

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL  
(ISC)**

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**INSPECTION OF**

**ST DOMINIC'S SCHOOL**

**by the**

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE  
(ISI)**

**on**

**12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### St Dominic's School

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Full Name of the School   | <b>St Dominic's School</b>                               |
| DfES Number               | <b>860/6005</b>  |
| Registered Charity Number | <b>504645</b>  |
| Address                   | <b>Bargate Street, Brewood, Staffordshire, ST19 9BA.</b> |
| Telephone Number          | <b>01902 850248</b>                                      |
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| Email Address             | <b>enquiries@stdominicsschool.co.uk</b>                  |
| Headteacher               | <b>Mrs S White</b>                                       |
| Chairman of Governors     | <b>Mr P Lopez</b>  |
| Age Range                 | <b>2-16 years</b>  |
| Gender                    | <b>Female 2-16; Male 2-7</b>                             |
| Inspection Dates          | <b>12<sup>th</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007</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 has 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.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 St Dominic's School, Brewwood, provides a broad Christian education for girls from 2 to 16 and for boys from 2 to 7 years of age. Founded by a Dominican Order in 1920, it welcomes pupils of all faiths and of none. The school occupies its own grounds in the village of Brewwood, to the North of Wolverhampton.
- 1.2 St Dominic's aims to promote "growth in mind, body and spirit", through "the development of the whole person, including each child's spiritual, physical and moral well-being as well as academic progress." In recent years all pupils have continued in education when they leave at 16. The school opens a sixth form in September 2007, for which they have received approval from the Department for Education and Skills. It provides funded nursery education for 26 pupils.
- 1.3 The roll has increased since the inspection of 2001 and at the time of the inspection was 300 from 2 to 16 with two boys, part time, in the foundation stage. Of these, 38 were under five years of age, 85 in Years 1-6 and 177 in Years 7-11. The great majority of girls remain in the school to 16.
- 1.4 The school admits pupils on the basis of its assessment of their ability to access the education provided, but is not fully selective. In the foundation stage and junior department, the process involves trial days in the school, during which discrete assessments are made. Admission to the senior department is based on assessments in mathematics, English and both verbal and non-verbal reasoning. On the evidence of the school's non-verbal tests, the ability of pupils is broad for an independent school, with many very able pupils and a significant minority of pupils of average and below average ability, including 56 identified as needing some degree of learning support and five with English as an additional language. Overall, the ability is above the national average. If the pupils perform in line with their ability in national tests and public examinations, then results on average should be above the national average for all maintained schools.
- 1.5 The pupils come from households in which parents are engaged in business and the professions. The school reports that families strongly support their children's education and progress.
- 1.6 At the time of the inspection, in the temporary absence of an assistant head, the headteacher was overseeing pastoral care and welfare.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The school divides the Foundation Stage into Nursery (under three), Prep (under four) and Reception (four to five).

## **2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

### **The Educational Experience Provided**

- 2.1 The pupils of St Dominic's receive an outstandingly broad, balanced and diverse education. Its range, diversity and integrated planning have improved since the last inspection and fulfil the school's aim of developing mind, body and spirit. It has particular strength in the performing arts. The unity and continuity of experience now established both within and between the junior and senior departments have created a truly unified 2 to 16 experience, soon to become 2 to 18. An important feature is the strength of provision throughout the school in the performing arts, and especially in the opportunities for dance, theatre and singing.
- 2.2 The curriculum is remarkably well and consistently planned. All subject co-ordinators and subject heads plan according to a common format to ensure that all aspects of delivery are attended to in a consistent manner throughout the school. This is done in a way that ensures attention not only to content and skills but also to personal development, to links with other subjects and to catering for the needs of pupils with differing abilities and preferred learning styles. Every subject at every stage has analysed the contribution made to the five elements of Every Child Matters, as has the library co-ordinator. Its principles are embedded in school life inside and outside the classroom. The co-ordination between the different phases of the school is one of its outstanding features.
- 2.3 This formal curriculum is then extended and enriched to an outstanding degree. Most subjects include a range of valuable field trips and visits to museums and galleries. There are also many opportunities at all ages for residential experiences both within and beyond the United Kingdom, such as a field trip to the World War II battle sites in Belgium, and within the school itself, such as the geography progression field day in which girls in Years 6 and 7 work together on a common project. The extended day, praised in the last report, has been retained, giving every girl the encouragement to be involved in a wide range of alternative experiences, both academic and non-academic, and so to develop her interests and broaden her mind. The musical and dramatic life of the school is particularly strong, but there are opportunities for competitive sports also.
- 2.4 Continuity between the different stages of the school is a further strength, underpinned by the fact that the deputy chairs both junior and senior curriculum committees. Form tutors meet to discuss each pupil and pass on relevant information about her academic and social development. Heads of Key Stage are in constant contact with each other. Particular attention has been paid to transition from the pre-prep to junior, through the '2 and 3 Club', and from junior to senior through the '6 and 7 Club'. In many subjects, for example geography, specific transitional activities are established between junior and senior. As a result, girls make smooth and uninterrupted progress from one stage to the next.
- 2.5 The extent and effectiveness of support for girls in need of some degree of learning support has been maintained and further developed since the last inspection, when it was already a strength. Support for pupils with learning difficulties is managed by the special needs co-ordinator, based in the senior building, while support for very able pupils is managed by the co-ordinator for gifted and talented pupils, based in the junior building. Learning support assistants spend much time in the lessons, where pupils can receive individual help without missing regular class work. Individual lessons are provided for pupils, whenever possible during un-timetabled time. Once pupils have been identified and assessed, their individual educational plans (IEPs) clearly identify the work to be covered and the progress made. These are regularly discussed with subject teachers and targets agreed both with them and

