



THORNTON

INSPECTION

2016

Dear Parents

This is my first year as Head of Thornton College. - I have to say that it has been one of the busiest, but most fulfilling six months of my life!

I had been considering headships for some time, but had not found a school which fitted my (rather lengthy and specific) criteria until I saw the role at Thornton advertised. The first thing I read on the website referred to '*happy children being successful children*'. I strongly share this belief and when I visited the school during the interview process I felt the warmth and happiness here. The ethos and atmosphere at Thornton cannot be replicated. This isn't something a Head can put on as a show for an inspection team. It is something that has developed over generations of pupils and staff, who are committed to make this school thrive.

Thornton is a member of the Girls' Schools Association (GSA) which sits alongside the HMC and represents the top independent schools in the country. As a result of this membership, we are required, by law to be inspected by the ISI, the Independent Schools Inspectorate. Independent schools that are not members of the HMC or GSA are inspected by Ofsted, the organisation which also inspects schools in the state sector.

Our inspection took place last month and I have pleasure in enclosing the inspection report. A team of seven inspectors and monitors, most of whom are themselves heads and senior leaders in quality independent schools, spent four days with us. They observed lessons, met with staff from every area of the school, spent time in boarding, analysed pages and pages of schemes of work, read lesson plans and scrutinized school policies.

This level of inspection, both compliance and quality, only takes place, in general, once every six years. Inspections are changing where compliance is assessed independently and more regularly. Boarding inspections generally take place on a three year cycle. There are always exceptions to this. For example, with the opening of a Sixth Form, it is likely that we will be inspected outside of these timescales to ensure, once again, that we are providing the highest quality of education and care.

Please take time to read the report. Of course it is a reflection of what the inspection team experienced in four days with us and cannot cover every element of a Thornton education. You will notice that it has graded us excellent and good in all areas. Excellent is the highest grade awarded by the ISI. We are striving for excellent in every area next time!

Inspection teams make 'recommendations'. These are made to the school to highlight areas where evidence was not clear during their visit. They act as a guide for us to ensure that the process or activity is in place. We have already identified the areas of the school where further focus or improvement is required - many of which are scheduled within our development plan or have already been actioned.

A great deal of work has been taking place behind the scenes to further improve the education of your daughters and of your experience as parents. Some of these are more obvious to you than others, such as the safer site security, additional parking and new phone system. There are many other improvements taking place across the school, some of which I will detail now.

We have introduced a new school management information system called iSAMS. This system will aid improvement in numerous areas. iSAMS assists with our new academic reporting, tracking and monitoring systems. It will also assist in ensuring that the marking of work is consistent across subjects, classes and year groups. There is a parent portal element, providing you with a great deal of real-time information about your daughter's progress and attainment as well as access to her timetable. It will also host all letters home and details of school events. The portal goes live imminently and you will be sent a username and password in due course.

ICT upgrades, including new hardware and software, have taken place throughout the school and we will shortly be appointing a Digital Learning expert who will further improve the mapping of ICT across the curriculum and assist with the introduction of a VLE (Virtual Learning Environment). We are committed to ensuring that students leave Thornton fully equipped and confident to make the most of the many advances in ICT.

We have appointed a fully qualified nurse to oversee the Health and Welfare of our boarders and to manage our medical centre, supporting the excellent work provided by our school matron. Improvements in this area include the introduction of a new medical record system to securely record medical data relating to student medical conditions and their medication.

The term dates for next year have been changed to be more in line with other independent schools and to provide consistent curriculum time.

The most significant developments, however, are the improvements to your daughter's educational experience - academic, co-curricular and pastoral.

These improvements include;

- increased the amount of form time - allowing form tutors more contact with their tutees to celebrate achievement and identify, and immediately deal with, any issues
- the introduction of numerous and varied co-curricular activities and societies from Brownies to Japanese and Accounting, providing further scope for the girls to discover new interests and talents, challenge the most able and present opportunities for all to find an area in which they excel. We have also entered into a partnership with Stowe School to commence a Combined Cadet Force (CCF) from Year 10 upwards
- development of a significantly wider GCSE programme with four new subjects introduced; Business Studies, Computer Science, Politics & Citizenship and Psychology, and an expanded option choice
- implementation of a new system of homework allocation and criteria for use of homework - ensuring that it always has a specific benefit to the curriculum, enhances the education within the classroom and is allocated and taken in on the timetabled day
- whole school council has been introduced, giving students a forum to feedback their wish lists and complaints.

We are developing our position as a leading STEM school. A Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics evening was held at the school in January, with over twenty external companies attending. The external speaker, Angela Brady OBE was excellent and this created quite a buzz about the STEM subjects. This was the first of many such events.

We now have a Head Girl and a Deputy Head Girl. A democratic vote was held with staff and students. The Head and Deputy Head Girls were appointed early in the Michaelmas term. It is important that students have evident role models within the school and these girls have been exemplary.

We believe that each and every child has an individual learning need. To this end, we are introducing new and developing our existing support programmes. We are committed to ensuring that all students, those requiring additional support, those sitting somewhere in the middle and those who are of the highest academic ability are stretched, challenged and can achieve their full potential.

