

## **Inspection report**

### **St John's Senior and Preparatory School**

**Independent school**

**DfES ref no: 308/6062**

**Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002**

**Dates of inspection: 3 – 6 July 2006**

## **INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY**

### **Purpose and scope of the inspection**

This inspection was carried out by the Office for Standards in Education under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002 in order to advise the Secretary of State for Education and Skills about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

### **Information about the school**

St John's Preparatory and Senior School is situated in Potters Bar, Hertfordshire. It is co-educational and takes pupils from the age of 4 to 18. The school is on two sites, each with its own headteacher. The headteachers are the proprietors. The school has a total of 428 pupils. Twelve pupils are funded under the Government's Nursery Scheme.

The school assesses pupils on entry and there are no pupils who have been identified as having a statement of special educational needs. Pupils sit the General Certificate in Secondary Education (GCSE) and General Certificate in Education (GCE) A Level examinations in a range of subjects.

The preparatory school has 203 pupils. It is situated in a large house, with some classes accommodated in four demountable buildings. There are 14 classes. The senior school has 225 pupils and is situated in a Grade II listed building, with further accommodation provided by three demountable buildings. There are 13 classes. The senior school has a recently built large sports hall.

The stated academic aim of the school is that *'through the study of the various disciplines, a child gains length, breadth and depth of understanding as to the 'reason why' of things.'* The social aim of the school states, in part: *'We base our whole ethos on the generally recognised ideals of encouraging our children to develop sympathy and sensitivity towards the needs of those around them...'*

### **Summary of main findings**

St. John's Preparatory and Senior School is a good school with a number of outstanding features. The pupils enjoy their education very much and their personal development is good. Relationships throughout the school are outstanding and this has a positive effect on the progress pupils make in their learning. They achieve high standards in their work. Pupils perform very well in national examinations at GCSE and A level. Teaching is good overall and is occasionally outstanding. The curriculum is broad and balanced, although more attention could be given to technology, religious education and business studies. Provision and teaching for the youngest pupils is good.

### **What the school does well:**

- it enables pupils to achieve high academic standards;

- it ensures that pupils' behaviour is outstanding;
- it is very effective in encouraging pupils to lead healthy lives;
- it ensures pupils really enjoy their education; and
- it enables pupils to develop very good relationships.

**What the school must do in order to comply with the regulations:**

- attend to the aspects of health and safety noted in section three of this report; and
- improve the aspects of the premises recorded in section 5.

**What the school must do to comply with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 2002**

In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA, the school should:

- devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the senior school.

# COMPLIANCE WITH THE REGULATIONS FOR REGISTRATION

## 1. The quality of education provided by the school

### The quality of the curriculum

St John's Preparatory and Senior School provides a good curriculum for its pupils. It offers an appropriate range of subjects with a generally good balance of time given to each. However, there is less emphasis on religious education and the technological aspects of learning. Pupils are currently not offered design and technology or religious education as options at GCSE or A Level. The curriculum provides pupils with good support for their academic, physical and personal development. However, older pupils commented that they would prefer greater emphasis on life skills and business studies in the 6<sup>th</sup> Form. Schemes of work are good, with an appropriate mix of published schemes and school-generated material. These provide teachers with a good basis for their planning. Subject matter is generally well matched to the ages and aptitudes of the pupils. As a result, nearly all pupils achieve high standards by the time they leave the school. Art and design, English literature, law, modern foreign languages, history and mathematics are particular strengths.

The school does not take pupils with known special educational needs, but there is good provision for those pupils who have specific learning difficulties or need extra support in their learning. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs. Provision for children in the reception classes is good. Planning takes account of the areas of learning for these children and the activities offered ensure that all make good progress. Nearly all children exceed the early learning goals by the time they enter Year 1.

The curriculum is enhanced by a very good range of extra-curricular activities. These include visits to places of interest, residential trips both in the UK and abroad, and lunchtime and after-school clubs. Effective use is made of the extensive school grounds for sport, environmental studies and art. Good use is made of the local community and services, such as the police and the fire service. Pupils are actively encouraged to take regular exercise and they frequently compete in local sporting events.