- with the pupils. The Japanese girls in school at the time of the inspection were being extremely well supported, through, for example, the use of a visiting speaker of Japanese.
- 2.6 Similarly, teachers are made aware of the more able pupils in their classes, and an effective gifted and talented programme is in place. Appropriate support is available for pupils whose first language is not English. In the junior department many teachers arrange pupils discretely into sets according to ability as a further measure to ensure appropriate challenge and support. In the senior department pupils are organised into sets for mathematics in Year 7 and for most of their other subjects from Year 8.
- 2.7 In the junior department the curriculum is broad and balanced. It affords a wide range of experience, successfully contributing to young pupils' academic and personal development. It is suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of pupils and supplemented by a very wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- 2.8 The curriculum for the under fives is based on the Birth to Three framework in the nursery and then on the Stepping Stones and Early Learning Goals in the foundation stage. Its planning is meticulous in every detail, to ensure that not a moment is wasted and that the daily programme is matched closely to the individual needs of each young child. Pupils are interested and stimulated, responding positively to the range of toys and challenging activities available. The Nursery, Prep and Reception classes, enhanced by readily accessible outdoor areas, offer an excellent, ever changing range of learning experiences.
- 2.9 The well-planned curriculum in the junior department is built around the National Curriculum with the addition of religious studies, French and personal, health and social education (PHSE). Extensive provision is made for the acquisition of skills of speaking, listening, reading, writing and numeracy in spacious, well-equipped classrooms. Good use is made of outside areas for investigative work, for example, in a geography lesson on erosion. The computer room in the junior building is fully used to enable information and communication technology (ICT) to play a central role in the curriculum. A well-equipped library adds to the stimulating learning environment.
- 2.10 In the senior department the formal curriculum is broad, balanced and flexible. It strongly emphasises the practical and expressive subjects, while giving due weight to all the core and foundation elements of the National Curriculum. ICT, PHSE and citizenship are studied throughout. In keeping with its history, it has retained a strong element of religious education for all pupils throughout the ages of 11 to 16. Though the school is not doctrinally Catholic, a flavour of its roots remains.
- 2.11 Girls in Years 7 to 9 study all the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education (RE), drama and a second modern foreign language from Year 8. A few girls are excused the second language to reinforce their English. In Years 10 and 11, a common core of English, mathematics, sciences, French, short course ICT and physical education (PE) is retained, together with short course RE. In addition, girls have a flexible choice from a good range of subjects for a small school.
- 2.12 The girls are well prepared for the world of work and for their future choices through a well planned programme of careers education and guidance, including an element in the PHSE course from Year 10. The careers co-ordinator has strong links with the local authority's Connexions, whose advisers meet with every pupil individually and make themselves available for further consultation if need be. All girls engage in work experience, carefully monitored by staff, and include their own reviews of these in their records of achievement. They are also helped to think and become informed about their future personal and

professional lives as adults through a comprehensively planned programme of PHSE and citizenship: this ranges over such things as personal finance, relationships, political systems and the law.

