

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL  
(ISC)**

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**INSPECTION OF**

**NOTRE DAME PREPARATORY SCHOOL**

**By the**

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE  
(ISI)**

**On**

**5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> February 2007**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

## INSPECTION REPORT ON

### **Notre Dame Preparatory School**

The senior school was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of the School	<b>Notre Dame Preparatory School</b>
DfES Number	<b>936/6570</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1081875</b>
Address	<b>Burwood House, Cobham, Surrey, KT11 1HA.</b>
Telephone Number	<b>01932 869991</b>
Fax Number	<b>01932 589480</b>
Email Address	<b>headmaster@notredame.co.uk</b>
Headmaster	<b>Mr. David Plummer</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Mr. Glen Travers</b>
Age Range	<b>2 to 11 years</b>
Gender	<b>Mixed (2 – 6 years) Female (7 – 11 years)</b>
Inspection Dates	<b>5<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> February 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 Notre Dame Preparatory School is an independent Roman Catholic school for day girls and boys aged between two and six years and for girls aged between seven and eleven years. It shares a common seventeen-acre site, on the banks of the River Mole just outside Cobham, with its sister senior school, Notre Dame Senior School. The two schools occupy their own premises and are organisationally independent but are linked by a common governing body and mission statement, together with a common bursar, prospectus and various resources. They share common feast days. The aims of the school are:
- to provide a community that is fully inclusive of all faiths and cultures whilst retaining a Catholic ethos;
  - to offer a broad and balanced curriculum to the whole person;
  - to light the flame of spiritual awareness which underpins the spiritual, moral and academic development of each individual;
  - to teach pupils to accompany each other on the journey through life;
  - to create life-long learners with open, responsible and creative minds.
- 1.2 The school is part of a world-wide educational organisation – The Company of Mary Our Lady – founded in Bordeaux in the seventeenth century by St Jeanne de Lestonnac, and devoted to the teaching of girls in the belief that they have a unique contribution to make to society. More recently, boys have been admitted into the pre-preparatory section of the school. In 2003 the school's ownership passed from The Company of Mary Our Lady to a charitable trust, and is now managed by trustees and a board of governors, a majority of whom are Sisters of the Order. The present headmaster was appointed in 2001.
- 1.3 The population of the school is broadly as it was in 2001, with 311 pupils in all of whom 30 attend part time in the nursery classes. These include 31 full time and 30 part time children under five (including 3 full time and 4 part time boys), 71 girls in Years 1 and 2 and 179 girls in Years 3 to 6. Admission is not based on pupils' academic ability, but on the decision of the headmaster as to whether they will enjoy being at Notre Dame and be able to make good use of the opportunities available at the school.
- 1.4 Of the pupils from overseas most have sufficient English but a few are in the early stages of learning to speak the language and need some form of support. The average ability of pupils is above the national average: about half are well above average and three-quarters are above average. Most of the rest are of average ability and about one in fifteen is below average. The school does not enter its pupils for moderated National Curriculum tests. At the time of the inspection 66 spoke a language other than English as their principal language, though most of these were reasonably fluent in English and 9 were receiving specific support. No pupil had a formal statement of special educational needs; 23 are on the school's register as having some form of learning need, five of these as *Action Plus*.
- 1.5 The school is dedicated to the Catholic faith but welcomes children of any faith and of none. Pupils come principally from professional backgrounds and from families that strongly support their children's education. The population is enriched by a significant number of children from expatriate parents from a variety of countries in Europe and Asia, speaking a variety of languages at home.

- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following tables.

***Pre-preparatory Department***

School	NC name
Fledglings (parent and toddler?)	Parent and toddlers group
Robins Tawny Owls Snowy Owls	Nursery
Reception	Reception
Prep 1	Year 1
Prep 2	Year 2