Pupils' personal development is good because the school places a high priority on this aspect. The supportive family atmosphere in which pupils are encouraged to be *'brave thinkers, but polite at all times'*, helps pupils feel safe and to achieve well. Pupils learn about key risks, and can explain why, for example, drinking alcohol at too early an age is dangerous. Their excellent behaviour and positive attitudes shows that they enjoy school very much. Pupils' personal development is supported effectively by the personal, social, health and citizenship education programmes. However, at times, more opportunity could be given for pupils to use their initiative and be independent. Pupils' basic skills in literacy and numeracy are very well developed and prepare them extremely effectively for higher education, although the preparation for their economic well-being and an information and communication technology (ICT) based future is currently less effective. The school takes good care of the pupils' health and welfare. Outstanding support is given for helping them

choose healthy lifestyles, for example by the provision of high quality food and a rounded programme of curricular and competitive sport.

### **The quality of teaching and assessment**

The teaching is good overall and sometimes outstanding. The school has succeeded in attracting and retaining many teachers who have considerable expertise in their subjects. Many have a good range of specialisms and consequently the school offers most, but not all, courses to a high level. Lessons are planned very carefully with a satisfactory range of resources, but there is limited use of ICT in class lessons and through the curriculum. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods to engage and involve students. Because relationships are outstanding and there is firm discipline, lessons run smoothly and often at a very brisk pace. Classrooms are orderly and purposeful places, often with a quiet hum of focused learning.

Teachers generally have high expectations. They place strong emphasis on the specific knowledge and vocabulary of each subject, and in particular on precision in the use of English, so that pupils speak and read very fluently and write very well. Teaching in mathematics is strong, developing rapid and accurate skills. Pupils are set by ability in the senior school so that work can be more accurately matched to the level at which they are working. Although teaching in science is good in the preparatory school, it is weaker at Key Stage 3, because it does not develop the skills of investigation and enquiry sufficiently. Pupils make good progress in French and German because the teaching builds thoroughly on skills and knowledge.

Teachers generally have a suitable range of teaching techniques which they use to good effect. They have clear objectives for their lessons, which they share with their pupils and check that they understand. The objectives mainly show what the pupils are to learn but occasionally they are less helpful, setting out merely what they are to do. Explanations are clear and prepare the pupils effectively for the activities. The teachers set out their expectations of work and behaviour so that the pupils know precisely what they have to do. Pupils are often encouraged to work together, to share their ideas and develop their planning. Tasks are interesting, varied and closely matched to the lesson objectives. Teachers check pupils' progress carefully through the lesson, providing support and challenge where necessary. Pupils respond very well, concentrating throughout and usually doing their best. The end of lessons is usually used carefully to check understanding, consolidate knowledge and prepare pupils for what they are to do next.

Where the teaching is outstanding, teachers have very high expectations of what their pupils can achieve. They are precise about the skills and knowledge to be taught and prepare the teaching and tasks appropriately in order to achieve them. The question and answer sessions are often used to a high degree, promoting thinking, challenging previously held ideas and developing concepts. Teachers use a range of interesting resources, promoting first-hand exploration and enabling pupils to research from a variety of primary and secondary sources. The work builds very effectively on what the pupils already know and understand. However, the teaching occasionally falls short of the school's high standards when the teacher's behaviour management is not consistent with the school's expectations, questioning techniques

are ineffective and the pupils are not sufficiently involved in the lesson. At times, in otherwise satisfactory lessons, the more able are asked to complete the same work as others in the class before moving on to more relevant activities, which hampers their otherwise rapid progress.

The school has effective assessment systems. Assessment is matched to the levels of the National Curriculum and the demands of the examinations taken by the pupils. Teachers' own assessments are mainly accurate, although there is some over-caution in the grading of speaking and listening and writing in Year 2. There is a good range of regular tests and assessments, and the results are shared with parents and pupils so that all are aware of the standards reached and the progress being made. There are good strategies for identifying and challenging or supporting those whose performance is not as expected. The pupils have targets for improvement, helping them to see what they need to do next, although some class targets are too general to be of good use. The school is developing the pupils' ability to assess their own and others' work and this is helping them to understand the levels at which they are working. However, the use of marking is inconsistent. Some is very effective in showing pupils how well they have reached the objectives of the lesson, their targets and what they need to do to improve, but this is not always the case.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **2. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils**

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is good. Their spiritual development is excellent and supported effectively by the acceptance of all faiths and cultures together with the school's Christian ethos. The beautiful grounds in both schools develop pupils' awareness of the beauty of nature. They are taught to reflect on a range of spiritual and moral issues, and aspects of the human condition, such as the tragedy of war. They are also consistently encouraged to reflect on themselves, turning points in their lives and whether they are ready for challenges and responsibilities. As pupils mature, they begin to show a real spiritual dimension in their writing. For example, a pupil in the preparatory school wrote, *'If my daddy were a flower, he'd be a blossoming orchid bathing in the pleasant shade, beautiful and delicate, and as rare to find as a daddy like he is'*.

