



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

St Bernard's Preparatory School

February 2023

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School's Details

School	St Bernard's Preparatory School			
DfE number	871/6000			
Registered charity number	241743			
Address	St Bernard's Preparatory School Hawtreys Close Slough Berkshire SL1 1TB			
Telephone number	01753 521821			
Email address	info@stbernardsprep.org			
Headteacher	Mrs Asha Verma			
Chair of governors	Mrs Ros Nockles			
Proprietor	St Benedict's School, Ealing			
Age range	2.5 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	223			
	EYFS	55	Prep	168
Inspection dates	7 to 9 February 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St Bernard's Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1945 by the Bernadine Cistercian Order, whose Sisters owned the school and acted as its proprietor. The school is now an independent subsidiary of St Benedict's Ealing from which a majority of its governors are drawn. The school comprises of two sections: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 2 ½ to 5 years, and prep for pupils aged 5 to 11 years.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to teach the Catholic faith and educate pupils towards love and service to God, each other and the wider community. It seeks to provide a broad, balanced curriculum which will develop an understanding of each faith and the Gospel values shared by all faiths. The school endeavours to develop pupils to their full potential, spiritually, morally, academically, socially and physically.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Most pupils are from professional families who live within a 10-mile radius of the school. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils in the prep school is above average compared with those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 25 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional specialist help. There are no pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Of the 31 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL), four receive additional support. Data used by the school identified seven pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them. They include pupils who have particular talents in music and sport.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is

required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils demonstrate exceptionally positive attitudes towards their learning, working diligently and collaboratively to achieve their goals.
- Pupils are excellent communicators. They speak articulately and confidently, write with high levels of competence, read fluently and listen attentively.
- Pupils make rapid progress from their starting points, achieving high levels of knowledge and understanding in most subjects by the time they leave.
- Pupils achieve well in a broad range of activities beyond the classroom, particularly in sport and performing arts.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' spiritual understanding is excellent for their age.
- Pupils show strong levels of self-confidence, perseverance and motivation to work hard and improve their learning.
- Pupils respond positively to the cultural diversity within the school and have a mature understanding of the benefits of working with those from different backgrounds and faiths.
- Pupils' behaviour is exemplary; they are kind, caring and courteous towards each other.
- Pupils willingly and enthusiastically take on many leadership roles and make a strong contribution to the school.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Disseminate the excellent creativity and imaginative teaching that is evident in the very best subject areas so that pupils' engagement in lessons is consistent across every subject.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils of all ages achieve high academic standards, and in this way the school very successfully meets its aim of promoting a tradition of academic excellence. Children in the EYFS make rapid progress and achieve extremely well. By the time they leave at the end of Year 6, almost all pupils are successful in obtaining places at senior schools with demanding entrance requirements. The school's own analysis

of its data, indicate that the achievement of pupils of all abilities is excellent with most attaining levels well beyond others of similar ability nationally. For example, in 2022 almost half of Year 6 achieved the top grades possible in foundation level GCSE mathematics. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve very well because of effective and timely support and meticulous practice and preparation in study skills and examination techniques. Across the school the most able make rapid progress because teaching approaches usually challenge their thinking and raise their aspirations. In pre-inspection questionnaire responses that were overwhelmingly positive in every area, all parents agreed that the school enables their children to make progress.

