon Topman</b>
Age Range	<b>2½ to 18</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 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 statutory requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage were not inspected as part of this inspection.

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.

# CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION .....	1
	Characteristics of the School .....	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION .....	3
	The Educational Experience Provided .....	3
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	4
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils .....	6
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	8
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS .....	10
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	10
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community .....	11
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT ....	13
	The Quality of Governance .....	13
	The Quality of Leadership and Management .....	13
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	15
	Overall Conclusions .....	15
	Next Steps.....	16
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE .....	17
	List of Inspectors .....	17

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 St George's School, Edgbaston was founded in 1999 from the merger of two schools: Edgbaston Church of England College for Girls, founded in 1886 and Edgbaston College, founded at the end of the nineteenth century. The school is situated one mile from the centre of Birmingham and occupies a six acre site. It is an independent co-educational school in Birmingham for children from age 2 ½ to 18. The headmistress has been in post since the school was founded.
- 1.2 The school has a Christian foundation which aims to embrace Christian values in all they do. Its ethos statement also recognises that the school community reflects the multi-cultural diversity of Birmingham and that this has a significant influence on the way the school applies its Christian values. The school offers an education which balances breadth in the curriculum with strong, secure foundations in literacy and numeracy. It aims to: maximise individual achievement within a caring community; develop respect and responsibility in all relationships; promote friendship, fair play and equality; and create opportunities for personal development in a changing and challenging world. It is divided into the lower school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for the youngest children, and the upper school, including the sixth form.
- 1.3 The school currently has 351 pupils from Birmingham and the West Midlands. Fifteen are in the EYFS, 60 in lower school and 276 in upper school including 46 in the sixth form. Boys outnumber girls in all year groups and the overall boy to girl ratio is over 3 to 1. About half of the EYFS pupils continue with their education in the lower school. Thereafter most pupils continue to age sixteen and some to eighteen. The school participates in the government nursery scheme for pupils living in the Birmingham area.
- 1.4 When children start in the EYFS, most of them are achieving in line with age-related expectations in all areas of learning. Pupils' ability on entry to the lower school varies considerably between pupils. The average ability of pupils in Years 1 to 6 is wide, ranging from below to above average. The overall average cannot be summarised, because of the small numbers of pupils. In the upper school, the results of standardised tests indicate that the ability of pupils is above the national average. At sixth form level the ability profile is similar to the national average for pupils embarking on A-level courses. If pupils are performing in line with their abilities, GCSE results should be above the national average for maintained schools and A-level results should be in line with the corresponding average.
- 1.5 Applications to the school are considered on an individual basis. In the lower school, entrance is through "taster days", references and assessment. Entry to the upper school is on the basis of an entrance examination, informal interviews, references and any further information received. The school offers twelve places each year to pupils who do not perform well in the entrance examination but would benefit from what the school has to offer. Scholarships and bursaries are also awarded to a number of pupils.
- 1.6 The school has a large learning support department. Twenty two pupils have statements of special educational needs (SEN). A further 128 have learning difficulties or disabilities (LDD) of various kinds including dyslexia, autistic spectrum disorders and other specific learning difficulties. Some pupils are funded by local authorities.
- 1.7 A wide range of ethnic groups is represented, reflecting the multi-cultural nature of the city. The largest group, just over one in four, is of Asian origin. A significant number of these pupils do not speak English as their first language. There has been a recent increase in the

number of pupils from China and Korea, particularly at sixth form level. Thirteen pupils currently receive support for their English. The school was last inspected by ISI in 2002. The school's EYFS provision was inspected by Ofsted in July 2008.