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

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

- 2.14 Pupils of all ages and abilities at St Dominic's are well-educated in mind, body and spirit, in accordance with the stated aims of the school. Achievement in most lessons observed throughout the school was good and was outstanding in many of the rest. This is the result of the range of areas in which each child can achieve success, both within the formal curriculum and in the school's extra-curricular and other programmes. The school has maintained the standards noted in the last inspection. The quality of the girls' singing is outstanding and standards in the performing arts generally are a strength of the school. The girls show much greater independence in their learning and thinking than in 2001. This greater independence has been achieved without a loss of standards, although in several years, both in senior and in junior, the girls' presentation and accuracy of writing was not as good as it should be. Girls at every stage in the school are ready for the next.
- 2.15 Children get off to a flying start in the nursery, in which their rate of development in numeracy, in speaking, listening, reading and writing and in the other early learning goals is exceptional in every way. The children learn and enjoy their work ceaselessly from their arrival in the morning to their departure at the end of the afternoon. Achievement in every lesson observed was outstanding.
- 2.16 In the junior department girls of all abilities make good progress, particularly in English but also in most of their other subjects. However, their achievements in art are not as good as in other subjects. Standards towards the end of the Junior School, though satisfactory, are not as good as elsewhere. This is apparent in the quantity and quality of their writing. The school has already identified this issue and is investigating and working on it.
- 2.17 In the National tests at ages 7 and 11, pupils' standards in English are high. They are far above the national average for girls in all maintained primary schools. This applies equally to achievement at the higher levels expected of more able pupils. Standards in mathematics are high in Year 2. In Year 6 they are above the national average and therefore satisfactory over the last three years as a whole. They have, however, fluctuated and in 2006, the most recent year, were well above the national average for girls and therefore good for pupils' abilities. In science they have fluctuated somewhat and are now high at Level 4 and good at the Level 5 for more able girls.
- 2.18 The good standards are maintained into the senior department, where achievement throughout is good with much that is outstanding, as in the junior department.
- 2.19 Standards achieved at the ages of 14 and 16 in the national tests and public examinations are good. In the National Curriculum tests, results have been consistently well above the national average for all maintained schools, and therefore good for pupils' abilities. At GCSE the results achieved are well above the national average for girls in maintained secondary schools and are therefore good for their abilities. On the basis of the nationally standardised measures of progress used by the school, pupils are, with only a few and occasional exceptions, better than predicted; in some cases, like German, they do so by a large margin. On this basis also, pupils of all abilities, but especially the less able are among

those exceeding predictions by a large margin, corroborating the judgement that the school enables girls of all abilities to do well.

- 2.20 Throughout the school, girls have good knowledge and understanding of their subjects and activities and are able to apply their knowledge practically, creatively and imaginatively. The quality of acting and singing is a particular strength throughout the school, although the orchestra is still in the early stages of development.
- 2.21 Pupils' academic achievements are extended by a host of group and individual achievements in senior and junior, most obviously in the school's strong performing arts but also in sport, in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, where about four-fifths of last year's Year 10 obtained bronze awards, and in their successful entry to writers' competitions. A junior pupil was chosen to perform in 'Chitty Chitty Bang Bang' in Birmingham. Senior girls enter with success into local Rotary Club and national English Speaking Union competitions in public speaking. Senior girls were successful in the international competition 'Destination Imagination' against many schools. The school is regularly represented at all ages in the UK Maths Challenge.
- 2.22 Throughout the school, girls are highly articulate and confident. They read well and benefit from the efforts of the school to encourage reading through initiatives such as the shadowing of the Carnegie Award. Their reviews of books are often of high quality, demonstrating an increasing appreciation of literary genre and style, and an ability to write critically and justify their taste. They write well and with a wide vocabulary. They listen particularly well, because from the earliest stages they are listened to and are asked to respond to and comment on what other pupils have said. They do not present their work as neatly or accurately as they should. They use and apply number accurately for a variety of purposes, including in sciences and ICT, at which girls show a high degree of confidence and proficiency at all ages.
- 2.23 The girls are excellent learners and students, and are no longer dependent on their teachers as they were at the time of the last inspection. In the junior and senior schools they are eager to learn and enjoy their learning. This is demonstrated in the junior department, for example, by forests of hands begging to answer questions and in the senior department by their ability to both work alone and together without supervision and to help each other when necessary. They are inquisitive and excited by new learning. Girls are confident and not afraid to ask if they do not understand or to challenge if they do not agree.
- 2.24 They are able to research independently, to put together short and long pieces of writing and to take notes, in which they have gradually been helped to acquire facility. Girls in Year 6, studying in geography how rocks turn to sand, used their notes, taken in a previous lesson to help each other. They begin to learn how to plan their work from Year 1, in which they do mind-maps. By the end of Year 9 they are independently planning their work and taking notes in lessons with little need for intervention. They can reason and think for themselves. Girls studying the Treaty of Versailles in Year 9 showed themselves well able to argue the positions of Britain, France and the USA at the end of World War 1.