***Junior Department***

School	NC Name
Prep 3	Year 3
Prep 4	Year 4
Prep 5	Year 5
Prep 6	Year 6

## 2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

### The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The school provides a good and rounded education with some outstanding features. It is well suited to the interests, aptitudes and needs of all its pupils and in line with its aims and philosophy. It combines a broad and balanced formal curriculum for all with a particularly diverse range of extra-curricular activities, into which the pupils' personal, spiritual and moral development is woven. The musical life of the school is exceptionally strong.
- 2.2 The spiritual and Catholic elements have been maintained and further strengthened since the last inspection. The teaching of religious education (RE) has been increased to 10 per cent of the timetable throughout the school. Pupils in every class begin and end their day with prayers and pray together at lunchtime. Apart from the celebration of feast days, a collective act of worship takes place for some part of the school each weekday and all pupils participate in an assembly on three days in the week.
- 2.3 The pace and balance of the school day are excellent. Registration is conducted in a lively and friendly way, which gets the day off to a purposeful beginning, with the pupils ready to start work. The teacher no longer calls out the register but projects it onto the interactive whiteboard and greets each pupil personally ("Good morning, Alexandra") and is greeted in return. The ten half-hour lessons of the day (or nine in the pre-prep) are interspersed with two breaks and a break for lunch, in which a high proportion of pupils are engaged in some form of extra-curricular activity. After class prayers at the end of the day most pupils participate in one of the many activities on offer.
- 2.4 Children under five work towards the six early learning goals, planned in accordance with *Birth to Three Matters* and the guidelines of the Qualifications and Curriculum and Authority (QCA). The thorough planning ensures a smooth transition from the *Fledglings*, *Robins* and *Owls* through the more subject-oriented provision in Reception to Year 1. The formal curriculum from Year 1 to 6 includes all the subjects of the National Curriculum, together with RE, dance, French and in personal, social and health education (PSHE). All but history and geography have sufficient time. In pupil interviews the pupils described their education as interesting and challenging: a pupil in Year 2 declared that she liked doing hard sums.
- 2.5 The thorough planning, based on published QCA guidelines, pays due attention to laying solid foundations in numeracy, literacy, including speaking and listening, and information and communication technology (ICT), balanced by strong attention to their creative, aesthetic, physical, human and social development. Increasingly, attention is being paid to catering more explicitly for the more able as well as for those in need of learning support. Lesson plans explicitly single out approaches for pupils by ability group, labelled *extension* (for the more able), *support* (for any with learning needs) and *core*. Planning in history, geography and art do not match the quality in the other subjects. The school has recognised this and appointed co-ordinators for these subjects since the inspection.
- 2.6 The outstanding variety of lunchtime and after school clubs and activities compliment the formal curriculum and offer something for everyone. All the teaching staff run at least one activity. The opportunities include extensive team sports and opportunities for music, drama dance and art. They also include a range of curricular topics, such as ICT, library and homework, and sessions of chess, textiles, a puzzle club and a board game club. The greatest strength lies in the expressive arts and particularly in drama and music. As well as a junior choir of 25 girls in Years 3 and 4 and a prep school choir of 85 pupils in Years 4 to 6,

- there is chamber choir for 26 pupils. In addition to the seventy-strong school orchestra are two string ensembles, one for Years 1-2 and one for Years 3-6, a guitar and a recorder group.
- 2.7 Virtually all pupils are involved in at least one activity and many are involved in several. The high uptake indicates their popularity and pupils spoke enthusiastically about the enjoyment they get from their activities. All pupils have the opportunity to participate in major productions involving music and drama. The recent Years 3 and 4 production of *Goldilocks* brought praise from the pupils, who described it as “fantastic”. One of the performers found the whole experience “brilliant”.
- 2.8 Pupils’ learning and experiences are further extended through planned residential visits, such as a recent visit to Normandy, in which pupils experienced living and working together whilst strengthening their language skills. Field trips and visits to museums and galleries further enrich their learning experience, supplemented by opportunities to contribute to the community through charitable activities and events.
- 2.9 Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education through the organisation and application of the curriculum. The effective transitions between each stage are considerably assisted by the quality of the information and comprehensive records passed from teacher to teacher. Helpful meetings are held between parents, pupils and teachers to ensure that all understand the process. Pupils are prepared in a practical way by receiving taster lessons in their new classes.
- 2.10 Partly in response to criticisms in the last report the school has introduced an element of specialist teaching for the core subjects of English, mathematics and science and for music. This has proved effective, as has the setting for mathematics. However, difficulty with the timetable has led to pupils in Years 5 and 6 being taught most of their subjects in a stream determined by their ability in mathematics rather than according to their aptitude for each subject.
- 2.11 The significant number of pupils with English as an additional language is well supported by the teachers in their classes and parents can pay for individual teaching. In practice all these pupils were able to make progress. In order to access the curriculum more effectively and more quickly, however, pupils with little or no English would benefit from a period of intensive language teaching.
- 2.12 The setting up of a gifted and talented register has identified pupils who would benefit from greater challenges. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties is effective both in the classroom and in individual lessons. The special educational needs co-ordinator provides a vital link between all those concerned with the provision for pupils, parents, staff and outside agencies. Following the individual assessment of each pupil’s needs, helpful work programmes are provided for each pupil. These profiles set clear targets and are regularly monitored and reviewed.
- 2.13 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