- 1.8 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 education provided by St George's Edgbaston is consistent with its aims. It provides good education for all pupils through a curriculum which gives pupils a secure foundation of knowledge, skills and understanding. It is well planned, is set out in writing and is accessible to all pupils including those requiring learning support. Particular strengths of the curriculum include its provision for the very young in the EYFS, its specialist help for pupils with English as an additional language (EAL), and its specialist provision for those with SEN and LDD. Parents value the quality of education highly and recognise that much effort goes into preparing their children for adult life.
- 2.2 The curriculum in the EYFS is outstanding in meeting the needs of children and fulfilling the school's aims. Staff have reviewed their practice against all six EYFS areas of learning (personal, social and emotional development; communication, language and literacy; problem solving, reasoning and numeracy; knowledge and understanding of the world; physical development; and creative development). They plan the children's activities so that the six areas are seamlessly linked and learning objectives are designed to the unique interests and aptitudes of each child.
- 2.3 The curriculum in the rest of the lower school is well planned, is of good quality and has a strong focus on literacy and, in particular, on phonics. Appropriate emphasis is also placed on creative writing including poetry, writing for different audiences, spelling and punctuation and presentation. A good example of the emphasis on spelling was seen in a Year 6 lesson when children were taught silent letter words, such as *pneumonia* and encouraged to write interesting sentences. The school also focuses effectively on the development of mathematical skills, with a strong emphasis on number. However, there is limited evidence in pupils' workbooks of mathematical investigations and problem solving.
- 2.4 Lower school pupils study the full range of National Curriculum subjects, with due attention paid to the scientific and technological, the aesthetic and the physical aspects of their development. The time allocated to humanities, social studies and music is less than usual to accommodate the priority given to literacy and numeracy but it is adequate overall. Information and communications technology (ICT) is taught well as a discrete subject but despite some examples such as Year 4's excellent autumn alliteration poems which were creative and very well presented using a computer, ICT skills are not sufficiently applied in the broad range of subjects where such skills are necessary. Personal, social and health education (PSE) is successfully integrated throughout the lower school.
- 2.5 Upper school curriculum planning is good with subject departments having clear schemes of work and handbooks. The recent introduction of departmental reviews is beginning to prove effective in ensuring consistency and good practice as well as leading change. The curriculum is well balanced. In Years 7 to 9, English, mathematics and science are supplemented by French with Spanish offered to the more able in Year 8. There is a full range of humanities subjects, PSE, physical education (PE) and games. Technical, aesthetic and creative skills are developed by the study of art, drama, music, design and technology including food and ICT. In Years 10 and 11 most pupils take eight or nine GCSEs with compulsory English, mathematics and double award science. The range of subjects is viewed positively by pupils as is the provision of study skills.
- 2.6 In the sixth form pupils follow AS and A-level courses in subjects studied at GCSE and options in psychology and government and politics. The recently introduced general studies programme in Year 12 provides students with a breadth of experience. There is also an

additional enrichment programme which is part of the formal curriculum. It includes such topics as money management, survival cookery and table tennis, although not everything is available for all sixth formers and some students had reservations about its content.

- 2.7 The new upper school PSE programme builds on the major strengths of the school, delivering a comprehensive and relevant course. The system of monitoring pupils' development, together with teachers' and pupils' evaluations, ensures that the course is relevant to pupils.
- 2.8 In the school as a whole, there is a rich programme of extra-curricular activities and links with parents and the wider community are strong. Work experience in Year 10 allows pupils to put skills developed in PSE into practice, applying the principles of the "Get a Job" unit of careers education. Further support for the next stage of education or employment is provided by the Independent Schools Careers Organisation supported by individual testing and reports for all pupils in Year 11. A dedicated higher education resource room supports the work done by sixth form tutors in preparing Years 12 and 13 for their university applications.
- 2.9 Pupils who require additional learning support are helped by the learning support department, whose influence is strong. The key element for all age groups is flexibility to provide a curriculum that meets the needs of different children. For instance, in each year group, a small group of pupils with particular difficulties follow a modified curriculum with a greater allocation of English and mathematics. Hitherto, the learning support department has not been asked to focus on the needs of the gifted and talented because the school has only recently begun to identify such pupils. Such pupils already do well but the school recognises that more could be done to support them.
- 2.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

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

- 2.11 Throughout the school, pupils are well educated in relation to their different abilities. All pupils acquire secure knowledge and understanding, and an ability to use academic and other skills successfully. They achieve well in public examinations and there are good individual and group achievements.
- 2.12 When children start at St George's in the EYFS, they arrive with a range of pre-school experiences and most are achieving in line with age related expectations in all areas of learning. They make very good progress according to their ability so that many of them reach a good or very good level of achievement by the time they enter Year 1. Just over half of children are working beyond the Early Learning Goals.
- 2.13 Pupils in Years 1 to 6 make good progress across the full range of subjects, including reading, spelling, verbal and non-verbal reasoning. There is no significant difference in the performance of girls and boys or ethnic groups.
- 2.14 Lower school pupils settle well, apply themselves to work, behave well and enjoy what they do. They develop good levels of knowledge and understanding across the subjects of the curriculum. Pupils are articulate. They read fluently with understanding and other literacy skills are demonstrated in varied, lively and well presented ways. Good examples were pupils in a Reception class lesson when children built words using phonics and older pupils' perceptive and sensitive poetry. In some lessons observed, pupils worked independently by showing initiative or by asking open ended questions, finding answers or ways of doing things and communicating them. A good example of this, which also illustrated good cooperation between pupils, was in a games lesson when two teams of boys had to work