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

- 2.25 Pupils' personal development is outstanding and clearly reflects the school's mission statement to encourage growth in mind body and spirit. The high quality noted at the last inspection has been sustained. It is embedded in the school's overall approach to Every Child Matters. Pupils show an awareness of how and why they matter and, because of this, they are made to feel safe and secure. In all parts of the school, from the age of two to

- eleven, girls have elaborated their own understanding of the five key principles. A display in the Library, for example, includes: "we can keep our minds healthy by reading to learn". In Year 5, girls have written down their own ideas as to how their education contributes to the five areas. Throughout the school it is evident that the girls help and encourage each other.
- 2.26 The relationships fostered throughout the school enable the girls to develop self-esteem and confidence. They demonstrate this in their relationships with their teachers and with each other and in the mature courtesy they show to visiting adults. The spiritual development of the girls has been built on the firm foundation of its Christian heritage, in which its Catholic history is still discernible. It has strong links with St Mary's Roman Catholic Church and girls are supported in their first Holy Communion. The girls also go to St Mary and St Chad's Anglican Church for their Carol Service. Ministers from both churches visit the school on a regular basis and lead the end of term services. The beautifully maintained chapel is available for quiet reflection throughout the school day. The pupils also benefit from further spiritual development through assemblies, RE lessons and the PHSE programme, all of which encourage the girls to become aware of their personal feelings and to express their sensitivity to a range of topics, religions and cultures. For example a Year 7 Assembly about Commonwealth day was led by two pupils, who had composed a prayer outlining the importance of "one circle of friendship to help each other instead of fighting just because we are different".
- 2.27 The moral development of the pupils is already becoming well established at Foundation Stage, where the children observe the principle of "kind hands that care and share". From these roots the ethos grows throughout the school and is continuously reinforced by a clear set of rules and encouraged by rewards. Above all it rests upon the quality of the girls' relationships with each other and with teachers and support staff. In PHSE and in their lessons, as well as through the values and attitudes that the school promotes, pupils show a good understanding of the difference between right and wrong and of the importance of respect for the law.
- 2.28 The school has a strong social life, in which pupils of all ages mingle easily. The house system, for example, is a strong element binding pupils together through various performing and sporting activities. During the inspection, the houses were rehearsing for a competition performance of 'Snow White', involving all senior house members and organised and directed by senior girls. The atmosphere was that of a large family. At all ages, pupils reflect upon society and social relations through their reading and in the study of history and geography. From the Foundation Stage to Year 11 many girls have responsibilities within the class and beyond. They welcome these opportunities and exercise them with maturity. From Year 6 onwards, each form has an elected form prefect and each form has a representative on the school council. The council has its own allocated budget. In the past, they have purchased benches for the playground. Pupils in Year 6 are also responsible for a variety of tasks throughout the junior department. In Year 11, the house captains and school officers play a vital part in organising events, such as the house drama, already mentioned.
- 2.29 Throughout the school there are numerous opportunities for social development. The programmes of citizenship and PHSE promote mature discussion and social awareness – the way the girls responded and welcomed the inspectors into the school was a credit to themselves and St Dominic's. Regular fund raising events sensitise girls to the needs of others and increase their awareness of the circumstances of other countries. For example, the school has involved itself in Catherine's Peak in Jamaica and in Year 10 citizenship the girls are preparing presentations about Jamaica, with the probability of the two winners flying out to visit the Blue Mountains project.

- 2.30 The school has firm links with the community. For example, they participate in the local harvest festival and the Year 10 and 11 work experience involves many of the girls in work in local primary schools. The cross-phase system in the school encourages older pupils to be responsible for younger year groups. For example the Year 7 pupils are "Buddies" for the Year 6 girls. The life of the school brings girls together for many purposes, such as assemblies, house competitions, residential trips, school productions and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. In this way girls learn to relate to and network with others for a variety of purposes.
- 2.31 The girls benefit from the many opportunities that the school provides for their cultural development. Many are actively involved in one or more of the performing arts, for example. All gain understanding of the diversity of culture through their lessons and through their involvement in multi-cultural days and the many exciting activities on offer during the extended day. The displays around the school celebrate a variety of cultures and experiences. The school has regular guest speakers, visits to galleries and theatres, foreign exchange and the girls take part in local art festivals regularly achieving success. The choirs are frequently invited to support local groups at charity functions and perform at the Grand Theatre annually.
- 2.32 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