Developments in this area include:

- an Oxbridge programme from Year 9. We know that students develop at different rates and this group will develop and expand over time
- the development of scholarly habits across the school, with an inaugural Scholars' Evening due to take place early in the Michaelmas term 2016
- further enhancement of our learning support department, which provides additional support to students who need help in some areas of the curriculum **and** ensure that extension programmes and activities are arranged for girls who are the most academically able.

This is on top of the differentiation strategies which teaching staff use on a day-to-day basis in their lessons, to bring the best out of each of their students.

From the Early Years Foundation Stage upwards we use our beautiful grounds as an extension to our classrooms and laboratories. Outdoor learning has enhanced the curriculum across subjects and year groups. What we are now working on is planning outdoor learning into lessons on a more formal basis. Presently staff are inspired to use the grounds on a regular, but ad-hoc basis when it will support the topic being studied. Work has started in developing specific outdoor learning facilities to enable study outdoors to take place come rain or shine and these lessons will be included within the timetable.

Finally, we will be opening a Sixth Form this September. The presence of a Sixth Form brings so much more to a school than the actual Sixth Form experience itself. Specialist A Level subject teachers will share passion for their subjects lower down the school, introducing new societies from Prep upwards. The numerous Sixth Form activities, such as Young Enterprise will benefit all students, and parents, as these girls will be setting up our school café!

Thank you for all your support as parents. This is a partnership, and if we work together, we can ensure that your daughter thrives and makes the most of every moment she has at this exceptional school.

This is an exhilarating time to be at Thornton and I am so proud to be part of it. This is only the beginning - there is so much more to come.



Mrs Jo Storey

Head of Thornton College



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

**INTEGRATED INSPECTION
THORNTON COLLEGE**

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Thornton College

Full Name of School	Thornton College		
DfE Number	825/6010		
Registered Charity Number	247358		
Address	Thornton College Convent of Jesus and Mary Thornton Milton Keynes Buckinghamshire MK17 0HJ		
Telephone Number	01280 812610		
Fax Number	01280 824042		
Email Address	office@thorntoncollege.com		
Head	Mrs J Storey		
Chair of Governors	Sister Helen Mary Haigh RJM		
Age Range	2 to 16		
Total Number of Pupils	371		
Gender of Pupils	Girls		
Numbers by Age	2-5 (EYFS):	42	5-11: 108
	11-16:	221	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	320	
Number of Boarders	Total:	51	
	Full:	30	Weekly: 21
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection Dates	02 Feb 2016 to 05 Feb 2016		

PREFACE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. The range of these Regulations can be viewed on the website www.legislation.gov.uk. Additionally, inspections will consider the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment introduced by the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.

This inspection report follows the *ISI schedule*. The inspection on which the report is based took place over a period of four continuous days in the school.

The previous ISI EYFS inspection and intermediate boarding inspection was in September 2013 and the previous ISI standard inspection was in February 2010.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Education (DfE) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

This inspection contains specific judgements on the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education, personal development and welfare.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, although inspectors comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit;
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features;
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures;
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching their judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks and have different criteria for judging school quality that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. Both use a four point scale when making judgements of quality but, whilst the ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted, they also reflect the differences in approach. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement on each aspect of the school's work at the beginning of each section. **These headline statements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory', and where Achievement is**

'exceptional' that term may be used for the top grade. Elsewhere in the report, inspectors may use a range of different adjectives to make judgements. **For EYFS registered provision (for children aged under two), reports are required to use the same terminology ('outstanding', 'good', 'requires improvement' and 'inadequate') as Ofsted reports.**

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the co-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Tony Halliwell	Reporting Inspector
Mr Stephen Greenish	Former Headmaster
Mr James Kazi	Team Inspector (Deputy Head, HMC school)
Mrs Ruth Mercer	Team Inspector (Head, GSA school)
Mr Matthew March	Co-coordinating Inspector for Boarding
Mrs Anne McConway	Co-ordinating Inspector for Early Years