together to cross a gap using only limited PE apparatus. Another good example was a Year 5 mathematics lesson on line graphs when, in addition to the construction of the graphs, pupils drew intelligent, imaginative conclusions.

- 2.15 In the upper school, there were many examples of pupils demonstrating that they can successfully think creatively and critically, use knowledge and demonstrate skills such as listening, writing, numeracy and, to a lesser extent, ICT. Good examples of creative and critical thinking were seen in a Year 13 class studying symbolism and imagery in the text of the "Ancient Mariner". In religious studies Year 8 pupils in a small-group were creative in their discussion of what Jesus may have looked like and one pupil was able to hypothesise his ideas on Jesus in the abstract. Another good example was a Year 13 history class analysing the Nazi-Soviet Pact and understanding how unlikely this alliance was.
- 2.16 The atmosphere in lessons is positive. Pupils listen attentively and contribute well to discussion. A good example of this was in a Year 9 history lesson on World War One where pupils were confident in reading, suggesting ideas and learning from each other. Mathematical competence was displayed in different subjects, such as the way that Year 9 pupils handled statistics in geography to produce accurate graphs of population growth.
- 2.17 Performance in GCSE and at A-level is broadly in line with pupils' abilities. Over the period 2005 to 2007, the last three years for which national comparative data was available at the time of the inspection, GCSE results were above the average for maintained schools. Results have improved over time, and in 2008 maintained the higher standard achieved in the two preceding years. The school has started to use a standardised system for the measurement of GCSE performance in relation to ability, and although only a limited quantity of data is currently available, the indications are that progress to GCSE is above the national norms for pupils of similar ability. Sixth-form pupils achieved A-level results that were in line with the average for maintained schools.
- 2.18 In public examinations, as in lessons, there are no significant differences in attainment between boys and girls. Pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities achieve results beyond expectations, reflecting the strong level of support for such children. They make good progress.
- 2.19 In terms of study skills, upper school pupils' capacity to take notes is good. This is a particular feature in humanities subjects. Pupils work cooperatively and they are good at supporting one another. Good examples were in Year 10 art and in Year 10 biology when pupils shared their knowledge and worked together on the task. Support for peers was very evident in a Year 7 English lesson where pupils helped a boy learn a poem. In another Year 7 lesson, pupils supported each other very well when exploring communication skills in preparation for a visit to a home for the elderly.
- 2.20 In the main, upper school pupils enjoy lessons. This happens most when they are given the opportunity to work independently. Examples were seen of pupils doing this in Year 10 geography using laptops, in art research on Georgia O'Keefe and Salvador Dali in Years 10 and 11, and also in Year 13 psychology in an exercise on phobias. However, there are also examples of learning becoming constrained when pupils are not given enough opportunity to show initiative by asking their own questions and finding answers.

- 2.21 Pupils do well in a wide range of other achievements. The school is successful in Dance UK awards and London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art awards with nearly two-thirds of upper school entrants achieving merit or distinction certificates in 2008. Upper school pupils participate in the national "Maths Challenge" competition. The St George's Leadership Awards scheme has proved successful, laying the basis for pupils to proceed onto the Duke of Edinburgh's Award which has just started. Individual pupils have become members of Birmingham schools' choirs, orchestras and bands.
- 2.22 In both lower and upper schools, netball and football teams participate in regional leagues and provide valuable opportunities for pupils who would not otherwise play in teams and compete. Individuals gain honours in a range of sports: tennis, cricket, athletics and netball. Last year the school came second in the St Columba Drama Trophy in competition with all Birmingham schools. The "Lines Aloud" competition run by the school for the last two years gives pupils in Years 7 to 10 the chance to display their spoken skills. Speeches seen and heard by inspectors were excellent.
- 2.23 At all ages, the achievement of pupils supported by the learning support department meets academic predictions, with some students performing comfortably above predictions. SEN pupils and LDD pupils make rapid progress academically, socially and personally. A particular feature of note is the results achieved by EAL pupils. They have been consistently high over recent years.

