



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ALTON CONVENT SCHOOL

MARCH 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Alton Convent School			
DfE number	850/6073			
Registered charity number	1071684			
Address	Alton Convent School Anstey Lane Alton Hampshire GU34 2NG			
Telephone number	01420 82070			
Email address	office@altonconvent.org.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Graham Maher			
Chairman of governors	Mr Clive Hexton			
Age range	6 months to 18 years			
Number of pupils on roll	531			
	Boys	138	Girls	393
	Day pupils	526	Boarders	5
	EYFS	158	Juniors	132
	Seniors	202	Sixth Form	39
Inspection dates	15 to 16 March 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any unmet standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

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

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chairman and other governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registrations and an assembly. Inspectors interviewed boarders, a representative group of their hosts, and the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Robin Lewis	Reporting inspector
Ms Rachael Allen	Team inspector (Headmistress, ISA school)
Mrs Catherine Peuleve	Team inspector (Head of lower years, HMC junior school)
Mrs Gill Bilbo	Early years co-ordinating inspector

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Alton Convent School is an independent Catholic school founded by the Sisters of Our Lady of Providence in 1938. The community transferred responsibility to the Alton Convent School Trust in 1998 which now, as the Alton Convent School Charity, governs the school. The school moved to its present site, on the outskirts of Alton in Hampshire, in 1946.
- 1.2 The school is in four sections. Both the Garden House Day Nursery, for Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) children, and the prep school, for Years 1 to 6, are co-educational. The senior school, for Years 7 to 11, and the sixth form, for Years 12 and 13, educate girls only. An international programme, initiated in 2016, gives experience of UK education to sixth-form girls from associated Catholic overseas schools. These pupils lodge with the families of current pupils.
- 1.3 Since the previous interim inspection of the whole school in 2011, the school's head has changed; a new refectory has been created; the nursery has been extended and updated; laboratory provision has been rebuilt and two new preparatory school classrooms have been added.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school has a Catholic ethos and encourages its pupils to 'be the best that you can be'. It aims to prepare them to realise their full academic, spiritual, personal and creative potential, to live by Christian principles and to contribute as valued members of their communities to the benefit of their world.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils come from a range of professional family backgrounds and many travel to the school from nearby Hampshire towns, most within a 15-mile radius of the school. They are predominantly from White British families.
- 1.6 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 72 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for one pupil who requires no specialist support, although such support is available for any who may need it. Data used by the school have identified 30 pupils as being more able in the school's population and the curriculum is modified for them, and for the 50 other pupils because of their special talents in music, sport and drama.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school above the Reception level. The names of classes below Reception are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
The Nest	Nursery (6-18 months)
The Chicks	Nursery (15-24 months)
The Robins	Nursery (22 -36 months)
The Sparrows	Nursery (Rising 3 years)
Pre-prep	Nursery (Rising 4 years)

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in March 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Provide more opportunities in lessons for independent learning and the use of information and communication technology (ICT) by pupils.
 - Introduce a more rigorous system for monitoring key policies and procedures by governors and managers.
 - Include Reception in the existing action plan for Nursery, to establish clear priorities for improvement across the whole EYFS provision.
- 1.9 The school has fully met the recommendations to include Reception in the Nursery action plans and establish clear priorities for EYFS improvement. The school provides more opportunities for independent learning in lessons. It has partially addressed the recommendations to provide more opportunities for pupils to use ICT and to introduce more rigorous systems for monitoring key policies and procedures by governors and managers. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.
- 1.10 In January 2014, ISI carried out an intermediate inspection of the school's EYFS provision. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Develop educational visit opportunities for children to experience and make sense of the wider community.
 - Provide further opportunities for children to make choices and develop their independence during lunchtimes.
- 1.11 The school has fully met the recommendations. It has developed educational visit opportunities for children in the EYFS and given them more opportunities to make choices and develop their independence during lunchtimes.
- 1.12 This inspection is the first to take place since the school accepted boarders.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils of all abilities make excellent progress and achieve high standards across all curriculum areas, in line with the school's aim for everyone to 'be the best you can be'.
- Pupils have highly positive and confident attitudes to learning, as a result of the school's systems of individualised encouragement and support.
- Pupils develop outstanding levels of skills, knowledge and understanding as a result of staff members' high expectations and detailed feedback.
- Pupils' ICT skills are not as well-developed as those in other areas, due to the limited opportunities to apply these in other subjects.
- Pupils' achievements are excellent. They take full advantage of the wide-ranging opportunities offered both within and beyond the classroom, reaching high standards.