## **Pupils' Learning and Achievements**

- 2.14 The pupils of Notre Dame Preparatory School are well and broadly educated academically, personally and physically and are ready for their future secondary education and for adult life. The girls who leave the school are successful in entry not only to the senior school but also to other highly competitive selective schools. They are well prepared for independent study and, through their musical, sporting and other accomplishments, to make valuable contributions to their secondary schools.
- 2.15 In this the standards reported in 2001 have been maintained and indeed improved. The incidence of less than satisfactory achievement, then judged excessive, is now rare. Examples of outstanding achievement were observed in mathematics, science, music, dance and physical education (PE).
- 2.16 From the nursery to the end of the Foundation Stage, in Reception, the girls and boys make good progress in achieving the six early learning goals. By the time they leave Reception they are fully ready for the more formal schooling they encounter in Year 1. The high quality praised in the most recent Ofsted report is still apparent. At this stage they are well advanced in reading, writing and number. They are able to choose their own activities and become absorbed in them either by themselves or with other children.
- 2.17 Pupils of all abilities and needs achieve well and make good progress in most of their subjects, particularly so in English, mathematics, science, music and ICT. Achievement and progress is more uneven in history and geography and is not good enough in art, considering how well pupils achieve in other aspects of the aesthetic curriculum. The less able and the more able pupils achieve the best standards and progress. In some of their work, girls of more middle ability or in the middle groups achieve satisfactory but more modest standards.
- 2.18 Pupils show thorough knowledge and good understanding as well as secure skills, which they apply with assurance and are able to think things out. Much of what they write shows perceptive appreciation of literature and sometimes insight into themselves and into human nature. There are many examples of scientific and mathematical investigations, while in RE, for example, the least able show no less personal insight in their writing than the ablest. This was true of a piece in which a less able pupil explored the difference between intention and action thoughtfully and honestly.
- 2.19 Where there is relative weakness, it is in cases, such as art and some aspects of history and geography, where either schemes of work are not fully implemented or where teachers not themselves expert in the subject are not yet fully supported by co-ordination. In art, for example, pupils produce much attractive two-dimensional work and that produced by the children in the pre-prep is of good quality. Their technique and range, however, does not progress sufficiently as they move up the school.
- 2.20 Examples abound of good achievement. The imaginative writing at every age shows a keen and developing understanding of form, acquired from teaching and from their wide reading of children's fiction. By Year 6, for example, many show a mature understanding and use of figurative language in English. In science, pupils in Year 2 readily identify the surfaces in the room where the greatest friction is to be found, while girls in Year 6 showed a grasp of photosynthesis advanced for their age and appropriate for Years 7 to 9. Throughout their curriculum pupils demonstrate a particularly strong understanding of matters related to the environment, health and healthy eating and living, because it is touched on effectively in so many subject areas.



- 2.21 The achievement of pupils extends beyond the timetable to their host of extra-curricular activities. Their musical achievements are outstanding. The Key Stage 1 String Ensemble of 20 children is a rarity and these pupils were able to play simple pieces and to read notation with letter guidance remarkably well and in tune. The choirs are of a very high standard in a school which does not specialise in music. Many girls enjoy success in the netball, soccer and swimming teams.
- 2.22 As at the time of the last inspection, pupils with relative difficulty in aspects of their learning make good progress because of the support they receive from their class teachers and teaching assistants and from the special needs staff. Most of the children from overseas who speak a home language other than English are also well supported by the English as an additional language (EAL) teachers for whom parents pay extra. The staff are sensitive to their needs and both they and other children in their classes give them effective support. They benefit particularly from having access to some dual language books in the school library. Even the small number who do not receive one-to-one support are sensitively helped and make good progress. Nevertheless, those with the least English might make more rapid progress with intensive teaching at the beginning.
- 2.23 The pupils throughout the school are highly motivated and express enjoyment in their classes and respect for their teachers. They work hard and want to succeed. They work well individually and in groups and readily help one another unprompted. They produce an appropriate quantity of work, almost always well presented and showing a developing secure command of vocabulary and syntax. Their writing is by turns thoughtful, imaginative and amusing and is invariably well expressed. They are highly articulate both in and out of class. They have a firm command of number and can use the functions of computers for a wide range of purposes. They can investigate and solve problems. Many examples were seen of extended writing and of well-organised research, especially in science. That being said, they comparatively rarely think beyond the required information and explanations. For example, though the senior choir sang their Hebrew song lustily, none showed any curiosity as what the words meant.