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 Thornton College is a Catholic girls' day and boarding school for pupils aged from two to sixteen years of age and is located in a rural area close to Buckingham. The school occupies a 25-acre site and all sections of the school are located on the same campus. The school was founded in 1917 and forms part of the charity of the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. The Nursery caters for boys and girls aged two to four, however the school is girls only from Reception upwards. A small number of the Sisters continue to teach in the school, and provide pastoral support. Several Sisters are governors or trustees, with legal responsibility for oversight of the school and its finances. A new headmistress was appointed in September 2015.
- 1.2 The school aims to enable pupils to discover their true potential and to work towards their full development where they will strive for excellence, whilst fostering pupils' academic, physical and spiritual growth. It aims to enable pupils to grow in the knowledge and love of God, and to encourage pupils to respect and value others.
- 1.3 Currently, there are 371 pupils: 42 children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), 108 in the pre-prep and prep departments in Years 1 to 6, 221 pupils in the senior school in Years 7 to 11, of whom 41 are boarders. There are 10 prep school boarders, with boarding being available from Year 3. Boarders are accommodated in one of two boarding houses. At age eleven, most pupils move up from the prep school to the senior school. The pupils come from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds. Many day and weekly boarding pupils live within a twenty-mile radius of the school, however a number of boarders come from overseas, principally from Spain and Mexico.
- 1.4 The ability profile of the prep and senior schools is above the national average. There is a fairly wide spread of abilities represented, with most pupils having ability that is above or similar to the national average. The school has no pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC) and has identified 68 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 59 receive specialist learning support. There are 24 pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) of whom 19 are given extra support by the school. There is no pupil with a statement of special education need (SEND).
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 The pupils' achievements and learning throughout the school, including EYFS, are good as a result of the well-balanced curricular and co-curricular provision. The school is successful in meeting its aims to foster pupils' academic, physical and spiritual growth. The pupils make good progress in response to good teaching throughout the school although in some lessons the challenge and learning opportunities are not sufficiently developed for all abilities and the use of ICT by pupils is not consistent across the curriculum. Additionally, there is an inconsistency of approach to marking. In the EYFS staff training does not always focus on enabling children to make the most of their learning opportunities in particular for outdoor learning. The co-curricular provision supports the academic programme well and is valued by the pupils. As a result of the effective provision pupils attain results at GCSE which are good for their levels of abilities and the most recent GCSE results show that standards are being consistently maintained. Throughout the school the pupils are receptive and attentive learners, keen to participate and willing to explore ideas.
- 2.2 Pupils are supported by excellent pastoral care and welfare systems together with carefully monitored health and safety and risk assessment procedures. Relationships between staff and pupils and between the pupils themselves are of a high quality and this results in a caring and happy community in which the pupils thrive. The pupils' spiritual development supported by the Mary and Jesus convent community in the school is a strength and the moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Pupils are unfailingly polite and have a strong social awareness and their sense of core British values is in evidence across most subject areas.
- 2.3 Governance and leadership and management of the school are good. The governors offer the school a broad range of experience and draw on the convent sisters to offer direct support from their community. Governors effectively monitor the school at all levels, including the EYFS and prep departments, however a number of minor policy amendments were needed during the inspection week to ensure that they were fully up-to-date. Leadership is focused on enabling the school in achieving its aims to allow pupils to discover their true potential and to work towards their full development. The staff leadership team is committed to school improvement and as a result departmental planning and self-evaluation are now more focused with achievable targets being set, including better use of data and the tracking of pupils which are being used to more effectively monitor pupils' progress. Good progress has been made on most of the recommendations from the previous inspection reports. Consequently, throughout the school teachers use of ICT is increasing and the tracking of pupils' progress has improved across the school. Parents of pupils across the age range are strongly supportive of the school.

2.(b) Action points**(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

2.4 The school meets all the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

2.5 The school meets all the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

2.6 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

1. Ensure that throughout the prep and senior schools, that teaching offers appropriate pace and challenge for pupils of all abilities.
2. Ensure the more widespread use of ICT in the classroom by pupils across all subjects.
3. Ensure that all departments consistently adhere to the school's marking policy.
4. Ensure that homework tasks set are more consistently focused on the curriculum needs of the pupils.
5. In the EYFS, ensure that detailed plans for outdoor learning make use of the extensive space available.
6. In the EYFS, ensure that the staff training programme promotes both the development of language skills, in particular for Nursery aged children, and the delivery of outdoor education.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and learning

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' achievements and learning is good.
- 3.2 Pupils throughout the school are well educated and the school is successful in meeting its aims to offer pupils the opportunities to fulfil their potential and acquire the knowledge and skills to equip them for life.
- 3.3 In EYFS children are happy and enjoy engaging in learning. From their starting points children make good progress and most reach or exceed the Early Learning Goals by the time they leave or progress to Key Stage 1, including those with SEND, EAL and the most able. Children show excellent concentration for example when completing puzzles independently. Children explore, investigate, and think critically when opportunities are provided. Children in the Nursery can count to 14, recognise numerals to 12, name six shapes, count to 20, and know phonic sounds and six words of positional language. In the Reception children learn to form letters correctly, reading and writing simple sentences. Children are actively engaged in self-chosen activities and show perseverance and self-confidence. Children are developing their skills as active and independent learners addressing the recommendation of the last inspection.
- 3.4 Pupils throughout the school have good speaking and listening skills, engaging willingly in discussion when opportunities allow. They read with understanding from a young age and take care with their written work. They apply their mathematical skills and work logically in science and are able to work both independently and collaboratively. Displays in the school of pupils' artwork and the realisation of their designs in design and technology demonstrate high levels of creativity. Pupils develop good physical skills through the wide range of sport and fitness activities available to them. Limited opportunities are provided for pupils to demonstrate their use of information and communication technology (ICT) skills in the classroom.
- 3.5 The attainment of pupils in the prep school cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests, but based on the evidence available from discussions with pupils, from scrutiny of their work, their performance in lessons and the results of standardised tests of attainment in English and mathematics, it is judged to be good. This indicates that pupils make good and in some cases, excellent, progress in comparison to pupils of similar ability. Most Year 6 pupils proceed to the senior school.
- 3.6 In the senior school, the following analysis uses the national data from 2012 to 14; these are the most recent three years for which comparative data is available. GCSE performance has been above the national average for girls in maintained schools. Results in 2015 were of a similar standard to those of previous years. This level of attainment at GCSE, together with the nationally standardised progress data available and observations conducted by inspectors indicate that pupils make progress that is good relative to the average for pupils of similar abilities. The majority of pupils gain entry to the sixth form of their choice, with some gaining scholarships.
- 3.7 Pupils with SEND and EAL benefit from suitably tailored programmes of study and from small group and one to one support and make good progress particularly when appropriate support is provided within lessons. Enrichment opportunities within the

co-curricular programme offer stretch and challenge for the most able pupils and enable good progress to be made. The recommendation from the previous inspection to ensure that extension tasks are incorporated in schemes of work has been met, however the pace and challenge offered to pupils in lessons does not fully accommodate the full range of ability across the school.