- 3.6 Pupils' achievement beyond the classroom is excellent. They are highly successful in music and sport. Pupils gain confidence and experience in extra-curricular activities ranging from coding to chess and Junior Duke to judo. Just over a quarter of pupils take part in at least two extra-curricular clubs each week, which make a significant contribution to their learning. Experience of taking part in school productions such as the *Big Little Nativity* and *Change the World* helps pupils to develop both confidence and self-discipline. Many pupils achieve success in external music examinations and two pupils have been selected to join the National Children's Orchestra. Participation in sport is a strong feature of the school with just over 100 fixtures taking place every year. Pupils have successfully represented the school at county levels in athletics, cricket, swimming and tennis, with some competing at national levels in girls' wrestling. Pupils are successful at national and international mathematics challenge and several pupils have been awarded prizes in elocution and science competitions. Those who have SEND and EAL are as keen to take advantage of the range of opportunities as their peers and their achievement is greatly enhanced as a result. Leaders and governors have enhanced the school's facilities and designed a stimulating curriculum that gives all pupils the chance to fulfil their potential.
- 3.7 Pupils of all abilities achieve very high levels of knowledge, skill and understanding as a result of stimulating teaching. For example, children in the EYFS could confidently identify and name all the planets and noted that Pluto was known as the *dwarf* planet. In physical education (PE), prep pupils demonstrated a high degree of physical skill when completing netball passing drills aimed at honing their technique which included using more advanced movements when moving to the side. In French, older pupils demonstrated a very high standard of linguistic understanding when discussing their morning activities accurately using the associated *er* verbs. In the best teaching, pupils develop very high levels of independence in their learning. Pupils actively use their earlier learning and guidance to refine their work. In such lessons, teaching skilfully engages pupils emotionally as well as intellectually so that they are often found eagerly discussing the lesson as they leave the classroom. This creativity and imagination which engenders such deep learning experiences has yet to penetrate fully into all subject areas.
- 3.8 Pupils are excellent communicators. They speak articulately and with self-assurance and are able to express themselves clearly and concisely. This was observed in a French lesson in which prep pupils confidently read with expression and accurate pronunciation a passage on making healthy food choices. Children in the EYFS develop strong writing skills through early mark making of two-year-olds to full letter formation free-writing activities designed to develop their letter formation. For example, children were confidently writing lists of tools, such as hammer, saw and pliers using picture and phonic clue sheets to prompt them. As they move through the school, pupils learn how to write for different purposes. This was observed in science in which older prep pupils used advanced technical language when writing their plan for an investigation into friction. Pupils correctly used key terms such as dependent, independent variable, fair test, prediction and hypothesis. Pupils read aloud fluently and with increasingly good expression and awareness of punctuation and rhythm. In a phonics session, children in the EYFS successfully read and sounded out words starting with the letter f such as fig, fox, fog, fan, fun and fin. They then used these words to form short sentences such as 'His fan' and 'I had lots of fun' correctly remembering that sentences always begin with a capital letter. Children then successfully recalled the alphabet by singing their special ABC alphabet song to the tune of *Twinkle twinkle little star*.