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

- 2.24 The personal development of the pupils is outstanding, as it was in 2001. The strongly Christian and caring ethos permeates the daily life of the community and has a major influence on the pupils' education and development. The aim "to teach pupils to accompany each other on the journey through life" is evident everywhere. The development of the whole person, including friendliness, self-esteem and understanding and concern for others is at the heart of everything the school does.
- 2.25 Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is at the core of the school's mission statement. It can be seen to permeate all that it does, from the nursery to Year 6. The caring attitude of all staff and the community of Sisters, make important contributions to pupils' spiritual development. Pupils show increasing self-confidence and the teachers build on their self-esteem and knowledge by valuing them as individuals and through the support they provide.
- 2.26 The spiritual life of the school is very strong. Pupils pray at the beginning and end of each day and often the form captain makes up the prayer. The programmes of study for RE and PSHE provide pupils with the knowledge and insight in the Catholic faith, and an introduction to other world religions; the pupils have respect for everyone as a child of God, in keeping with the teachings of St. Jeanne de Lestonnac. Girls acquire a mature self-knowledge – Year 5 pupils acknowledging that good intentions are not always carried out.

- 2.27 Assemblies, which often take place in the chapel, offer a time to pray, reflect on values and beliefs, as well as the opportunity to celebrate the successes of members of the whole school community. A feature of the assemblies is the high quality singing and musical accompaniment; pupils use their musical talents to enhance the spiritual experience. Every classroom has a focal point for prayer, which is an integral part of each day. These regularly include the celebration of achievements, not only academic but also pastoral and social. Girls listened and participated thoughtfully to a talk on how to pray and where to find God (everywhere). Pupils learn to understand themselves and others as people through the strong relationships with staff as well as through what they learn from RE and in other subjects.
- 2.28 Pupils' moral development is very strong and from the nursery onwards, they have a growing understanding of right and wrong. They are encouraged to question their feelings and to share them with others. Year 6 produced posters using ICT with slogans such as 'Freedom is the ability to choose right and wrong' and role-play and diary writing about resolutions and reconciliation were seen. Pupils understand the value of class rules and the system of rewards and sanctions.
- 2.29 The school is a well-ordered and lively community. The pupils are confident, polite and considerate of their peers. Social development is encouraged by the wide range of extra-curricular activities, which enable the girls to mix with different groups. This is particularly true of the many musical, dramatic and sporting activities in which they work together effectively. Younger children enjoy being the class 'helper' and older girls are very happy to contribute to the life of the school by applying for the post of prefect – and if selected, wear their badge with pride. When asked about their opportunities to accept responsibility, a pupil replied: "we take responsibility for our own behaviour and we try and help the younger ones." Classroom rules and 'friendship trees' encourage all the children to treat others with care and respect. The school council enables pupils to make suggestions about issues they consider important and the pupils are proud of the improvements they have been instrumental in making. Every child is likely to have served on the school council at least once in their time in school and this body has a clear effect: pupils agreed that concerns expressed about the quality and healthiness of school dinners had been effectively dealt with.
- 2.30 Pupils have many opportunities to learn about and appreciate cultural traditions from their own and others' backgrounds. Playing, singing or listening in assembly, pupils appreciate and take pleasure in fine music. Concerts include music from around the world. Through opportunities to travel abroad with the choir, through residential experiences, such as the Year 6 trip to Normandy, and through the curriculum, pupils become increasingly culturally aware. Books about other faiths and cultures, and stories in other languages are available in the libraries. Work on display around the school, reflects the visit supporting a geography topic on Africa, with good observational drawings of artefacts. Teachers take every opportunity to celebrate the diversity of their pupils. An atlas spontaneously produced in a registration session when a young pupil mentioned the country she had moved from, was used as an opportunity to share its location with her peers.
- 2.31 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

