

Inspection report  
Stoodley Knowle School  
Independent school  
DfES ref no: 880/6001

Inspection under Section 162A of the Education Act 2002

Dates of inspection: 26-27 September 2006

# Introduction

## 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 as part of pilot inspection arrangements 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

Stoodley Knowle School, founded in 1925, is a non-selective independent girls' school for pupils aged 2 to 18. It is owned and run by the Order of the Daughters of the Cross, and stands in 65 acres of wooded headland by Anstey's Cove near Torquay. Its mission is *'to pursue excellence in all aspects of education and ... to help each child develop her gifts and talents to the full. ... to nurture a whole, happy, confident young person ready to face the challenges of life inspired by true Christian ideals.'*

## Overall evaluation of the school

Stoodley Knowle is an outstanding school with some excellent features. Staff and pupils form a friendly, family community where all are committed to shared values. It offers pupils a very wide range of curricular and extra-curricular opportunities enabling them to take their place in the world with high academic achievement, self-confidence and strong moral values. The high standard of teaching enables pupils to make good, and sometimes very good, progress. There is a strong emphasis on care and welfare throughout the school. The school complies with all the independent schools' regulations.

The curriculum is outstanding in meeting pupils' needs. It sparks pupils' interests and enthusiasm because of the wide range of opportunities which offer intellectual, creative and physical challenge. Through specialist teaching many subjects inspire and extend learning through the demand they make on pupils' participation in group work, discussion and reflection. All subjects of the National Curriculum are taught through clearly constructed and well documented programmes. French is introduced from the Nursery and Spanish in Year 8. Provision for basic skills is good and begins early in the child's life at Stoodley; it focuses on the importance of grammar, spelling, effective communication and facility with mathematics. A consistent approach to presentation and neatness reinforce good habits, and encourage pupils to organise their thinking and their work logically. In creative subjects the freedom of expression is much valued by older pupils and leads to high quality work, but this is more restricted for the very young children. Pupils enjoy the many diverse curriculum activities such as jazz ballet, the climbing wall and pre-driver training. There is a reasonable range of subjects on offer for older pupils and where the curriculum cannot support small exam groups there is close collaboration with a local grammar school. Progression routes for the next stage of education are clear and *Connexions* advice is available from Years 9 to 13. Additional careers support comes

through the Young Enterprise challenge and work experience. A good range of extra-curricular activities are offered and participation is high.

During the inspection many lessons were observed across the full age-range and in a variety of subjects. Teaching was almost always of good quality and often outstanding, consequently the pupils' achievement and enjoyment were high. Lessons are well planned and the teachers have good subject knowledge. Clear instructions are given to pupils and often the lesson's objectives are shared at the start. In the best lessons the teachers frequently refer to key learning points to ensure that these are well understood. Planning often indicates that teachers are expecting pupils to make different amounts of progress during the lesson and this was successfully taken into account during the lessons seen. On a few occasions pupils were required to wait for others to catch up rather than being given purposeful tasks in the meantime. There are no pupils with a statement of special educational needs but there are good systems for identifying those who may need extra support and appropriate curriculum plans are put in place for them. The staff are developing good systems for the regular review of progress and the assessment of pupils' learning. The school takes part in national testing arrangements in Years 2, 6, 11 and 13. At the end of the junior years, performance in English and science is well above that expected of their age-group, and their mathematical achievement, although not as strong as English, is also good. GCSE and A level results are both well above the national averages with 100% of pupils achieving at least 5 A\*-C grades in GCSE and 100% passing A levels with 85% at grades A or B. Such success throughout the school ensures that pupils have a good choice of future careers. Although the outcomes are very high, teachers could give pupils more opportunity to develop independent learning skills and make more choices about how to approach problems and tasks. Greater flexibility in the format for presentation of their work, including the use of information and communication technology (ICT) would allow pupils to develop additional skills. Current resources for ICT place some constraints on this but the school's development plans are realistic.