Pupils' social, moral and cultural development are all good. There is a very strong emphasis on appropriate social behaviour and a zero tolerance of traits such as bullying and Internet violation. These are reinforced in personal, social and health education lessons and class time. Pupils in the preparatory school say how much they enjoy these discussions. Pupils choose their own class rules which generally have a moral basis, and they understand the school's rigorous sanctions which are displayed in each class. Senior pupils study law and the importance of a democratic law-abiding society. Pupils take on a range of responsibilities. In the Preparatory school, pupils above Year 4 monitor the toilets, dining room and playground. One pupil said, *"it was the greatest moment of my life when I was elected Playground Buddy"*. In the senior school, pupils have many roles and responsibilities. The

school council is influential and, for example, has heavily influenced the healthy lunch menu. Pupils raise money for charities and good causes of their choice. The preparatory school pupils recycle waste products as a matter of course. The curriculum supports pupils' cultural awareness well. Pupils of all ages enjoy performing a number of musical and drama performances each year, and there is a well constructed programme of visits to places of interest such as museums and democratic institutions. Pupils learn French from Reception Year and visiting speakers from a variety of faiths, together with '*Culture Days*' help prepare pupils for life in our multi-cultural society.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

### **3. The welfare, health and safety of the pupils**

Provision for the pupils' welfare, health and safety is good. The school rightly prides itself on its family atmosphere and caring environment. Pupils say that the school takes very good care of them and that there is always an adult in whom they can trust and confide. They enjoy school and feel that adults treat them with respect. There are many rewards and celebrations for good work, behaviour and particular achievements which the pupils value and which encourage them to greater efforts. Because the school does not tolerate even minor misdemeanours, such as swearing, the ethos reflects its aims and values, with a friendly and positive ambience where pupils feel safe. There are appropriate anti-bullying and anti-racism policies which all pupils and staff understand. Pupils report that there is very little aggressive behaviour and know that it will be dealt with severely should it occur. The school keeps careful records of all incidents of misbehaviour and action that is taken as a result.

There is a suitable health and safety policy that is implemented in the main successfully, but does not meet requirements. The designated person for child protection in the lower school has recently received training. However, arrangements made for training the Child Protection Officer at the senior school have been unavoidably cancelled. Consequently the training is not up to date. The school has plans in hand to rectify the situation. It carries out regular risk assessments to ensure that other procedures are in line with guidance. It has suitable systems in place to ensure Internet security, although there is no written policy. Proper risk assessments are also carried out in relation to school visits.

The school meets the regulations for fire safety, as reflected in the fire officer's report of 2004. Fire drills are carried out regularly and the results are noted and any necessary action taken. There is a satisfactory policy on First Aid and the qualified staff have undertaken recent training. Pupils report that appropriate action is always taken in the rare case of an accident or bump. However, although the procedures at the senior school meet the requirements for dealing with blood spillages and body fluids, those at the lower school do not always do so. The school has already taken steps to remedy this. Supervision of pupils inside school and in the grounds is good. Staff are deployed suitably. There are clear rules, applied consistently, about supervision at all times of the day. The admission and attendance registers are

maintained in accordance with the regulations. However, while the lower school complies with the requirement of the Disability Discrimination Act 2002 to have a three-year plan of action, the senior school does not.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *ensure that the designated person for child protection receives training to the standards set by the area Child Protection Committee with refresher training at two-year intervals. In addition, ensure that all permanent staff who work with children undertake training with refresher training at three-year intervals. (paragraph 3(2)(b)): and*
- *ensure that all staff follow the guidance on hygiene procedures in the case of spillage of blood or body fluids. (paragraph 3(6)).*

***What does the school need to do to comply with the DDA?***

*In order to comply with the requirements of the DDA the school should:*

- *devise a three-year plan to improve the accessibility of the senior school premises.(DDA)*

#### **4. The suitability of the proprietors and staff**

Appropriate Criminal Records Bureau checks have been carried out on all recently appointed staff and the proprietors of the school. The school has taken effective steps to ensure that all members of staff are suitable persons to be working with children.