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

- 2.32 The quality of teaching is good and in some cases outstanding. True to the school's aims, teachers and their assistants cater especially well for the different needs and aptitudes of their individual pupils. Since the last inspection the school has succeeded in virtually removing unsatisfactory teaching to a point where only isolated cases were found, associated with subject expertise and planning rather than with underlying teaching skills. By contrast, more of the lessons were good and more were outstanding. In all these ways the quality of teaching has improved.
- 2.33 The teachers consistently plan their lessons thoroughly, deploy appropriate resources and make efficient use of time. In the nursery and Years 1 and 2 the classroom assistants make a crucial contribution to the work both in helping set out the room and in supporting the teaching of individuals and groups. Thanks to the training they have received, teachers make good use of interactive whiteboards, for example, introducing a map to illustrate a discussion in religious education for Year 5.
- 2.34 The teaching of skills taught in the pre-prep often incorporates several different activities to make allowances for different learning styles. One mathematics lesson in a Reception class used an interactive whiteboard and an engaging program involving a caterpillar to practise the skill of ordering random numbers.
- 2.35 Teachers explain concepts clearly, employing, where necessary, suitable analogies and they check carefully that everyone has understood. Their subject knowledge is secure, with the exception of art, where the absence of specialist guidance leaves the work attractive but underdeveloped. The use of specialists in the core subjects and in ICT and music enhances the quality and depth of work. Teachers set a varied range of tasks, some checking for mastery of skills or for knowledge and understanding, others requiring short or extended writing and independent research. They set appropriate homework for the pupils, which usefully re-enforces or extends what pupils have studied in their lessons. Even though a significant minority of pupils and parents felt that there was sometimes too much, inspectors did not feel the quantity to be excessive overall.
- 2.36 Many girls refer to their teachers and their assistants as kind. Teachers are patient with their pupils and help them when they have difficulties. As one pupil put it: "my teacher always helps me with stuff I am stuck on". For those with learning difficulties teachers make effective use of the guidance provided by the special needs co-ordinator to provide support.
- 2.37 The co-ordination of provision for gifted and talented pupils is beginning to have a positive effect. Teachers are aware of the children identified and many lessons made provision for different types of question for pupils of different ability. There is room for further improvement in this respect. Many tasks seen in pupils' work and many schemes of work still rely substantially on outcome for differentiation rather than defining different expectations for learning and development.
- 2.38 The small class numbers have enabled teachers to know their pupils well. Questioning was tailored to match the ability of the pupils. In a mathematics lesson in Reception and one in Year 6, discrete help was given to those who found mental calculations difficult in opening activities. In a swimming lesson, less able pupils carried out the same activities but over shorter distances.
- 2.39 Some but not all pupils not yet fluent in English receive one-to-one tuition for which parents pay. Class and subject teachers are sensitive to their needs and even pupils who do not

receive private tuition receive a great deal of support from their teacher and from other children and are able to produce good work. The use of dual language books for Korean pupils was particularly helpful. Despite this, the school needs to consider extending such provision to all such pupils.

- 2.40 The teaching encourages pupils to develop their reasoning skills. Judicious questioning in a mathematics lesson extended a lower ability class in Year 6. From a sample of written work in Year 4 geography, where pupils were asked to hypothesise on the purpose of given artefacts, it was evident that the pupils' thinking had been stretched.
- 2.41 In the best lessons teachers show energy and enthusiasm for the topic; most teachers make their teaching enjoyable and interesting in ways that engage the pupils in the topic and enable them to increase their understanding and skills. For example, a mixed ability class mastered a complicated modern dance sequence to a good standard in a 30-minute session because of the positive encouragement and carefully structured approach of the teacher.
- 2.42 Teachers know their pupils' work and needs well. Marking is regular with some evidence of constructive comments and targets for improvement. Weekly speed tests are used from Year 1 to 6 to improve mental mathematics and results and timing are recorded. The PE department has devised a system to assess each pupil in all disciplines throughout their time at Notre Dame. Regular mathematics assessments set by the mathematics co-ordinator are carried out within the classes to inform future planning. A new database to collate information on pupil progress throughout the school is helping to inform the setting of targets.
- 2.43 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