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

- 2.24 Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good throughout the school; in the EYFS it is outstanding. Thus the school's aims to create a caring community with opportunities for personal development in a changing and challenging world are very well met. Pupils are developing into well-balanced, responsible young people.
- 2.25 In the EYFS, children are very much part of the community of the lower school. Foundation Stage children take part in assembly each morning and like the older children, respond well and become more self-aware when they receive house point badges and celebrate their birthdays. Their increasing sensitivity to others is very clear in the way they are very pleased and excited when a child is mentioned for something good that they have done and when they receive a certificate which they can take home to share with their parents. Pupils also join lower school pupils for the Christmas play, sports day and Church services. They respond well to this, gaining in self-confidence. Developing social awareness is visible in the relationship between the younger and older children. This is very strong because older children show a responsible, kind and caring relationship towards younger pupils.
- 2.26 In the rest of the lower school, pupils develop well spiritually, showing that they can reflect on their feelings about events in school, in people and in the wider world. Some beautiful and very perceptive poems were written by Year 4 pupils on emotions such as joy, hate and fear. In Year 6 biology pupils showed empathy in understanding the angst linked to anorexia. Pupils are becoming confident about themselves and their achievements during their time in school. The weekly celebration assembly, where any achievement however small is celebrated enables each child to feel special. Inspectors noted numerous other instances of achievement being recognised; for example, beautiful sewing was acknowledged in Reception class, an unsinkable boat made by a pupil was praised in Year 2.
- 2.27 In the upper school there is equally clear evidence of well-developing spiritual awareness and pupils' growth in confidence as they get older. This was particularly evident during inspection with performances by a large number of pupils in the "Lines Aloud" speaking competition. Pupils are developing an understanding of the esoteric and intangible. For

- instance, Year 8 pupils talked in class about the “aura” of Jesus and older pupils in Year 11 English demonstrated good understanding of “The Old Man of the Sea” and its representation of Christ and his sacrifice.
- 2.28 Moral development is also strong. In the lower school, rules are displayed all round the building and individual classes formulate their own rules. The children say these are very fair and help them to feel safe and secure. The lower school is a very happy place and pupils contribute much. Many of the values that the school promotes foster attitudes of co-operation, tolerance, empathy and respect and children reflect these in their behaviour and attitudes to both fellow pupils and adults.
- 2.29 In the upper school, pupils have an increasing awareness of their responsibilities to the global environment through the work of the Eco-club, which works to improve the school environment through recycling. Their involvement in an environmental project with schools from Italy and Turkey has also helped them to develop and share opinions and ideas with different nations and cultures. Year 10 pupils responded thoughtfully to an assembly on the moral dilemmas facing a Nazi soldier. In the upper school council, pupils have reviewed and updated the anti-bullying policy. Year 8 pupils have considered the effect of bullying in their comprehensive PSE programme and in a Year 9 ICT lesson, they achieved a good understanding of the issues surrounding cyber-bullying.
- 2.30 Pupils’ social development is very good and the school’s view that it is an inclusive community is well justified. There is a rich cultural mix and children know and respect each other’s faiths and cultures. They recognise that faith plays an important part in people’s lives and in conversation talk freely about the different faiths represented in the school. Year 11 pupils affirmed this strongly regardless of age, gender and ethnic background. Lower sixth students spoke of the mutual support they offer each other and the school’s “Buddy” system where older pupils befriend younger ones works very well. In terms of wider social awareness, pupils are very familiar with charitable giving by sponsoring a child in Russia, visiting a home for the elderly and taking part in Remembrance Day activities. Pupils participate in Red Nose Day and Children In Need; sixth formers dressed up as Smurfs to help raise money for the charity. Pupils have a very good understanding of the significance of these events.
- 2.31 Some opportunities exist for some pupils to take responsibility although there is room for further development. In the lower school, the school council has an elected member from each year group. It meets regularly and deals and discusses issues such as, food, playground equipment, and the school’s bullying policy. Members take pride in their roles and are keen to take ideas and discussion points back to their class. In the upper school, older pupils feel they are not given sufficient opportunity to hold leadership roles and that the school council is not sufficiently used as a vehicle for pupil involvement in the full range of school issues, major and minor. Likewise, the house system is under-used as a means of giving pupils greater responsibility.
- 2.32 Pupils’ cultural development is good. The work they are doing on two international projects, focussing on the environment and music, is contributing to the school’s application for the International School Award through cooperation with schools from a number of European countries. Pupils’ cultural understanding is also strengthened through visits organised by departments to the theatre and galleries as well as overseas trips including the “World Challenge” expedition to Morocco. In the lower school, pupils are given a quiet space at lunchtime to pray and the various festivals of the major faiths are celebrated. In a Year 1 religious education lesson on Diwali a pupil was able to explain to his class very thoroughly the meaning of the festival and why it was celebrated. Plans are also well developed for an exchange with pupils from South Korea. Year 7’s work on African and Egyptian art has