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

- Pupils have particularly strong self-knowledge and confidence due to the school's ethos of supportive encouragement.
- Pupils show a deep spiritual understanding and strongly appreciate the non-material aspects of life, as a result of the school's foundational values.
- Pupils' contributions to others' lives are excellent, due to the close links forged in the local community and with other foundation schools.
- Pupils' behaviour and moral understanding are outstanding due to the consistently high expectations and example set by senior leaders and other teaching and support staff.

Recommendations

2.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement:

- Increase pupils' opportunities to use ICT across other subject areas, in order to embed and develop their skills.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Throughout their time at school, pupils of all abilities make excellent progress and achieve high standards across a wide range of curriculum areas. This is because senior leaders ensure that the curriculum and its delivery are well-balanced and underwritten by detailed planning. They ensure that the various programmes of study and activities are delivered by staff who are well-trained and strongly motivated to support the school's overarching ethos to 'be the best that you can be'. In the pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all parents indicated particular approval of the range of subjects on offer.
- 3.3 Data provided by the school covering the years 2012 to 2016 indicate that results at both GCSE and A-level examinations have been above the national average. Over this time, sixth form leavers have consistently achieved A-level results which have ensured successful entry to their first-choice universities. Scrutiny of pupils' work and observations in lessons indicate that, throughout the school, pupils make excellent progress in lessons and their personal studies. This is supported by the individual care they receive, together with regular testing and the rigorous academic standards expected by their teachers, who set each pupil aspirational goals which they cheerfully set out to attain. Their success in pursuit of these, and the encouragement they receive, helps pupils to raise their personal targets higher still.
- 3.4 Pupils with SEND make similarly strong progress, achieving standards which reflect most creditably on their efforts and the support they receive. Pupils with SEND taking GCSEs were able to participate freely and fully in additional English classes, due to the clear explanations their teachers provided. More able pupils make equally strong and effective progress due to the personalised extension work provided inside and outside of timetabled lessons. A few pupils reported that they had difficulty understanding their level of attainment in lessons and subjects and that there were weaknesses in some marking. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils are well informed concerning their attainment; pupils' work is regularly marked and feedback given individually. However, some marking, across various subjects and year groups, does not consistently reach the high standards of the best examples seen.
- 3.5 Many of the children in the EYFS exceed the expected levels of attainment by the end of Reception. Their excellent progress is due to the strong knowledge held by staff, leaders and managers about individual children, their personal developmental and learning needs and, even at their young age, learning styles. Review meetings, to assess children's corporate and individual needs, take place weekly, with a more overarching scrutiny at other times. As a result, the best outcomes for all children are ensured. Reception children enthusiastically participate in the exciting range of activities devised by their teachers, including trips and outings, and strengthen their fine co-ordination skills through the use of pencils, crayons and scissors. These activities provide rich opportunities for investigative exploration and physical development, both indoors and in the security of the extensive school estate with its climbing frames and adventure play equipment. Excursions always prove particularly popular and contribute strongly to pupils' confidence and skills, in line with the recommendation of the previous inspection.
- 3.6 Pupils' achievements in scholarships and external competitions are excellent. The list of pupils' attainments is extensive and includes the winning of a national competition in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) programme with an innovative, cancer-detecting bra; an Arkwright engineering scholarship, a BBC radio 'Make it Digital' award, the receipt of 'Teen Tech' Awards at Buckingham Palace and many Year 7 pupils winning bronze 'Crest' awards, which give participants experience of enquiry, problem

solving and communication. Pupils' achievements in sports are significant, with individual successes including national representation in judo and equestrianism. The school makes special arrangements for its particularly talented pupils, so that they can pursue their expertise as well as their studies. Younger athletes won the district athletic championship, whilst teams at all levels across the range of sports undertaken by the school enjoy considerable success in inter-school fixtures and national competitions. High levels of artistic success are nurtured by drama days, house events, school productions and musical performances including works such as Handel's Messiah. A large number of pupils across the school achieve excellent results in performing arts and music grade examinations.