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

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

- 3.1 The care devoted to the well-being and development of all pupils is outstanding, as is the quality of relationships. The school fully meets its aim of providing the highest quality pastoral care for their pupils. Since the last inspection the arrangements for safeguarding welfare have been strengthened. Staff know their pupils well and respond sensitively to their individual needs. One pupil commented: “all the teachers are really kind; they always give us help when we need it and always sort out our personal problems.”
- 3.2 The vast majority of pupils that completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and all the children to whom the inspectors spoke said that teachers always helped them with their learning and that staff really cared whether or not they were happy. The pupils expressed a willingness to confide in teachers should they need any particular help or advice. They were familiar with the procedures for raising concerns about bullying and expressed confidence in the arrangements. The great majority of parents were happy with the help and guidance provided for their children.
- 3.3 These strengths are the result of the dedication of the staff, underpinned by effective leadership and clear and effective pastoral structures and policies, rigorously monitored by senior management. These include comprehensive documents on behaviour management and bullying. They provide a wealth of information for staff, including illuminating examples of positive strategies, which staff apply in practice.
- 3.4 Unacceptable or challenging behaviour is rare and praise and positive encouragement are the first and main resort. The house points system is understood and valued by the pupils and the reward of house points is a source of excitement and motivation.
- 3.5 Special good conduct, ranging from excellence in drama to helping other pupils or, in the case of one girl, being brave when a wasp flew behind her glasses, is rewarded by a certificate and much coveted entry into the ‘Green Book’. Its use in assembly was greeted with eager anticipation and pupils expressed pleasure for their peers when they collected their certificates. The converse ‘Red Book’ is a seldom applied object of dread.
- 3.6 Staff are familiar with the three-stage system for resolving any issues. Class teachers sensitively deal with minor incidents and in the unlikely event that a behavioural matter has to be taken further, records of actions taken are kept. Any incidents are reviewed and the information is used sensitively to provide extra care and support. The application of sanctions is equally rare because any problems are nipped in the bud. Girls in Year Six confidently reported that bullying hardly ever happened and that if it did they could report their worries to staff, secure in the knowledge that it would be taken seriously.
- 3.7 Care is also taken to avoid pupils becoming isolated. New pupils are always paired with a member of the class in their first term. Any child who has no one to play with can sit at the ‘friendship bench’ in the playground. Other children and especially the older girls know at such times to join her and offer to talk or play.
- 3.8 Governors, management and staff take scrupulous care to safeguard and promote the health and well-being of the pupils. Risk assessments are completed for any school trips and their worth is further enhanced by evaluation after the outing to inform the future planning of trips. There are highly effective measures for child protection and a comprehensive policy.

A named governor plays a full part in overseeing the school's arrangements and reporting to the board, which keeps the effectiveness of the welfare arrangements under review. Child protection officers have been designated and the necessary training for all staff is up to date. The school carries out thorough checks on newly appointed staff, on governors and helpers, in line with the latest DfES guidance. The school has gone further and carried out enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks on all staff, whenever appointed and has compiled a cover sheet making clear what checks have been carried out on each person.

- 3.9 The school nurse keeps detailed records of any accidents that may occur. Pupil's welfare is further safeguarded by medical updates ensuring that all staff are aware of any special requirements that a pupil may have. There is a designated governor for health and safety and the committee meets regularly to review, amongst other things, any accident reports and relevant risk assessments. Any issues are actioned and scrupulously monitored. The school regularly arranges for a health and safety consultancy company to perform a full audit of any risk throughout the site.
- 3.10 Fire protection is thorough, detailed records are kept and procedures for evacuation are appropriate and effective. Appliances are tested regularly. The school also undertakes enhanced annual testing of portable electrical equipment and five yearly assessment of fixed wiring takes place.
- 3.11 The school maintains the appropriate electronic admissions record and register of attendance. Pupils attend regularly and there have been no unauthorised absences. Any absences are appropriately followed up with parents. Suitable policies and practices are in place in relation to the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act and in relation to equal opportunities.
- 3.12 The school meets all of the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

### **The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community**

- 3.13 Notre Dame Preparatory School has an outstanding partnership with parents and has formed many worthwhile links with the wider community.
- 3.14 The majority of parents responding to the pre-inspection questionnaire were very satisfied with the quality and range of the education their children were receiving and with the support the school provides.
- 3.15 Parents have very good opportunities to be involved with activities in the school. An active parents association, Friends of Notre Dame (FoND) is open to all parents from the preparatory and senior schools. FoND runs a variety of fund-raising events. These have included a summer fete and a quiz evening, in which the staff pitted their wits against the parents, and a dinner dance. Plans are already in place for the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary ball they are organising in May. Funds raised from these events are shared between projects to enrich the school and charities. Both the senior and preparatory school have elected form representatives, who function as a single committee, meeting regularly to discuss interests and concerns. These meet regularly with the heads of both schools and expressed the view that these meetings are productive and positive.
- 3.16 Parents are welcomed to special assemblies, to Junior Masses and to music events. They have also accompanied the school choir on its trips, in 2006 to Budapest and in 2007 to