The promotion of pupils' spiritual, moral, and social development is outstanding. Behaviour is excellent. The purposes and values set out in the mission statement are evident in the pupils' personal and social achievements. One group of pupils commented that the moral precepts build on their own family values. There are opportunities for understanding the customs and beliefs of other cultures but this is not so well developed as other aspects of preparing pupils for adult life in today's society. The school is a happy, harmonious community. All staff, the sixth form and the sisters are excellent role models. They set high standards which include good manners and respectful behaviour. Year 7 girls new to the school explained how they had been welcomed, settled quickly and found new friends. The school offers boundless opportunities for pupils to boost their confidence, and the chance to develop leadership skills by taking responsibility as form prefects and games captains. Team-working is developed through opportunities such as the Ten Tors challenge, the many school teams and collaborative activities like choirs and drama productions. Trust, reliability and honesty are much valued by the pupils and produce enduring friendships. They show their compassion for others through charitable fund raising and other community links. With so much enthusiasm, a

significant number of pupils said they would like to be able to contribute more effectively to decision making in the school; the school is currently devising means for this.

Provision for care and welfare is good throughout the school. Pastoral structures are well developed. A full range of policies underscore the school's approach to all aspects of ensuring pupils' welfare, and the practice matches the theory. Very thorough risk assessments are undertaken for all activities, including those that take place off-site. On-site risks have been carefully considered and the school constantly monitors movement around the grounds. Fire safety, First Aid and child protection issues are all properly implemented and regularly reviewed to take account of the latest guidance. Pupils are well supervised within the buildings and especially as they move around the extensive site, usually being escorted by a member of staff. There is a good emphasis on being healthy and staying safe, and pupils often comment about these matters with secure understanding. The school currently has boarding facilities, which are well maintained, but which are being phased out when the present boarding pupils leave the school. The school has taken account of its duties under the Disability and Discrimination Act and has introduced some site modifications with plans for further enhancements. All staff have been properly checked with the Criminal Records Bureau. Good recruitment procedures ensure qualifications, health and identity are checked and that references are taken up from previous employers.

The premises are very well maintained, in good decorative order and fit for purpose. The buildings are a mixture of historically old and purpose-built new, with good-sized accommodation for all teaching areas and many additional specialist rooms. The chapel takes a central place in the life of the school. Outdoor sports facilities are noteworthy including netball and tennis courts, a cross-country track, swimming pool and a very large fenced area with an all-weather surface. There are extensive woodlands and maintained gardens and a natural rock-face climbing wall, which is also made available to other groups from the local area. The school buildings and grounds comply with all aspects of the respective regulations.

The school prospectus is an attractive and well produced document with relevant inserts which can be updated to contain the latest information. Together with the parent handbook, these are informative publications and meet all the regulations. The annual 'Stoodley Knowledge' is a very informative and attractive booklet with details of activities, events and contributions from pupils. Progress reports, parents' evenings, regular communications about diary dates together with curriculum outlines and bulletin boards for the younger pupils, keep parents informed about their children and the day-to-day running of the school. The vast majority of parents who returned the inspection questionnaire are overwhelmingly supportive of the school and the quality of education which their daughters receive. "I cannot speak highly enough of Stoodley Knowle," was typical of many comments received by the inspectors. The school prides itself on an 'open door policy' which enables parents, carers and pupils to contact the headteacher directly and receive an early response. Although a few parents were not aware of the school's policy, the complaints

procedure is clear and meets all the regulations. High priority is placed on informal resolution and there have been no formal complaints.

## Compliance with regulatory requirements

The school meets all of the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended January 2005.

## What the school could do to improve further

Whilst not required by the regulations, the school might wish to consider the following points for development:

- increase opportunities for developing independent learning skills throughout the school and especially for the youngest pupils;
- improve opportunities for learning about non-European cultures; and

## School details

Name of school:	Stoodley Knowle School
DfES Number:	880/6001
Type of school:	Girls Catholic/Christian
Status:	Independent (with boarding facilities)
Date school opened:	1925
Age range of pupils:	2-18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
Number on roll :	301
Number of boarders:	3
Annual fees (day pupils):	£3465 - £6105
Annual fees (boarders):	£8856 (no new boarders accepted)
Address of school:	Anstey's Cove Road Torquay TQ1 2JB
Telephone number:	01803 293160
Fax number:	01803 214757
Email address:	headoffice@stoodleyknowle.fsnet.co.uk
Headteacher:	Sister Perpetua
Proprietor:	Trustees of the Daughters of the Cross
Reporting Inspector:	Mr Peter Way HMI
Dates of inspection:	26-27 September 2006

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