- 3.9 Pupils acquire and develop highly sophisticated study skills for their age as they move through the school. Children confidently referred to a paper number line to check their ordering of numbers before they drew their own using chalk on the playground. In geography, pupils used an atlas to accurately analyse the typical climates that exist in Europe. In English, younger prep pupils were examining the historical facts surrounding Skara Brae, a Neolithic settlement in Orkney. By sifting and synthesising a wealth of source material, they agreed which were the five most important facts: hunting animals for food; staying safe was a full-time job; animal skins were worn to keep warm; needles made from bones, and caves were used for shelter. Using a very helpful plan using sub-headings to organise their thoughts and record information in a logical order. They wrote-up their conclusions, which were enhanced using key vocabulary gleaned from both online and paper-based resources.
- 3.10 Pupils' progress in developing understanding of numeracy is excellent. Children in the EYFS calculated the correct money using one and two pence coins that would be needed to purchase gifts from the toy shop. In history, older pupils were investigating a range of cipher techniques used in World War 1. They drew on their previous knowledge of algebra and problem-solving skills to complete a range of complex cipher activities involving morse code, pigpen and caesar shift techniques. In science, prep school pupils used their mathematical expertise to record data in tables and plotting appropriate graphs regarding the gestation period of various mammals. Similarly, Year 6 pupils successfully deployed their mathematical understanding of shape and symmetry when studying the work of Joaquin Torres Garcia before producing their own drawings.
- 3.11 Pupils of all ages and abilities develop excellent technological skills which they successfully use across the curriculum. For example, children in the EYFS word-processed simple sentences beginning with *I like*. They also developed strong fine motor skills which enabled them to confidently control a mouse. Older prep pupils successfully applied their knowledge and understanding of computer software to create a 3D model of the perfect school. Similarly, younger prep pupils successfully navigated complex publishing software to produce high quality posters on mental health. Here they honed their skills in manipulating typeface, colour pallet, graphics and choice of background.
- 3.12 Pupils' extremely positive attitudes to learning can be seen in classrooms and beyond. Pupils of all ages develop a love of learning in wanting to find out as much as possible and to embrace new challenges. In a phonics session, pupils accurately and enthusiastically read aloud sentences about going on holiday: *I am going to a hotel in the holidays* and *For breakfast I had toast and jam*. Pupils know that they need to put in the effort to succeed and that they are the determiners of their own futures. They like the opportunity to work collaboratively and understand that this helps them learn, for example when thinking about future career possibilities. In a physical education lesson, older prep pupils showed excellent leadership skills by dynamically developing tactics to enable their netball game to flow better and produce for themselves more opportunities to score for their team.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils develop strong spiritual awareness because governors and senior leaders have ensured that there is a significant focus on the skills needed for reflection. Pupils enjoy the many opportunities to participate in prayer times throughout the school day. Pupils of all faiths contribute to the class prayer books. Here pupils reflect usefully and write sensitively and perceptively about their feelings and the beauty of nature. In art, prep pupils thoughtfully studied *The Tree of Life* by the Haitian artist Jacques-Richard Chery. The picture depicts a black Jesus who suffers with the Haitian people, confronts evil, and through his broken body pronounces redemption. Here Pupils reflected and analysed perceptively on the various techniques deployed and considered what the artist might have thought of when he produced the work, such as when we pursue our own agenda, we lose sight of the poor and vulnerable in society. In a discussion over lunch, pupils reflected on the question, *Does time go on forever?* They confidently discussed the meaning of time and the origin and concept of the end of the universe. In

religious studies, younger prep pupils expressed their emotions and reactions freely when they reflected on the symbolism of Holy Communion within the Catholic Mass, for example, in celebrating Jesus' special meal. Many pupils enjoy the strong sense of fulfilment gained from performance, whether it be through drama or music. Pupils are able to explore and express their deeper emotions more fully in the performing arts when language and words become exhausted.

- 3.15 Pupils' work on behalf of others, the school and the community is excellent. They take much pride in choosing several charities to raise money for, based in the United Kingdom and overseas. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of duty and service by donating 108 *bags of kindness* (gifts and necessities) to vulnerable families in the community. They raised funds for those people affected by the conflict in Ukraine. Involvement in these community activities helps pupils to develop empathy with others, particularly those less fortunate than themselves. Pupils willingly take on posts of responsibility such as school counsellors, faith and anti-bullying ambassadors. They fulfil these roles effectively. Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of social development which reflect the school's aims and ethos, showing awareness of social responsibilities beyond home and school. They have a keen sense of the value of collaboration. For example, prep pupils successfully set up an eco-club and introduced initiatives such turning off taps and lights when not in use and choosing metal bottles instead of plastic ones as they are easier to re-cycle. Pupils respond well to an environment that inspires them to develop a strong social conscience. For example, in geography, pupils demonstrated excellent levels of human and social understanding when discussing the impact of the war on the migration of refugees from Syria.
- 3.16 Pupils develop an excellent awareness and understanding of different cultures and religious customs. For example, children of Hindu families delivered a presentation about Diwali and reflected with interest on the many festivals from different world religions that contain the theme of light. In history, older prep pupils explored how the Indus valley shaped the early beliefs of Hinduism. In art, pupils developed a deep appreciation for the common motifs found in Islamic art which they used to produce their own hand drawn crayon pieces. In science, pupils appreciate the valuable work of successful scientists from a range of different specialisms and cultures. Examples included, George Washington Carver (USA), Alice Ball, Kusala Rajendran and Lonnie Johnson. In discussion, pupils confidently articulated the value and importance of tolerance and respect, by treating all people as they themselves would wish to be treated, regardless of their faith or background. In questionnaires, all parents agreed that the school actively promotes values of diversity, democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.
- 3.17 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe in a variety of contexts. For example, they know not to give out personal details when online. This was reflected in their responses to the questionnaire in which all asserted that they know how to stay safe online. Pupils also understand well how to stay safe on the road or near water. Pupils have a good awareness of how to support their mental health and feel confident to discuss their concerns. For example, pupils know that when they are feeling sad or anxious or faced with a mental challenge, they can visit a trusted adult to discuss their concerns. Leaders and governors have ensured that mental health is promoted vigorously across the school and with increasingly positive results. Pupils know that for a healthy lifestyle it is important to get enough sleep, eat a balanced diet and take regular exercise. Children in the EYFS spoke with confidence about how their PE exercises were good for them and helping their hearts to become strong. They all knew that it was important to drink lots of water when they returned to class. Pupils displayed a sophisticated knowledge of modern-day health challenges such as *Fatty Liver Disease* and the effects of soft drinks on tooth decay. In the questionnaires, a few parents commented that school food and snacks are not always healthy, but observation of availability, menus and discussion with pupils supported the view of the vast majority that the school supports healthy eating.
- 3.18 Pupils' moral understanding and sense of responsibility for their behaviour towards others are excellent. Pupils' conduct around the school and in lessons is exemplary. Relationships between staff and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are excellent. They are excellent role models for younger pupils; they take a lead role in running clubs and organise fundraising events for the school's charities.

Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Inspection evidence supports this view and that pupils have a strong moral compass and awareness of right and wrong. The school's anti-bullying ambassadors demonstrate excellent understanding about the causes and effects of bullying. Pupils' comments and behaviour logs confirm that bullying is extremely rare. Nevertheless, the anti-bullying ambassadors are proactive in deploying a range of strategies to raise awareness and offer support.

- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of self-knowledge and self-assurance and feel valued as individuals. Nursery children demonstrated strong self-discipline by settling quickly into their morning routines sitting on the carpet or putting their clothes on without being prompted. Reception children were able to add reward *coins* to their own money boxes that they had made. Older pupils value the understanding and support given to them by staff, so that they understand well their strengths and weaknesses, which provide a springboard to their success. Personal, social, health and education (PSHE) lessons make a substantial contribution to pupils' personal development. For example, pupils were able to confidently explain that no one is perfect and that we are the sum of ourselves, comprising of both positive and negative traits. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages their children to be more self-assured and independent, and inspection evidence supports this view. In the questionnaires a small minority of pupils did not feel that they were well prepared for senior school. However, in interviews with inspectors all pupils agreed that they were well prepared for the next stage of their education. Within and beyond the classroom, pupils approach their tasks with perseverance, encouraged by the pervading 'can do' ethos. Pupils are generally very resilient. Pupils develop a strong sense of self-knowledge about how to improve their own learning that they can give feedback on each other's work.
- 3.20 Pupils demonstrate a very mature understanding about making sensible decisions. In discussions, they were clear that the decisions they make now about their learning, behaviour, friendships and effort could have a major influence on how well they do in the future. Children in the EYFS made excellent choices when selecting different shapes of wood when making up their wooden toy designs. Opportunities for decision-making enable pupils across the school to develop their skills in oracy through, for example, taking on a leadership role in which they initiate and organise charity events or lead assemblies to promote the work of various ambassadors. During the inspection, as part of their *Go-givers* community action project, pupils in Years 3 and 4 performed *Change the World together* to the rest of the school. Here they displayed excellent leadership and collaboration qualities by using the musical as a basis to design their own two-week curriculum and raise awareness and funds for charity that is devoted to saving a trillion trees.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors and a member of the proprietorial board, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr David Scott	Reporting inspector
Mrs Naomi Fowke	Compliance team inspector (Retired headteacher, ISA school)
Mr Graham Bone	Team inspector (Deputy headteacher, HMC school)