- Bordeaux. They are encouraged to support their children at sports matches and swimming galas and have the opportunity to take part in the cross-country Octagon run.
- 3.17 The school is rightly proud of its communication with parents. This is achieved in a variety of ways. Prior to entry, detailed handbooks are sent to the parents. Their format and the information they contain is helpful and adapted to the stage at which the pupil will be joining. Curriculum guidelines are sent to parents at the beginning of each academic year.
  - 3.18 Homework diaries in the prep department and Reading Comment books in the pre-prep are used effectively to provide a dialogue between the parent and class teachers. Entries have included queries on homework, messages to inform who will be collecting their child and offers of help.
  - 3.19 Termly grade reports, informing parents of their children's achievements and effort in the core subjects are sent to parents with children in the prep school. Full reports are sent to all parents in the autumn and spring terms. These contain information on the topics covered, the progress made and a target for future consideration.
  - 3.20 Regular newsletters, containing information of interest to the parents such as staffing in the pre-prep, future events or details of Open Mornings are sent to the parents from the head of pre-prep. A Friday mailing pamphlet is distributed from the headmaster of the prep school to all pupils. A recent copy included news of achievements, forthcoming events, sports match results, future fixtures lists, family news and information on St. Jeanne de Lestonnac in preparation for the 400 year celebrations.
  - 3.21 Two notice boards by the sports hall display useful information for parents, one dedicated to FoND news and the other to school topics such as the weekly menu and a copy of the Friday mailing.
  - 3.22 The school handles the concerns of parents with due care. All members of the senior management team make a point of mingling informally with parents in the playground after school to discuss any problems that may have arisen. Teachers are willing to arrange appointments with parents at a mutually convenient time if parents wish to discuss concerns with them. Records are kept of these meetings and senior staff informed. Should a situation require further investigation the deputy head, the head of pre-prep or the headmaster become involved. Should a complaint remain unresolved the school has a formal complaints procedure, available to parents. It has not had cause to implement this to date.
  - 3.23 Internationally, its own pupil population brings to the school a wide range of nations and cultures of educational value to the pupils' development. Similar benefits flow from the schools worldwide contacts with the Order and with its charitable works, particularly in relation to Kinshasa in the Democratic Republic of Congo.
  - 3.24 The school has fostered many links with the local and wider communities. The substantial sports hall is hired by local groups such as Scouts and Guides. Local swimming clubs make use of the pool for training purposes. Pupils compete against other independent schools in sports matches and swimming galas. The school also belongs to the Elmbridge and Runnymede Primary School Sports Association and competes in netball and five-a-side soccer with local schools.
  - 3.25 Annual choir trips are made to a variety of cities in Britain and abroad. An annual activity holiday is organised for Year 5 to the Wye valley and Year 6 to Normandy. These visits help to foster independence and in the latter case a marvellous opportunity for immersion in the French language.

- 3.26 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 Notre Dame Preparatory School is well governed. The Trustees have a clear oversight of the preparatory school and of its sister senior school. In doing so, they have successfully honoured and upheld the Catholic mission of the schools and their aims and ethos.
- 4.2 The governing body has eleven members, covering a range of disciplines relevant to the school's operations. They meet four times a year, but they variously serve on five sub-committees – education, finance, health and safety (including pupil welfare), building, and Lestonnac (school ethos) – on which appropriate members of school senior staff also serve. Some governors are Sisters of the Order, and one of these Sisters has a significant pastoral role within the school, both for staff, pupils and some parents. Governors attend many school functions, and have various social meetings where they meet school staff. Thus the whole framework of governance ensures a close liaison with the school, providing effective oversight, and good support for the school and staff.
- 4.3 Through their contributions to the various committees, governors undertake their responsibilities with regard to educational development and ensure that finances are in place for the provision of educational resources.
- 4.4 Through their presence at school functions, presentations made to them by staff, and the existence of one governor able to provide staff with pastoral support, relationships between governors and staff within the school are good, and provide advice, support and challenge.
- 4.5 The governing body, since coming into being in 2003, when it took over from The Sisters of The Company of Mary our Lady, has sustained the ethos and mission of the school, as set by the founding Order. It has communicated this so well to the school that both staff and pupils have commented that Notre Dame is a special place, with a special ethos.