helped expand pupils' horizons as has a recent visit to the city's museum. Older pupils' understanding of government and other public institutions is good, largely as a result of the school's PSE programme.

- 2.33 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

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

- 2.34 The overall good quality of teaching, some of which is outstanding, allows pupils of all abilities to learn successfully. This is a considerable improvement on what was reported in the last report. Pupils comment strongly that they are well supported. In the pupils' questionnaire, almost all confirmed that "the teachers help me learn".
- 2.35 Teaching in the EYFS is outstanding. As a result, pupils become increasingly confident and make excellent progress. Teachers provide a wide range of adult led and child initiated activities. For example, in Reception, a group of boys were encouraged to build a railway track and invited a watching little girl to join them and she became the red engine. Well prepared and organised activities combined with an appropriate and natural presentation encourage each child to develop their language skills and extend their thinking beyond the obvious. For example, the children were asked to feel a range of materials: sand, cotton wool, water, ice pack, and glue. Through questioning they were able to describe the sensations they felt; soft, frosty, crunchy, sticky, cold and so on.
- 2.36 In both upper and lower school, teachers and children enjoy a warm, professional and strong relationship and all members of the community have high expectations. Teachers have a sound knowledge of their subjects. Assessment data on pupils' past achievements is well used. Pupils in the lower school say that teachers give them confidence in what they do and appreciate the attention that they receive and the targets which are set. Lessons are well planned. Teaching groups are often small and teachers know individual pupils very well and are able to plan accordingly. As a result, pupils generally enjoy lessons. However, there is a tendency sometimes for teachers to "talk at" pupils for too long. Tasks that involved the completion of worksheets limited pupils' ability to be independent thinkers.
- 2.37 The quality of teaching for pupils who require additional support is good. That provided within the several specialist programmes run by the school to meet individual needs is outstanding. For example, the specialist literacy programme, "Toe by Toe" has raised the literacy levels of all participants dramatically. The learning support department works closely with the local authority Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) team to support its ASD pupils. Individual education plans for SEN pupils are properly maintained and suggest suitable adaptations to lessons to enable pupils to access the curriculum. Most staff are familiar with the guidance and use it effectively to support the pupils' progress, although a few do not vary their approaches sufficiently to meet the needs of pupils with specific learning difficulties.
- 2.38 Marking within the lower school is generally good; teachers make useful comments, which help pupils to understand what they need to do to improve. The use of ticks and dots with pupils progressing to convert dots into ticks as they master the work is very successful and well understood by the pupils. A new system of assessment and tracking is in place, giving standardised scores and reading and spelling ages. It is beginning to be used very effectively to target future work for pupils. In the upper school, the marking policy is clear and most teachers follow it very closely. For example, there is valuable formative marking in some subjects such as English, history and geography. However, some books and files in other subjects indicated that work had not been marked for a period of time and the marking did

not sufficiently make clear to pupils what they have to do to improve. A few pupils commented correctly that they would benefit from more use of target-setting and awareness of their levels of achievement.