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

- 2.33 The quality of teaching is good. It is consistently outstanding throughout the Foundation Stage. In the rest of the school, the teaching in one lesson in five observed was judged outstanding and much of the rest was good. No lesson was unsatisfactory. The school has more than sustained and improved the quality noted in the last inspection. The quality of support for girls in need of learning support or with English as an additional language remains the strength it was. But now teachers challenge more able pupils, both in lessons and in extra-curricular activities, supported by guidance through the gifted and talented programme. Moreover, the tendency to deny initiative to the girls and over-teach, noted in the 2001 report, has been removed. Teachers and class assistants, through their knowledge of their pupils and their commitment to Every Child Matters, combine enjoyment with learning. The key aim of adopting "approaches in the classroom that support each pupil's level of ability and learning style" is fulfilled to a high degree.
- 2.34 The planning and organisation of lessons are consistently thorough and well-matched to the needs of the pupils. Good use is made of time and resources. The great majority of lesson plans provide clearly for different abilities, sometimes by outcome but often with specific differences of approach or task for pupils identified through the school's learning support and gifted and talented registers. The work done on identifying and catering for pupils' individual learning styles, though not yet established fully, features in the planning of some of the teachers. The introduction of setting in the senior department has helped improve the ability of teachers to cater for their pupils' needs. In the junior department teachers accomplish the same end by discreetly organising girls in suitable groupings within the class for certain subjects.
- 2.35 The pace of lessons is well judged. Teachers make sure that lessons are lively and that the girls are interested and engaged. Teachers have a thorough knowledge of their subjects, with the exception of art in the junior department. The expertise available in the performing arts contributes importantly to the high standards observed. This applied, for example, to the teaching in a singing lesson for Years 3 and 4, where professional standard expertise enabled