- 3.8 Pupils participate in a wide range of drama, music and sporting activities and achieve good standards. A significant number of entries in music and speech and drama examinations are awarded the highest grades. A number of pupils represent their county in netball and hockey, and occasionally at national level in rounders and badminton, while others compete with distinction in local music festivals. A sports leadership programme is undertaken by all pupils from Year 9.
- 3.9 Pupils throughout the school are happy, polite and courteous. They are punctual to lessons, arriving with the correct equipment. They are cheerful and positive in their attitude and approach to learning, following their teachers' advice and guidance willingly. Pupils, particularly the most able, respond enthusiastically to opportunities to take full responsibility for their learning in both independent and collaborative work. In the pre-inspection questionnaire most pupils felt that they were encouraged to work independently and found their work interesting and the vast majority said they were making good progress in their work.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and co-curricular provision

- 3.10 The contribution of curricular and co-curricular provision is good.
- 3.11 The focus on religious education and collective worship is central to the school and it additionally provides a range of timetabled academic study and co-curricular pursuits that supports its aims. The vast majority of parents in the parental questionnaire consider that the school provides an appropriate range of curricular and co-curricular activities.
- 3.12 In EYFS the educational programme is broad based and inspiring, enabling all children to reach or exceed expected levels. The provision meets the needs of all the children including those with SEND, for example, through an active multi-sensory approach to phonics. In addition to the seven areas of learning ballet, French, music, and PE are taught. Continuity of learning in literacy has been facilitated by the introduction of a new literacy scheme that extends through Year 1 and 2. Cultural diversity is supported through a variety of topics including a theme on world food. Outdoor learning is restricted as the use of the extensive grounds is not fully exploited and planning and supervision for outdoor activities is limited. The good balance of adult led and child initiated learning enables children to create their own play and explore ideas addressing the recommendation of the previous inspection.
- 3.13 Up to Year 4, the 'creative curriculum' teaches subjects through topics, developing cultural awareness where, for example, visitors talk with pupils about the life of a Roman soldier. Beyond Year 4 in the prep school, whilst other pupils have additional literacy lessons, the lessons where the humanities are taught in French provide a unique approach to study. A significant effort is made by teachers to ensure that there is a smooth transition from prep to senior school, aided by specialist teachers who teach in both sections.
- 3.14 Throughout the school, the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) lessons; science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) initiative, curriculum enrichment day and activities week provide good opportunities for pupils

to extend their learning. In the senior school, beyond the core of English language and literature, mathematics, religious education and combined sciences, there is a good range of GCSE subjects, including languages and separate sciences. There is a selection of creative options such as dance and physical education, some of which have been chosen to respond to pupils' requests. Additional, off-timetable GCSE subjects to extend the curriculum include further mathematics and statistics. The school's ICT facilities have recently been improved, but their use in the curriculum is still being evolved by both teachers and pupils.

- 3.15 Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) incorporates and promotes core British values and is taught in individual lessons with pupils working towards the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network certificate of personal effectiveness in order to validate their progress. Senior staff provide interview practice and careers is included in the curriculum to help pupils prepare for their futures by collating a record of achievement.
- 3.16 Those pupils with SEND are identified carefully and are well-supported with individualised study programmes outside of lessons. Those with EAL are withdrawn from some lessons for language study. Academic review sessions are provided through a computer-based support programme and homework clubs for selected pupils allow for assistance to be provided for both SEND and more able pupils.
- 3.17 The co-curricular programme across the school is good. The recently evolved lunchtime and evening activities programmes allow pupils to follow career-related courses in accountancy and money management. Additional languages are also offered, such as Japanese and Russian and general fitness sessions and new sports are introduced to pupils. The prep school pupils are able to learn bread making, take part in gymnastics and can join a brownies group. Creative expression is developed through the choirs and smaller chamber groups, such as the cello ensemble. The debating society affords pupils the opportunity to rehearse their speaking and listening skills. Discussion of political issues across the curriculum are handled sensitively with a balanced view being presented. In the pre-inspection questionnaire almost all parents felt that the school offered a good range of co-curricular activities.
- 3.18 Links are well developed locally through the congregation and church community. The school has a strong sense of its position within the Congregation of Jesus and Mary. The presence of the sisters within the school forms a very profound and heartfelt link with the convent and this is reciprocated with some of them teaching in the school. Members of the congregation from other schools are hosted and pupils themselves visit other schools in the foundation. Trips are often both curricular and spiritually based, such as those to Auschwitz and Rome. Annually, pupils select a charity and then engage in fundraising initiatives with great success.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.19 The contribution of teaching is good.
- 3.20 Good teaching enables the school to support its aim in encouraging pupils to strive for excellence and to work towards their full development. Lesson monitoring has been introduced across all sections of the school, and discussion about teaching and learning initiated, further developing the quality of teaching.
- 3.21 In the EYFS staff have high expectations of the children supported by good programmes for tracking individual progress. Staff are knowledgeable about