- 2.39 The policy to identify gifted and talented pupils is in its early stages. These pupils already do well in school but in some lessons they are not sufficiently stretched. Year 8 and 9 pupils commented that if they finish a class activity early, there is sometimes no extension work. The school is aware of this issue and is pursuing it with urgency.
- 2.40 Resources in the lower school are good and effectively used. An increasing focus on school trips linked to the curriculum is benefitting pupils' understanding. In the upper school, resources are adequate and good use is made of them, although some are beginning to become outdated. The school is aware of this and has recently provided departments with their own budgets to allow them increased flexibility in their purchases. Resources to help pupils who require additional support are uneven. There is good resource support for ASD pupils; however, resources for pupils with specific learning difficulties are in some respects, inadequate. There is a lack of laptops and other useful ICT aids that additional support pupils would enjoy and would enhance their learning. Stock in the library has been carefully vetted to encourage readers including the provision of "easy read" texts and the lower school special needs coordinator has developed a small area outside the library as an attractive work area for withdrawal support.
- 2.41 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

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

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

- 3.1 The quality of the care is outstanding. Staff are extremely committed to implementing effective strategies to promote pupils' well being so they give high priority to welfare, health and safety. Staff know and understand their pupils well and so can provide the support they need, academically and personally.
- 3.2 In the lower school, the inclusion of a discussion on individual pupils in every weekly staff meeting emphasises the quality of care. In one instance, a boy struggling with organisational skills and with a passion for Star Wars was set the task of working towards becoming a Jedi Knight through meeting set targets on a well-devised individual Jedi Training Programme. In the upper school, form tutors work hard to oversee pupils' academic and personal development; pupils value their role and the quality of what they provide. Formal tutor group meetings are short but tutors also teach their tutees for PSE providing more formal contact. The real support from tutors comes in less formal contacts with pupils during the school day. Pupils of all ages say that there is someone to go to if they need help though some older pupils disagree with this. The additional support from a "staff mentor" for pupils in Year 11 is warmly welcomed by the pupils as a support for their preparations for GCSE and they would like to see this scheme extended into Year 10.
- 3.3 Throughout the school there is a relaxed, trusting relationship between the pupils who need additional support and the learning support team. This is clear both within and outside the classroom. This supportive atmosphere also encourages pupils to be sympathetic to each other. Strategies that learning support staff employ to help pupils are devised on an individual need basis and are flexible and imaginative. Examples include working with friendship targets, behaviour targets, preparing for circle time, counselling and social-communication games and activities.
- 3.4 The school has a generous number of teaching assistants who are able to provide valuable individual support for the children, ensuring that pupils have an adult who understands their needs and can act as an intermediary with other staff and pupils. Many of these assistants are undertaking some form of professional training with the encouragement of the school.
- 3.5 The behaviour of pupils is very good, setting the tone for a quiet yet productive and happy climate for learning. Pupils feel good behaviour is the expected norm and bad behaviour is dealt with very well. In both schools, there is a clear policy regarding rewards and sanctions. Most pupils understand and support the system, even though some older pupils say there is inconsistency in the way it is applied. The lower school has clearly displayed rules and aims to promote "Friendship, Fair Play and Equality" and pupils interviewed felt these were fair and just. The policy on bullying is clear and, in the judgement of both pupils and inspectors, works well.
- 3.6 Measures to safeguard and promote pupils' health are successful. Child protection measures are in place; all staff, governors and others have been subject to security verification. Policies are in place to ensure the regular updating of training for all staff and governors, including interagency training for the nominated child protection officer. The premises are checked regularly for fire and other health and safety risks, supported by a written health and safety policy. Comprehensive risk assessments for trips and visits are carried out appropriately. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained correctly and the school has addressed as best it can, the requirements of those with disabilities.