- pupils to develop breath control, intonation and dynamics and in the dance component of GCSE performing arts, where even girls who had not had extensive dance training performed well in rehearsal.
- 2.36 The over-teaching that was a weakness in the last inspection has been largely replaced with a balanced approach, in which girls receive proper preparation for their important examinations but are given opportunity and expected to study and think for themselves. The process of learning how to plan and take notes starts with mind maps in Year 1 and by Year 10 most girls are taking notes and planning their work with little more than general oversight from their teachers. This was evident, for example, in the quality of notes taken by students of business studies in Year 10. This has been achieved without an ill effect on results. However, more care needs to be taken in some cases to make sure that presentation and accuracy do not slip.
- 2.37 A further strength, noted at the last inspection and since reinforced and improved, is the good knowledge the staff have of their pupils. Throughout the school the same system of assessment in terms of national curriculum levels and GCSE related criteria are shared with the pupils, all of whom agree 'can do' statements with their teachers and tutors. This approach begins from the Foundation Stage, where at the end of the day each child declares: "Now I can ...", citing something she has learned in the course of that day. Teachers mark thoroughly and provide constructive comment, although such comments are not always as diagnostic as the school's policy envisages.
- 2.38 The common feature of the best lessons at all levels of the school is the vitality of the teaching. In these lessons, teachers are enthusiastic and communicate their passion to their pupils. They lighten the atmosphere with humour.
- 2.39 Teaching throughout the Foundation Stage is without exception outstanding. Teachers and their assistants render the difference between work, play and personal development imperceptible, so that children never stop learning and learning and enjoyment go hand in hand. For example, in a session on number for pupils of three, each child in turn was asked to fetch a given number of pens or other implements needed for the coming lesson from the next room. After the group session, they settled readily to practising, using dice, while the teacher circulated, talking to them and completing a running assessment sheet. The effectiveness of previous teaching is evident in the present ability of the girls to concentrate and to help each other. This latter feature can be seen in the best lessons elsewhere throughout the school. In one lesson, for example, the teacher was merely responding to requests for help and guidance from the pupils, who worked purposefully and independently, some supporting others, as appropriate.
- 2.40 The school monitors its teaching carefully both at senior and middle manager levels, using both work scrutiny and the observation of lessons to ensure that school policy is being carried out. This has been a key factor in the consistency that has been achieved through the school. A further consistent feature is the high quality of support for girls with special gifts and for girls who need learning support. Provision for the pupil with a statement is in line with the individual education plan, which is regularly reviewed by the local authority. Without exception, staff were aware of the individual education plans of the pupils on the special needs co-ordinator's register and also of the plans and guidance provided through the co-ordinator for gifted and talented.
- 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 pastoral care is outstanding. The well being of the individual pupil is paramount in every aspect of the school. This matches the school's vision statement that "the development of the 'whole person' is at the heart of its ethos and culture". The quality of pastoral care is even better than in the previous inspection; it has been developed and enhanced through the Every Child Matters initiative, in particular. Teaching and non-teaching staff at every level place the well being, safety and health of their pupils above every other consideration.
- 3.2 The quality of pastoral care is well articulated in structure and policy. The key stage managers lead and co-ordinate effectively the work of form and subject staff. They meet regularly with the head and each other to discuss pastoral concerns and strategies. Documentation is both comprehensive and effective. It is common to all sections of the school, ensuring unity and continuity for girls as they move through the school. The house system provides another strand of pastoral care, offering further opportunities of support from staff and older girls and opportunities for personal development: the vertical structure means that talents and expertise are recognised across year groups. Girls in Years 10 and 11 appreciate having a personal tutor as well as a form tutor, primarily for academic guidance through to GCSE, but also providing another person with whom they can raise personal concerns.
- 3.3 The quality of relationships between staff and pupils is excellent. Staff know the girls in their care very well, as can be witnessed at all times in lessons and around school. In discussion, staff expressed their pride in the girls and their pleasure in seeing them achieve. Pupils appreciate their relationships with staff, and feel that they are treated with respect. They were particularly pleased that their individual views were sought on the five elements of Every Child Matters, which confirmed for them that this is indeed the case at St Dominic's. All pupils were clear to whom they would go if they had a concern, and felt that they would be listened to. For example pupils in Years 7 and 8 said that when friendship issues are brought to staff, they are mediated sensitively and effectively.
- 3.4 The relationships between pupils of all ages are very good. In lessons, on the sports field and in house activities they offer support and encouragement to one another. In discussion a Year 9 girl said that if a friend had an issue she would go with her to see a member of staff.
- 3.5 Effective measures are in place to promote good discipline and behaviour, including the merit and de-merit system, certificates, and the Golden Book in the Foundation Stage. The girls, all the way up to Year 11, appreciate these rewards. Most feel they are generally fair, and are eager to ensure their behaviour merits them. The school has in place a clear policy on bullying. It is clearly not tolerated and is dealt with sensitively at various stages through PHSE. The great majority of girls of all ages responding to the pre-inspection survey and all those who spoke to inspectors felt that any issues of bullying were effectively sorted out. Girls showed a mature approach in being able to distinguish between general relationship issues and bullying.
- 3.6 The whole school arrangements for child protection are thorough and well documented. They have regard for the latest DfES guidance and for the arrangements in the local authority. The school has a Child Protection Governor and a Child Protection Officer (CPO), known to all staff. Interagency training for the CPO and child protection training are

up to date and staff are aware of and committed to their responsibilities. The effectiveness of the school's procedures is closely monitored and a written review has been provided for the governing body. The temporary lack of an assistant head as CPO has been effectively covered by the headteacher, who has also received inter-agency training. Inspectors verified that staff were aware of the temporary arrangement.

- 3.7 The procedures to ensure the health and safety of pupils are rigorous and effectively implemented and overseen. In its policies and practice, the school has due regard for health and safety guidelines, through its comprehensive health and safety policy. Appropriate measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards have been taken. For example, the school maintenance team risk assesses the nursery play area equipment every two weeks. The procedures for ensuring safety in school visits are rigorous and all trips are carefully risk assessed. A central record of checks is kept in the head's office.
- 3.8 The school maintains the required admissions book and the process of daily registration of attendance is properly conducted and recorded. Attendance throughout the school is good and there is no unauthorised absence. The school has carried out a recent access plan, in line with the Special Needs and Disability Act. The school's anti-discrimination policy is detailed, clear and effective.
- 3.9 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**