- 3.7 Communication, literacy and numeracy skills in EYFS children are highly developed due to the emphasis placed on these matters in the curriculum. Children are particularly confident in approaching staff with ideas and questions to further their understanding and appreciation of the world around them. This strength is reinforced strongly by staff who make excellent use of open-ended questions, such as 'what do you think of marmite?' or 'how do worms move?' Creatively, children are highly imaginative; Reception children were observed creating a small world for dinosaurs and adding sound effects, whilst other pre-prep pupils made a house, choosing suitable materials with enthusiasm.
- 3.8 Pupils have highly positive and confident attitudes to learning. They enjoy working individually and collaboratively, enthusiastically taking ownership of their studies. They use their initiative and sense of enquiry strongly to extend their thinking across the curriculum. This is linked to the school's well-embedded systems to support them at all levels, but at the same time to encourage them to develop their independence.
- 3.9 Across the school, pupils develop high levels of basic skills, and these advance appropriately as they mature. In all areas, including those covering linguistic, mathematical, scientific and creative matters, pupils apply these skills effectively, often in advance of their chronological maturity. This is due to the high expectations and challenges set by staff. In most lessons, staff devise interesting tasks appropriate to the needs of individuals and small groups. Such work ensures that the vast majority of lessons consistently maintain the interest and engagement of all pupils, including those with SEND.
- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills. These they use with alacrity and sophisticated conversations are heard across the school, both in and outside of lessons. From an early age, when the youngest children receive encouragement to share their daily experiences, to the older pupils making clear presentations, occasionally of a technical nature, in assemblies, all pupils are always ready to contribute or participate. School council members, for example, recognise their elected positions and are unafraid to speak out, even if older members hold contrary views. Pupils' articulacy is also evident in pupils' numerical and mathematical competence. Across the school, pupils explain their reasoning and procedures clearly and concisely, using appropriate mathematical vocabulary. These skills are applied confidently in other areas of the curriculum, for example, in the lower years, learning to count in both French and Spanish and using co-ordinates for map work in the prep school. In a sixth-form economics lesson, pupils were able to analyse a loan fund model and apply the theory to a real situation.
- 3.11 Pupils are particularly keen to develop and refine the skills linked to their studies. They are prepared to seek out advice and support, including appropriate work experience in the older year groups. Groups for 'higher order thinking skills', and more basic 'study skills', provide excellent support and there is no adverse approbation from peers or staff for anyone seeking help. The prominence of activities and lessons such as the BLT (Bilateral Thinking club) and the school's success in the national STEM awards gives further aspirational examples to

pupils at all levels. Increasingly, as they mature, pupils demonstrate the higher order skills of analysis and hypothesising and staff strongly encourage this trait. Pupils' ICT competency is good. As they mature through the school, pupils become increasingly confident in the use of this technology. Timetabled ICT lessons and the introduction of new, more sophisticated applications support pupils' skills in this area well. However, relatively limited use of ICT in other lessons means that pupils do not necessarily yet make fullest educational use of these facilities to develop and embed their skills, so that the recommendation of the previous intermediate inspection has been only partially addressed.