children's learning, carry out observations and assessments which are effectively used to plan further development of skills. Recently introduced electronic software enables staff to provide parents with regular updates on their child's learning. The best teaching makes exceptional use of good quality indoor resources which engages, motivates and develops the learning skills of the children. For example, the Nursery children independently use headphones for listening to music and Reception children use scissors with precision for cutting out paper skeletons. Inspiring activities motivate children in a stimulating, friendly, caring, and secure environment. Staff praise children for valuable and worthwhile effort in writing and encourage children to express their opinions, feelings, thoughts and ideas.

- 3.22 Pupils in the prep and senior school are appreciative of the warm rapport that is built up by teachers within the classroom and they respond co-operatively with excellent behaviour and a willingness to learn. Pupils are often focused and committed in discussion, although teachers do not always challenge pupils sufficiently resulting in a degree of passivity in some lessons. In the best lessons, pupils are challenged to assimilate information, to take intellectual risks such as in a history lesson where pupils were invited to analyse the roles played by different groups in the civil rights movement.
- 3.23 Teaching resources are good and are used effectively in lessons. The library is regularly used for group reading and has a good stock of fiction. In response to the recommendation of the previous inspection concerning the embedding of ICT in the curriculum, significant improvements have been made to its provision and use by teachers in the classroom. Opportunities for pupils to use ICT within their lessons are more limited. Assessment procedures are good. Up to Year 4, the dual colour marking scheme in the prep school clearly identifies praiseworthy work, as well as targets for improvement. Throughout the rest of the school, marking of homework is regularly undertaken, with the best being that which is in line with the school's marking policy, engaging positively with pupils and identifying targets for progression, although this approach is not consistent across all departments.
- 3.24 Of those pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a small minority felt that their homework did not help them to learn and that they did not have the right amount of work. Inspection evidence through pupil discussion and pre-inspection questionnaires supports this view. The school is aware and prior to the inspection, the pupil school council was in discussion with the school's management to resolve the matter.
- 3.25 Lessons are clearly structured and links are effectively made with prior learning. The recommendation from the previous report to ensure that a programme of extension tasks be integrated into the schemes of work to challenge the more able pupils has resulted in pupils across the ability range being identified. The best lessons provide appropriate pace and content and enable independent learning for the full range of ability for example, SEND and more able pupils in science, being supported with individualised worksheets. However, SEND pupils, on occasion, do not fully engage with the curriculum as a result of work not being adapted to their needs and not all lessons provide challenge for more able pupils. Appropriate support is provided to pupils with EAL.
- 3.26 Throughout the curriculum, teaching reinforces aspects of the Catholic faith and strongly promotes tolerance and respect amongst others. Teaching is non-partisan in the coverage of political issues.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils is excellent.
- 4.2 In the EYFS, children help each other, share, play imaginatively and tolerate each other's differences. Excellent personal skills prepare them well for the next stage in their learning. Children access a wide range of activities that enable them to make decisions as, for example, when they role play using puppets. Children make a positive contribution approaching everything they do with their best effort, working co-operatively and respecting one other's feelings and opinions. Core British values are actively promoted. Pupils have a strong moral code which is developed through stories and through a wide range of festivals that are celebrated.
- 4.3 The spiritual development of pupils is excellent, fully reflecting the school's mission statement to educate young people to meet the challenges of life courageously, to use their talents to the full and to live the values of Christ's Gospel.
- 4.4 Throughout the school, pupils reflect both spiritually and personally within assemblies and church services such as the inspiring and thoughtful St Claudine's Mass, held during the inspection. They develop high levels of moral and ethical awareness as seen in a debate in a geography lesson concerning China's one child policy.
- 4.5 Pupils embrace a code of conduct that actively promotes British values. Pupils have a broad general knowledge of the public institutions and the services of England developed through their study of British institutions in PSHEE and through visits to places such as the Houses of Parliament. Their self-esteem is excellent, developed by the caring and praising ethos demonstrated by teachers and seen in their willingness to engage and discuss issues with visiting speakers. Pupils display mature attitudes, are confident, articulate and self-aware
- 4.6 Pupils' moral development is excellent. In the prep school they have a clear sense of right and wrong developing the many classroom displays which prompt the pupils to consider, for example, how to be a good friend and through the weekly statement to live by, which is introduced in assemblies. Pupils throughout the school are aware of the need to contribute and understand that serving without expecting reward is commendable. The pupils show considerable awareness of others less fortunate than themselves, through raising money to support a variety of charities and through their service to the community such as taking responsibility for foodbank collections. Visits to Auschwitz for Year 10 pupils, as part of a study of ethics and discussions in religious education as to whether terrorism is ever justifiable, ensure that pupils appreciate balanced viewpoints and can understand philosophical attitudes. They are clear about the importance of identifying and combatting discrimination.
- 4.7 Pupils develop excellent social skills. They serve on the elected school council and select the local charities to support. Their interaction with one another is excellent; senior pupils show care and consideration for younger members of the school community. Pupils accept responsibility for their behaviour and demonstrate they can make a positive contribution to others.