- 3.10 The school has strong links with its parents and good links with the community, both local and further afield. In these, it fulfils its stated aim of partnership with parents and has sustained and built on the quality noted in the inspection of 2001. Responses to the pre-inspection survey of parents indicated that the great majority are well satisfied with the education and support provided for their children. Parents indicated in their responses to the questionnaire that they like what the school stands for and most other aspects of the school. In addition, parents were particularly pleased with the teaching, the range of subjects and extra-curricular activities, the standards of behaviour and the help and guidance. The most common reservations, among a minority of parents, related to the opportunities to discuss their daughters' progress, the setting of homework and the handling of their concerns. Inspectors looked carefully at these areas and agreed with the great majority.
- 3.11 Parents have good opportunities to be involved in activities in the school and in the work and progress of their children. The Friends of St Dominic's organise social and fundraising events such as the recent Quiz Night and parents are invited to open days, acts of worship, cultural and theme day concerts in addition to music, drama and sporting activities.
- 3.12 Parents are provided with full and helpful information about the school. Curriculum information booklets keep them up to date with what their child is studying in school and the termly newsletter 'The Journal' highlights achievements and events. Parent handbooks are issued in addition to homework diaries, which are used as a Home/School link, with opportunities for parents to make comments or raise questions. Reading records in the junior department also provide a useful opportunity for liaison as does the daily notice board.
- 3.13 Parents receive helpful information about their daughters' work and progress. Most parents value the system, though a minority were dissatisfied. Staff write regular, detailed and informative reports and produce half-termly grade reports throughout the senior and junior

departments. The school arranges meetings at which parents can discuss academic and other matters with the staff at least once a year and in many cases more often. Parents are encouraged to make more frequent contact as the need arises, and those in the junior department enjoy daily access to staff.

- 3.14 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care. Even though a small number of parents felt that their concerns were not addressed to their satisfaction, the school's thorough records of such concerns, demonstrate that due regard to these are taken. There is a suitable formal complaints procedure, which no parent has yet invoked.
- 3.15 The school enjoys good links in the community with local churches, with a care home for the elderly and with the local Civic Society which runs an annual competition which St Dominic's' pupils enter. It has good child development links with other nurseries and runs Holiday Clubs in the summer, which are open to local schoolchildren.
- 3.16 Girls support a wide range of national and local charities, including local hospices, the Tsunami appeal and the sponsorship of a school in Sri Lanka. The Blue Mountain Water Project, linking St Dominic's with a school in Jamaica, is another worthwhile cause supported by the school. This helps widen the girls' horizons.
- 3.17 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

## **4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

### **The Quality of Governance**

- 4.1 The school is properly governed. There are areas that would benefit from review. The school is a limited liability company and a registered charity and as such is governed by a small Board of Directors.
- 4.2 The arrangements for governance and the structure of the board of directors are adequate; the full board meets termly and its subcommittees more frequently. The committee structure reflects a legitimate pre-occupation with finance, with buildings and with the sixth form project; matters of academic standards, pastoral care, welfare, health and safety are currently left to the main board, whose business does not appear fully to reflect these vital issues.
- 4.3 All meetings are supported and clearly recorded by the bursar in his capacity as Clerk to the Board. Directors bring a range of experience to their work, including financial, and legal expertise; several have or have had children at the school. Currently, none has expertise in education or care. The Board is kept well informed about the school through helpful termly headteacher's reports. More recently, these have been extended to include a review of the effectiveness of the school's welfare and child protection procedures.
- 4.4 Directors to whom inspectors have spoken are aware of their responsibilities, are full of praise for the school, know it well and are highly supportive. The Board and its subcommittees are closely involved in the financial planning and development of the school and are effective in ensuring educational provision and a continuing investment in resources. Several Directors attend important school events and performances, though their contact with staff and their day-to-day work is uneven. Generally, the Board has not been sufficiently engaged in overseeing and challenging the school in relation to core academic, welfare and regulatory matters.

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

- 4.5 The school is outstandingly well led and managed. The leadership and management together make possible a degree of consistency and integration, remarkable for an all-age school, small though it is. The headteacher, supported by her senior managers, has succeeded in establishing a common ethos and sense of purpose and direction, in which the primacy of the individual child and the principles of Every Child Matters have become core elements, in full accord with the school's aims. The headteacher knows her staff and pupils very well and makes sure that staff communicate with each other and with parents and support their pupils. The quality of leadership and management have further developed and improved from the high quality noted in 2001.
- 4.6 The management of the school is unusual but clear and effective. Senior management represents the whole school rather than any phase or section. The rôles of the senior management are well-defined and their effectiveness is enhanced by the close working relationships that are a feature of the school. For a small school, there is a sophisticated middle management structure. Rather than a head of juniors, phase managers oversee and plan for the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 and for each of the other Key Stages. The consistency of quality and implementation in both pastoral and academic matters attest to the effectiveness of managers at all levels and of the structures that support them.