- 3.7 Facilities for pupils who are sick are appropriate. There are dedicated sick rooms in both lower and upper schools for pupils who are ill. Medicines are located securely. There is an accident record which is completed correctly.
- 3.8 Pupils are encouraged to take regular exercise and have many opportunities to take part in sport. There are opportunities to play in teams but also options such as the fitness suite for those who want flexibility. In the conventional dining hall, most pupils eat very sensibly with a good balance in what they choose. The ambience in the hall is good and pupils behave well with minimum supervision necessary.
- 3.9 Some pupils have criticised the food and aspects of the environment in which it is served. They refer to food running out, especially vegetarian if they have to eat towards the end of lunchtime. In the questionnaires, they also speak of rubbish bins in the dining area overflowing. The school has made significant efforts in recent months to address these issues and has plans to continue careful monitoring.
- 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 wider community is outstanding. In the lower school, parents' responses to the questionnaire reflected a high level of satisfaction with particular reference to helpful staff, high expectations and the happy environment although there were a few concerns regarding an excess of homework. This positive view was reinforced in inspectors' interviews with parents during the inspection. In the upper school, parents are equally enthusiastic. Out of the substantial number of responses to the parents' questionnaire, virtually all felt that the school helps their child make adequate progress. Parents were particularly positive about the help and guidance given by teachers and about the curriculum.
- 3.12 In the EYFS, parents are delighted to feel part of their children's learning. They are kept fully informed about their children's progress and curriculum information is readily available as are the detailed individual records of their child.
- 3.13 The remainder of the lower school has developed an equally strong partnership. The head welcomes pupils and parents to school each morning and ensures he is at the school door at the end of each day. Informal coffee mornings have been arranged inviting parents to come and discuss all aspects of their child's work. In the upper school, parents have good opportunities to be involved in activities such as speech night, sport and drama. Particularly appreciated is e-mail contact with teachers. Parents also find the website very useful for obtaining rapid information about the school's activities. The option exists for parents to have lunch with their child.
- 3.14 Parents of pupils needing additional support are very positive about the help their children receive and appreciate the individual care and attention that is available for them. Many said that they are delighted that their children's individual needs have been identified by the school.
- 3.15 Parents and prospective parents receive clear and full information about the school in its prospectus, on the website and through various publications. The excellent lower school newsletter and the colourful upper school 'News' celebrate pupils' achievements in every aspect of school life as well as informing parents of all that is happening.

- 3.16 Reports to parents on pupils' progress are easy to read and generally make clear what pupils have to do to improve. In the lower school they contain standardised scores, spelling and reading ages. There are regular parent evenings in both lower and upper schools.
- 3.17 The few complaints received by the school are dealt with in accordance with an appropriate procedure available to all parents. All recent complaints have been dealt with swiftly and conscientiously by the head, with only one going to appeal.
- 3.18 The school is building strong relationships within the local community. Year 4 held a cake sale raising a considerable sum for a local hostel for the homeless and there was a school harvest festival with the food collected distributed to the needy. The lower school has initiated football, netball, cricket and rounders leagues for local small independent schools and the school partakes in the Aston Villa Schools' Festival. The community arm of Aston Villa Football Club gives free coaching sessions each week and in return the club use the school facilities for their Saturday morning community development programme. In the summer term the school enjoys a day's professional tennis coaching at The Priory Tennis Club and watches a centre court match. The whole-school carol service and end of year Thanksgiving service are held in the local church to which parents are very welcome.
- 3.19 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 council of governors provides enthusiastic, effective oversight. The support it gives and decisions it makes ensure that the school meets its aims. It works closely with the school's managers and shares the headmistress's vision of the present and the future development of the school.
- 4.2 Governors have a clear, independent view of the strengths and weaknesses of the school; strategies to maintain strengths and addresses weaknesses are in place. Governors also have a clear insight into longer term objectives for the school.
- 4.3 Recent redefining of governor roles has ensured a good structure which is clear in most respects. The structure guarantees the oversight of the school by the nomination of experienced governors for child protection, education, risk and risk management, and marketing. Governors are fully aware of their responsibilities for the welfare and health and safety of pupils. They ensure sound financial management.
- 4.4 There is a high level of formal and informal contact between governors and staff. This is achieved by governor presence at formal school events such as Speech Night and informal contacts such as frequent Friday lunchtime visits. The education committee has established a rotational plan for an in-depth meeting and discussion with each school department and has already met with mathematics, science and lower school departments. The chairman has conducted interviews with sixth formers to help prepare them for life beyond St George's.

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

- 4.5 The headmistress has a clear vision for the school. She interprets well the juxtaposition of the school's Christian ethos and the multi-cultural, multi-faith, multi-ability nature of the school community. The result is an inclusive school in which everyone feels valued and in which all produce of their best. The headmistress's enthusiasm and educational priorities encourage all staff. The management structure established by her is becoming increasingly effective.
- 4.6 The senior management team, including the head of lower school, are in full agreement with the vision and future development of the school and provide effective management for its day-to day running. Monitoring of all aspects of the school is good. The deputy head and the head of pastoral care play a critical role in the identification, development and implementation of strategies to ensure good educational practices and effective communication at all levels. There is a meaningful school development plan.
- 4.7 The lower school head, supported by the staff, provides effective management for the lower school. In particular, this is clear in the sensibly constructed lower school development plan analysing the school's needs and setting priorities. At all times he works closely with the teachers giving motivation and sharing his vision in line with the whole-school aims and ethos. In the EYFS, leadership and management are excellent. All adults in the setting are suitably qualified, the staffing ratio is appropriate and they combine together to be a strong team, each taking responsibility as a key person for each child.