The school has an appropriate recruitment policy and checks are made to confirm the identity, medical fitness, previous employment history and qualifications of prospective staff. References are sought and the information gained is taken into account before confirming appointments. Induction procedures for newly appointed staff are good.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

#### **5. The suitability of the premises and accommodation**

The preparatory school is situated in a large house set in very spacious, attractive, well maintained grounds. Some classes are accommodated in four double demountable buildings. All parts of the school are in good condition, clean, tidy and



in very good decorative order. The school has benefited from a systematic programme of high quality renovation and development that is sympathetic to the original architecture of the main building. Classrooms are adequate in size and number, although space is restricted for a small number. There are not enough hand basins for the boys, and the need for a further toilet is imminent. There are not enough toilets or hand basins for the girls.

The senior school is situated in a very large, rambling house set in extensive and well-maintained grounds. The accommodation is supplemented by demountable buildings and some converted mews cottages. There is a very large, state-of-the art sports hall. This school is also undergoing systematic refurbishment which is of a high quality. The buildings are resistant to adverse weather, and are accessible to all current pupils. There are a number of areas in which the school does not meet regulations. One of the converted mews cottages is unsuited to its current use. The classroom is too small to use as the specialist music base, and the stairs are unsafe as the tread on one step is loose. In most areas of the school, the flooring is appropriate and in satisfactory or good condition. However, the carpet in one room is loose, worn and dirty, and the lino on the back stairs is curling away from the steps and is hazardous. There is insufficient ventilation in the stairwell leading from the kitchen, and this funnels and concentrates kitchen smells and vapours to the upper floors. There are insufficient toilets and hand basins for both the boys and girls, and facilities for pupils who are ill are currently inappropriate. The school has plans to build a new dining and washroom block.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

No.

***What does the school need to do to comply with the regulations?***

*In order to comply with the Independent Schools Standards Regulations 2003 the school should:*

- *ensure there are sufficient washrooms for staff and pupils in both the preparatory and senior schools, including facilities for pupils with special needs, which take account of the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(k));*
- *ensure there are appropriate facilities for senior school pupils who are ill in accordance with the Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(l));*
- *ensure the ventilation in the classrooms and other parts of the senior school is satisfactory and in accordance with The Education (School Premises) Regulations 1999 (paragraph 5(p)); and*
- *ensure there is appropriate flooring in the senior school and that it is in good condition (paragraph 5(s)).*

## **6. The quality of information for parents and other partners**

The school supplies very good information for parents. They are supplied with all the required information in a number of ways. These include in the school prospectus, the information packs supplied at each stage, the very frequent newsletters and the school website. Further information is given at parents' evenings or in individual meetings with the headmaster, headmistress or senior staff. Parents are made fully aware of the other necessary information and have access to it whenever they make a request. The school has clear and detailed policies, and suitable complaints procedures. Annual reports are very good overall and they provide parents with significant amounts of information about their children's standards and their attitude to work. The reports demonstrate how well teachers know their pupils.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## **7. The effectiveness of the school's procedures for handling complaints**

The school has a fair complaints procedure which sets out its philosophy of being fair, open and honest when dealing with any complaint. The policy outlines how a complaint can be made and the steps that will be taken to address it. Timescales for each step of the process are explained, and suitable provision is made for someone external to the school and managing organisation to be involved, should the complaint proceed to a panel hearing. The school makes appropriate arrangements to keep all correspondence related to complaints confidential.

***Does the school meet the requirements for registration?***

Yes.

## SCHOOL DETAILS

|                                    |   |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Name of school:                    | St John's Senior and Preparatory School   |
| DfES Number:                       | 308/6062  |
| Type of school:                    | Preparatory and Secondary   |
| Status:                            | Independent   |
| Age range of pupils:               | 4 – 18 years  |
| Gender of pupils:                  | Mixed   |
| Number on roll (full-time pupils): | Boys: 246    Girls: 182    Total: 428   |
| Annual fees (day pupils):          | 4+ £5,850   7+ £6,690   11+ £7,320  |
| Address of school:                 | St John's Preparatory School<br>The Ridgeway<br>Potters Bar<br>Hertfordshire<br>EN6 5QT |
|                                    | St John's Senior School<br>The Ridgeway<br>Potters Bar<br>Hertfordshire<br>EN2 8BE      |
| Telephone numbers:                 | Preparatory School: 01707 657294<br>Senior School: 0208 366 0035                        |
| Fax number:                        | 0203 366 4439   |
| Email address:                     | stjohnssc@aol.com   |
| Headteachers:                      | Mr A Tardios<br>Mrs C Tardios   |
| Proprietors:                       | Mr A and Mrs C Tardios  |
| Reporting Inspector:               | Mr S Dennett  |
| Date of inspection:                | 3 - 6 July 2006   |

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