- 4.7 The structure includes an effective and detailed programme of well-documented meetings that supports the whole school ethos and aims of the school. These include mechanisms for enabling the distinct management needs of junior and senior parts of the school to be met. For example, where the junior department relies on subject co-ordinators, the senior department uses heads of subject, collected into faculties for the purpose of planning for the senior department as a whole.
- 4.8 Those with management responsibilities are effective in analysing the school's needs, setting priorities, planning to meet those priorities, and putting decisions into practice. Whole-school policies and guidance are comprehensive and well organised and meet the needs of the school very well. Heads of faculty and managers of key stage throughout the school are effective in their leadership and administration. In the Foundation Stage all qualified staff wear a uniform to reinforce the corporate image and shared vision, at the same time making it easy for the children to pick out 'their' teachers and nursery nurses.
- 4.9 The quality of relationships and the positive atmosphere are important factors in the school's ability to retain high quality staff. Teachers feel they have a voice and that their efforts are valued. They know what is expected of them. A successful performance management scheme is in place. Currently the school has one newly qualified teacher and has a very successful record of supporting new teachers through the Independent Schools Council Teacher Induction Programme (ISCTIP). An excellent induction programme for members of staff at all levels new to the school is run by the deputy head.
- 4.10 Arrangements for the appointment of staff are good. The school undertakes all necessary checks prior to the employment of staff. The headteacher applies for a disclosure, in all cases an enhanced disclosure, from the Criminal Records Bureau, on all staff, teaching and non-teaching as well as on visiting staff.
- 4.11 Financial resources are well managed. All teachers have sufficient resources, which they use well. They are involved in discussions leading to departmental budgets being allocated by senior management. The school maintains and upgrades its premises well. The bursarial, administrative, maintenance, cleaning and catering staff are very effective in ensuring the smooth day-to-day running of the school. They play a key role in supporting the school's aims. The secretarial staff are a helpful and well informed first point of contact to girls, parents and visitors.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 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 Dominic's school helps its girls to develop in mind, body and spirit, in full accord with its aims. It provides all its pupils with an outstanding education, which is diverse, well planned and flexibly adapted to the individual needs and talents of its pupils. The range of activity is exceptional for so small an all-age school. So, too, is the extent to which both academic and pastoral provision work together and are integrated throughout every stage of the school. The school provides outstanding pastoral care. It has placed the principles of Every Child Matters at the heart of all it does, sharing them explicitly with the pupils. The quality of the Foundation Stage and the standards achieved in it are outstanding. Standards throughout the rest of the school are good, despite a small dip towards the end of the junior school and a small relative weakness in junior art. Pupils' personal development is also outstanding, so that the school is right to claim that it educates its pupils in mind, body and spirit. This could not happen without the dedication and care devoted by staff, both teaching and non-teaching. The quality of teaching is largely good and often outstanding. Nor could it be possible without the outstanding management and leadership that comes from the head, supported by the senior management team and middle managers. The governing body is properly established, though it lacks the structures to provide more active support and oversight in relation to academic and welfare matters.
- 5.2 The school has sustained and built on the strengths identified in 2001. The school has carried out the main recommendations of the 2001 report. There is now sufficient time for music in Years 7 to 9. The libraries in the junior and senior schools have been greatly improved and that in the senior school will be further expanded as part of the sixth form development. The school now has good and effectively used ICT facilities in both junior and senior sections and is well into the process of introducing inter-active whiteboards. The library and ICT facilities have made powerful contributions to the improvements in girls' ability to study independently. Since 2001, the school has completely overhauled its approach to learning: spoon feeding has been replaced by a good balance between independent study and teacher support. The school has accomplished this change while maintaining its standards in almost every respect.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

### Next Steps

- 5.4 The school has no major area of weakness and can concentrate on the task of establishing its new sixth form and ensuring that the strengths identified are embedded there also. In order to secure and improve the quality, the school should:
1. improve the levels of artistic achievement in the junior school and support the development of orchestral playing throughout the school;
  2. tighten its approach to spelling, grammar and presentation throughout the school;
  3. review the structure and priorities of the Board to reflect the growing importance of education and welfare matters and the need to provide active oversight, support and challenge.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

## 6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 12<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> March 2007. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents 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 Tony Hubbard       | Reporting Inspector         |
| Mrs Kate Carey        | Head of Juniors, GSA school |
| Mrs Annabelle Hancock | Former Head, IAPS school    |
| Mrs Alison Horton     | Deputy Head, GSA school     |
| Mrs Kerstin Lewis     | Head, GSA school            |
| Mrs Lynda Sharpe      | Head, IAPS school           |