- 4.8 Pupils' cultural development is excellent. They make the most of the opportunities to study other faiths and share cultural experiences with overseas pupils attending similar Jesus and Mary tradition schools. School visits, whether international or national, ensure that pupils are tolerant of different cultural traditions and acquire a strong respect for their own and other cultures' principles and faiths as well as providing opportunities to develop their self-knowledge.
- 4.9 Pupils value democracy, individual rights and an understanding of different beliefs and develop their understanding through debate in topics such in the Year 10 ethics course. They respect other people, particularly those with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 and they respect the civil and criminal law of England. By the time they leave the school pupils have high levels of personal development and are emotionally mature, caring individuals.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for pastoral care

- 4.10 The contribution of the arrangements for pastoral care is excellent.
- 4.11 The school is highly successful in meeting its aim to provide an environment where pupils will be happy, respecting and valuing others as equals and responding to their needs. Within the friendly atmosphere that is maintained throughout the school, pupils are able to participate confidently in all activities. Tutors know their pupils well, monitoring their progress and personal development closely and playing a key role in ensuring that they feel safe and well-supported. Pupils appreciate the interest that tutors take in them and respond positively to the trust that is placed in them and to the responsibility that they are given.
- 4.12 In the EYFS teachers have high expectations of behaviour in the classroom and these are well met by the exemplary manner in which the children conduct themselves at all times. In EYFS the key person system enables strong relationships and a bond of trust to be developed between staff, children, their families and other professionals. Staff support the children in feeling safe, allowing them the time they need to talk through concerns, encouraging them to work together and share experiences enabling the needs of each child to be met. Children are encouraged to lead a healthy lifestyle through, for example, eating healthy snacks, hand-washing and the covering of their mouths when coughing.
- 4.13 Throughout the prep and senior school relationships are characterised by mutual respect and are excellent. The house system in which pupils play a leading role, together with the prefects and a number of buddying schemes, provides extensive opportunities for peer support and for the development of strong and positive relationships. Pupils know to whom they can turn if they have any concerns and are confident that these will be effectively addressed should they arise.
- 4.14 The benefits of fitness are promoted through lessons in physical education and through the wide range of sporting activities and outdoor equipment available for use by all pupils. The range of nutritious items on the school's menus supports the development of healthy lifestyles. The conduct of pupils is exemplary reflecting the clear expectations of the school and its staff. Pupils stated that sanctions are administered fairly and records showed they are recorded by staff appropriately. Responses to the parents' questionnaire showed that the overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the school achieved high standards of behaviour.
- 4.15 Policies and procedures for dealing with bullying including cyber-bullying are clear. Pupils note that bullying is virtually non-existent and are confident that, should it

occur, it would be dealt with swiftly and effectively. There is a detailed plan, with appropriate timescales, to improve educational access for those pupils with SEND.

- 4.16 In their questionnaires, a small minority of pupils suggested that the school did not take account of their opinions; however, discussions with pupils did not confirm this view. Pupils felt that school council and contact with tutors and senior staff provided opportunities to affect change. In particular school council representatives take their role and responsibility seriously, actively seeking the views of their peers on, for, example, homework and uniform matters.

4.(c) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.17 The arrangements to ensure the welfare, health and safety of pupils are excellent.
- 4.18 In EYFS, all staff attend safeguarding training, which is updated every three years. Risk assessments are carried out regularly. Staff actively promote British values, equality and diversity through the continuous practice of promoting the well-being of all the children and planned themes. Systems are in place and effectively implemented to protect children and thereby meet all statutory and other government requirements, to promote welfare, to prevent radicalisation and extremism. Prompt and regular attendance is promoted.
- 4.19 Throughout the school, official safeguarding guidance is carefully followed and staff are trained annually in child protection procedures, including 'Prevent'. The designated senior person and deputies have undertaken training appropriate to their roles and are trained to Level 3. The governing body takes appropriate steps to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards. The requisite drills are undertaken in all areas of the school, and robust records maintained. Outside consultants regularly review fire precautions and their recommendations are carefully implemented.
- 4.20 There are appropriate systems in place to ensure effective health and safety arrangements for all pupils including those with SEND. These include monitoring the risks inherent in the outdoor adventure area and the swimming pool. Drinking water is regularly checked as is electrical equipment. Suitable and robust risk assessments for grounds and buildings are carried out and are made for off-site visits.
- 4.21 The school site is well maintained with a five year and annual rolling programme of improvements alongside day to day maintenance to rectify immediate problems.
- 4.22 Sick or injured pupils are looked after, in a medical room appropriate for their needs. All medical records are comprehensive and well documented and the majority of staff have undertaken first-aid training. Admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained and stored and rigorous systems are in place to register attendance and check absentees.