- 4.8 Heads of departments have good access to the headmistress and senior managers through the school's "Open Door" policy and feel well supported. Heads of department consistently involve all members of departments in decision making, welcoming individual opinions and suggestions for taking work forward and implementing change. Self-review schemes focus on the performance of departments and include scrutiny of pupils' written work and interviews with them. In the lower school, the newly-developed role of subject co-ordinator is developing well. A useful paper on their role has recently been produced. The school properly intends to monitor developments carefully. The learning support department is extremely well managed and has excellent communication with both lower and upper schools.
- 4.9 In the school as a whole, staff are highly motivated and morale is good. There is an atmosphere of mutual support and trust throughout the staffroom. The reintroduction of departmental budgets has been welcomed by staff and has led to a feeling of departmental ownership of resources and greater control of forward planning. Newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are welcomed into the school and feel well supported and mentored in line with the national scheme for the induction of NQTs. Administrative and maintenance staff work hard and serve the school very well.
- 4.10 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.11 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

## **5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

### **Overall Conclusions**

- 5.1 St George's School fully meets its aims. It provides a positive educational experience, matched to the needs of its pupils. It achieves results in public examinations that reflect its commitment to maximising individual achievement. The majority of pupils either meet or exceed their predicted potential. Pupil's personal development is good and is supported by outstanding pastoral support. Teaching throughout the school is good. Teachers know their pupils and generally provide work that is well suited to their needs. This is particularly the case in relation to pupils who need learning support. There is an atmosphere of respect for each other. There are outstanding links with parents, who are very satisfied with the school's care for their children. Leadership in the school is strong and well-directed. The governing body knows the strengths and weaknesses of the school and is both supportive and ambitious for the future. There are still issues to address. For example, pupils sometimes lack opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and in terms of their personal development, their voice in the management of the school is not sufficiently heard. There remains the issue, raised in the last report, of a few teachers not being sufficiently equipped to meet the needs of all pupils in the school. These issues and others are already being addressed by governors and senior managers; the school now has the will, means and imagination to address them.
- 5.2 The school has made good progress in most areas since its last inspection. The quality of teaching is now more consistent with the majority of lessons observed being good or better. Changes have been made to the systems of recording pupils' marks and assessment. There is a whole school policy on marking which departments are following, though there is still scope for further formative comments in books and files, to assist pupils' progress. The reports produced for parents are informative and promote further progress. Data on pupils when they enter the school and as they move through the school is now available and is used in planning lessons and assessment. School registers and staff background checks now meet all regulatory standards. Management systems and structures now ensure that responsibilities are appropriate in all parts of the school and suitable links between senior and middle management are in place.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

## Next Steps

- 5.4 In order for the school to improve further, it should take the following steps.
1. Raise standards by:
    - providing more opportunities for pupils to take greater responsibility for their learning by asking their own questions, researching answers and communicating these effectively;
    - in the upper school in particular, extend the use of ICT within subjects;
    - in the upper school, provide more opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions and contribute to the management of the school including further improvement in the role and functioning of the school council;
    - providing more in-service training for teachers who are not specialists in learning support so that they employ a range of suitable teaching strategies to help pupils learn;
    - ensuring that all marking is up to date and complies with the school's marking policies by providing appropriate formative comment.
  2. Improve the effectiveness of the school's governance and management by:
    - developing the role of lower school subject coordinators.
  3. For pupils who require additional learning support, provide a better variety of ICT aids and programmes.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 24<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> November 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, parents and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the two medical rooms. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

### List of Inspectors

Mr Paul Armitage	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Angela Culley	Headmistress, ISA school
Mrs Pat Guy	Head of language and learning, GSA school
Mrs Pamela Johnson	Head of boarding, GSA school
Mr Simon Mozley	Deputy head, GSA school
Mrs Lesley Norton	Head of department, SHMIS school
Mr Gareth Price	Head of 4-18 school, SHMIS school