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

- 4.6 As in 2001, the school continues to be well managed and outstandingly well led at all levels. The headmaster and senior management have succeeded in realising the vision of the Order and in establishing the powerful ethos that pervades the community of Notre Dame Preparatory School. Because of this, all staff work together to a common purpose and the school has a clear and shared academic, spiritual and pastoral direction.
- 4.7 The morale, dedication and professionalism of the staff are sustained by an excellent system of appraisal, which pays no less attention to the professional and career needs of staff than to objectives and needs of the school. The arrangements for supporting, mentoring and assessing the newly qualified teacher are thorough and supportive.
- 4.8 The management is in general effective and supported by a clear structure and strong body of policy in most respects effectively overseen. There is a clear structure of meetings, which are purposeful and written minutes identify matters for action, which are followed up.
- 4.9 From the school's self-evaluation it is apparent that the school is well aware of most of its strengths and weaknesses, and the school has a well thought out strategy for its immediate and long-term improvement and development. The new post of learning success co-ordinator is beginning to show fruit. However, the balance of non-contact time between

senior management and co-ordinators needs to be adjusted and steps taken to review and improve the timetable. Where there is a lack of specialist expertise, as in art, more might be done to draw upon the expertise in the senior school.

- 4.10 The school has good resources and very good accommodation for which plans for further improvement are under way. Classrooms are well equipped and the school has ample specialist areas, including a science laboratory, a substantial sports hall and a learning resource centre, which it shares with its sister senior school. The process of setting priorities and making up the budget is effective and well understood. The administration is efficient.
- 4.11 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff [Standard 4] and for premises and accommodation [Standard 5].
- 4.12 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 Notre Dame Preparatory School provides a good range of educational and spiritual opportunities for all its pupils, with some outstanding features. It fulfils its aim to balance academic achievement with the needs of the whole person. The musical and dramatic life of the school are particular strengths. Pupils achieve well in most of their subjects and particularly well in English, mathematics, science, ICT and music. There is room for improvement in art and in some areas of history and geography. Teachers provide effective support for pupils with learning needs, although the provision for those pupils from overseas not receiving one-to-one lessons in the English language depends too much on the good-will of individual teachers and classmates. The quality of care and the strength of relationships between staff, pupils, parents and the Order remain the keystone of the school community and underpin its strong spiritual ethos. Staff at all levels take rigorous care over pupils' welfare, health and safety. The school is outstandingly led at all levels and is well managed and governed. The appointment of the learning success co-ordinator is already bearing fruit in relation to provision for pupils with talents and particular aptitudes. There is further to go in ensuring that intellectual expectations are as high as they should be and attention now needs to be paid to the middle group of pupils. The balance of roles between co-ordinators and senior managers does not always guarantee the effective oversight of implementation of schemes of work.
- 5.2 Since the last inspection the school has carried out or made substantial progress in all the main recommendations: teaching is virtually never unsatisfactory and more is good and outstanding; work is always interesting and clearly explained; the match to higher attainers has been improved; control at lunch times is now efficient; the school day in Years 1 and 2 has been extended and the timing of the school day is greatly improved. In addition to these, the curriculum has been enriched by the introduction of dance and particularly in relation to the outstanding musical life of the school. English writing has caught up with reading as being of a high quality. Provision of learning support has been further developed, though that provided for relative beginners in English is too dependent on the ability to pay extra.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

## Next Steps

- 5.4 The school's many strengths far outweigh the weaknesses, none of which is serious. In order to improve further, the school should take the following steps.
1. Continue to improve academic and intellectual standards by:
    - ensuring that the schemes for humanities and art are effectively implemented;
    - continuing the development to the role of the learning success co-ordinator and raising intellectual expectations;
    - looking more closely at the performance of the middle group of pupils.
  2. Carry out a review of the timetable and of the criteria for setting to ensure that any ability groups are based as much as possible on aptitude for the particular subject.
  3. To these ends, adjust the allocation of time for senior and middle management to ensure that key co-ordination roles can be as effective as possible.
- 5.5 No action in respect of regulatory requirements is required.

## **6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from the 5<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup> February 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. Annette Cook	Deputy Head, IAPS school
Mrs. Rosalind Disney	Former Key Stage Co-ordinator, IAPS school
Mrs. Carole Long	Director of Studies, IAPS school
Mr. Michael Till	Deputy Head, IAPS school