4.(d) The quality of boarding

- 4.23 The quality of boarding is good.
- 4.24 Boarders have a good standard of personal development and exhibit confidence in dealing with one another, and with adults. The atmosphere is one of collaboration and mutual support. They are confident that the adults with whom they interact have their interests at heart and report that personal issues are resolved through discussion and that, if necessary, boarding staff will offer guidance and advice. They exhibit great loyalty and affection towards their house and school and regard Thornton as their term-time home and were unanimous in the pre-inspection questionnaire that they got on well in the houses.
- 4.25 Boarders arrive at the school from a variety of backgrounds and cultures and are well inducted into the school's way of life. Those with specific learning and other needs are sensitively catered for. Older pupils offer positive role models, and guidance, to younger boarders whilst the recent introduction of boarding prefects has positively contributed to the boarding environment. They report that the pupil voice is strong, whether through the school council, the boarding committee or informal conversations with adults and that their suggestions are often acted upon as evidenced by the recent rapid refurbishment of boarding common rooms. They live a healthy, active life and are ready to move on to the next stage of their school career after Year 11
- 4.26 The provision offered and the care of boarders is good. Boarding accommodation, within the upper floors of the main school building, is warm and homely, offering boarders accommodation suitable to their age and allowing them to live together harmoniously. All rooms are well furnished and are light, bright and airy and a refurbishment programme is gradually improving the standard of accommodation. Boarders are able to personalise their areas should they wish. Upgraded social areas allow pupils to meet together in a relaxed environment and whilst a minority of questionnaire responses were critical of snack and drink making facilities within the houses the recently refurbished kitchen areas now meet this need effectively. Boarders are able to follow current events and can contact home easily through the fully networked computer systems facility within the boarding areas. The many adults to whom boarders can turn for support include a counsellor and an independent listener. Boarders report that their possessions are secure and pocket money is drawn weekly so that they can make purchases at weekends. For younger pupils, prep is effectively carried out in the school science wing, primarily supervised by non-teaching boarding staff, with a limited amount of support from teaching staff. Older boarders work in their single study bedrooms.
- 4.27 Food is well cooked and varied and boarders report that it is consistent throughout the week and that they enjoy it, particularly at weekends. There is a range of after school activities for boarders and in line with the recommendations of the previous boarding report a more comprehensive programme of Saturday activities is offered; older pupils do not always take advantage of what is available as they appreciate opportunities for some personal space.
- 4.28 Medical arrangements are adequate although the medical area lacks privacy, something of which the school is aware. The school has effective policies for medical care, including for the administration of medicine, which are carefully recorded. The boarders have access to the local health centre and may visit a dentist or optometrist by appointment. The confidentiality and rights of boarders as

patients is appropriately respected. There is a long term plan to improve medical accommodation and its provision within the school. The daily house staff meetings include the medical supervisor.

- 4.29 Care for boarders' welfare, health and safety is good. Procedures for safeguarding are robust and well understood by pupils. Boarding staff are appropriately trained, show a confident understanding of safeguarding issues. Boarders are made aware of risk and how to manage it within the boarding environment. Entry to the boarding areas is secure. Fire drills are regularly carried out, including during boarding time, and appropriately recorded.
- 4.30 The school has effective policies to promote good behaviour, the emphasis within the clear disciplinary structure being upon co-operation and discussion in order to resolve difficulties without recourse to formal procedures. Boarders did not consider bullying an issue and believed the school to act robustly should an incident occur. House staff know the whereabouts of boarders, through effective signing in and out procedures. Appropriate search and supervision policies are in place to ensure the safety of the pupils in the boarding environment.
- 4.31 Leadership and management of boarding is good, ensuring the smooth running of the boarding environment. Senior leadership, recently appointed, offers dynamic and pro-active management to the boarding community. The school development plan shows that progress has been made in developing the boarding environment. The senior team operate an open door policy for both resident staff and pupils and they report that it operates well in practice, that their concerns are listened to, and largely acted upon.
- 4.32 All boarding policies are in order and boarding records are appropriately monitored. Resident house staff are committed and hard-working and know the boarders in their care very well. They report that they feel valued and well supported in their roles. In line with the recommendations of the previous report, since September, resident house staff have begun undertaking further training and two are beginning the Boarding Schools' Association boarding qualification. Houses run effectively in supporting the aims of the school in celebrating the positive and accepting disappointment in order to encourage personal development. This contributes to the caring ethos which is such a distinctive feature of the whole school. Relationships between boarding staff and the boarders are warm and positive. Parental responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire were unanimous in their support of boarding at the school. All the National Minimum Standards for boarding are met and the school has fully met the recommendations of the previous boarding inspection.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 The quality of governance is good.
- 5.2 In the Early Years Foundation Stage, the governors' involvement is effective. The governing body which consists of governors and trustees effectively helps the school to meet its aims. Governors have a wide range of experience; they monitor finance, resourcing and accommodation carefully and undertake appropriate training, including induction. The governors continue to increase their range of skills to better support the school and offer suitable challenge. Close communication and regular meetings with the school's management team ensures that they are informed of all aspects of the school's development. The trustees, many of whom are governors, are well known to the pupils and staff and undertake their legal responsibilities diligently knowing that they have ultimate responsibility for the school and its operation.
- 5.3 Governors are effective in maintaining a careful oversight of the whole school, and they are regular visitors, actively supporting school functions, acts of worship, and open evenings. The presence of the sisters within the school has an important and distinctive influence, ensuring a strong sense of community devotion felt by staff, pupils and parents alike.
- 5.4 Governors are conscientious in discharging their responsibilities for child protection and welfare and health and safety throughout the school. There are three governing board sub-committees which monitor the school's operation including staff appointments with related checks being appropriately recorded. Governors ensure that the safeguarding policy is reviewed annually and that procedures and implementation are updated and reviewed regularly. Governors additionally maintain a comprehensive risk register which reviews current and strategic operations throughout the school. Although governors monitor polices minor amendments were required during the inspection to ensure they were fully up-to-date with current requirements. The majority of the recommendations from previous reports have been addressed, however the previous report recommendations in respect of the use of ICT and the need for teaching to address the full ability range is yet to be fully met.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, carers and guardians

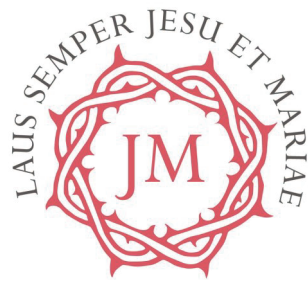
- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management, including links with parents, is good.
- 5.6 In the EYFS the leadership and management provide a welcoming environment in which children feel safe and secure. Equality, diversity and British values are strongly promoted. Self-evaluation in the EYFS is a strength with development planning showing clear priorities for improvement. However, implementation of this plan, for example with regard to the planning of the use of the outdoor space, has yet to be achieved. Supervision of EYFS staff has been embedded in practice and statutory training for staff is regular. However, training to enable children to make the most of their learning opportunities has not been sufficiently prioritised, including the delivery of outdoor learning. Improved monitoring of the educational provision has ensured that the recommendation from the previous inspection to establish a

clear leadership structure to ensure monitoring of policies and coordination of the EYFS has now been established. Recent improvements have ensured greater parity achieved across all EYFS planning ensuring smooth transition throughout. A progress check at the age of two indicates any additional support which is required.

- 5.7 Throughout the prep and senior school leadership ensures that the school fulfils its aim to allow pupils to discover their true potential and to work towards their full development. Additionally, pupils are encouraged to respect and value others as equals and respond to their wider needs. Democracy is evident in the ethos of the school. Clear and focused direction has given the whole school a strong sense of educational purpose and is having a positive impact on pupils' welfare including that of academic and co-curricular provision.
- 5.8 Leadership throughout the school, including EYFS, ensures that the pupils achieve well, that pastoral care is excellent and that pupils achieve a high standard of personal development. Recent management appointments have focused on school improvement, self-evaluation has improved and the strategic development plan is ambitious and sets appropriate targets within achievable timescales to take the school through its next stage of development.
- 5.9 Effective systems ensure the needs of pupils are well met regarding resources, planning and assessment. A committed and enthusiastic senior team are monitoring teaching and learning across the school and there is increased rigour in tracking pupils' progress with the setting of clear targets for improvement.
- 5.10 All staff, including in the EYFS, undertake safeguarding training with key personnel receiving frequent update training, several to a level higher than basic requirements. Welfare, and health and safety training takes place regularly for all staff with appropriate updates when necessary. The school's administrative, maintenance and grounds staff support the school well and extensive support and mentoring procedures ensure that all new staff are effectively inducted.
- 5.11 Staff supervision is good and teachers' and leaders' performance is regularly assessed against set standards with appropriate training recommendations being made to ensure continuous improvement. Appropriate and robust arrangements are in place for checking the suitability of all staff and governors.
- 5.12 The quality of links with parents is strong in all parts of the school. In EYFS the partnership with parents is strong ensuring that they are engaged in their child's learning and development and that involvement is made as appropriate with other agencies. In discussions and in the pre-inspection questionnaire parents indicated that they are particularly happy that the school responds to their suggestions and allows them access to see their child's work. Parents appreciate the high quality of care and the daily feedback.
- 5.13 Throughout the school no significant areas of concern were raised by parents in their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire. Most parents expressed a very high level of satisfaction with the leadership and management of the school and the high standards of pastoral care. They feel that the school is well led and managed and would recommend it to other parents.
- 5.14 The school welcomes and supports parental involvement in the work and progress of their children. Parents accompany pupils on trips, attend musical, dramatic and sporting events and enjoy family days such as the whole school picnic. Additionally, they join their children in celebrating a number of religious events.

- 5.15 A comprehensive and recently redeveloped website provides current and prospective parents, including those in the EYFS, with detailed information about the school. Parents of younger pupils receive a weekly information update. As pupils progress through the school this occurs half termly. The parent portal is updated daily. A large majority of parents expressed satisfaction in the pre-inspection questionnaire about improved levels of communication. Parents attend regular parents' meetings and receive termly, detailed reports about their children's work and progress as well as half termly report cards. Parental concerns are answered promptly and in the pre-inspection questionnaire a very large majority of parents indicated that the school had handled their concerns well. An appropriate complaints policy and procedure is maintained and correctly implemented.
- 5.1 The school has responded to the recommendations in the previous reports and good progress has been made. However, the use of ICT by pupils in lessons is inconsistent across the curriculum and planning does not consistently provide sufficient focus to ensure that lessons offer suitable pace and challenge for the full ability range in the prep and senior schools.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.



THORNTON

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