- 3.12 Pupils' immediate and longer term development and opportunities are given strong support from governors, through the school's leadership and management. Governors' highly effective oversight is proving increasingly able to offer professional challenge and advice to senior leaders and managers and to the staff and school generally. Governors track the school's progress and regulatory compliance through key performance indicators, as well as regular visits and contacts. This ensures that corporately, and through their various committees and individual governor's specific dedications, governors understand the school's procedures and needs well. Consequently, they successfully provide the necessary resources and anticipate the school's developmental requirements to the pupils' evident benefit.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils' self-knowledge and self-confidence is outstanding. They know their strengths and the areas in which they can make improvements in their characters and deportment. Pupils are able to express themselves and their opinions with great clarity and without fear of adverse criticism. They have particularly strong self-discipline, which enables pupils at all levels, from Reception to Year 13 and of all abilities including those with SEND, to listen carefully to the opinions of others. As a result, they are able to engage in informed debate and thereby refine their own understanding and positions. These helpful traits effectively support pupils' excellent ability to reflect, in an age-appropriate way, on their own learning and performance so that they can move forward seamlessly to the next stage of their education.
- 4.3 All these qualities are facilitated through the school's clear ethos of support and encouragement for each individual and tolerance of different points of view. This is a particular strength of the school, again reflecting the school's aim 'to be the best that you can be'. It is exemplified, without exception, by the governors and the senior leadership team, as well as the entire teaching and support staff. Children in the EYFS settle rapidly into the setting and approach the responsible adults and new toys with great confidence. Sixth-form boarders mature strongly in self-confidence, self-reliance and resilience, developing a strong understanding of the nuances of living in a different culture; at the same time, they contribute significantly to the school's ethos and understanding of cultural difference through their interactions with others at all levels.
- 4.4 Pupils' deep spiritual understanding is evident in all areas. In line with the school's Catholic foundation, pupils appreciate the peaceful community times provided in assemblies and the regular school masses. In addition to this Christian understanding, pupils have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life and show excellent awareness through their enjoyment of music and enthusiastic singing, not merely of the hymns in chapel. Their appreciation of nature through activities such as outdoor learning in the prep school, is equally strong. Pupils at all levels will happily find a quiet place to reflect and use their senses to enjoy the tranquillity of the school grounds and estate. Art and drama are also much appreciated across the school. The opportunities provided for pupils of all ages and abilities to participate and develop their skills strongly reinforce pupils' spiritual depth.
- 4.5 Throughout the school, pupils have an excellent sense of fair play and are ready to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They respect the school's rules and recognise them as necessary and just. Their corporate and individual behaviour is excellent and, as a result, bullying is rare. During formal and informal interviews, pupils confirmed this, and the school's fair and robust response to any such incidences. Accordingly, pupils have an excellent moral understanding and also know what attributes they need to have in order to be responsible members of the school and, as they mature, wider society. For example, younger pupils said they know when they need to challenge poor behaviour and unkindness.
- 4.6 Pupils are highly aware of their social responsibilities. They engage collaboratively with their peers, at all levels and all abilities including those with SEND, and work together effectively and harmoniously. Both inside and outside of lessons, teachers throughout the school nurture this by encouraging group activities and pupils respond cheerfully, showing great maturity and common sense. Across the school, pupils readily and enthusiastically contribute to the lives of others. This can be seen in their considerable and varied contributions to the immediate community, including performances in local care homes and, amongst more senior pupils, voluntary work as part of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Pupils gain a

strong perspective on national and international needs through their extensive fundraising activities and the information associated with this work. The school's international programme with boarders and close internet contacts with sister schools in India and Colombia give all pupils a personal attachment to their charitable work. Considerable sums of money have been raised for a foundation in India and other charities identified by pupils.

- 4.7 Pupils across the school are able to make excellent choices and take decisions, both small and large, with an unusually balanced viewpoint. They do so confidently and in the knowledge that if they wish, they may call on support and advice from the whole community, not merely those adults with whom they have day-to-day contact. This is entirely in line with the schools' ethos. Where pupils' decisions are likely to have considerable and long-term impact, such as their choice of GCSEs, pupils only take them after thoroughly examining all the factors.
- 4.8 Pupils have a strong understanding and respect for cultural diversity. They intermingle with great cheerfulness and have a ready acceptance of differences in faith and culture, often in different year groups from their own. Their comprehension of diversity and understanding is particularly fostered by the strength and intimacy of contacts with foundational sister schools in India and Colombia. This has received a significant boost from the advent of boarders from Colombia who literally put flesh on the bones of friendship and inter-school links. Relationships with adults in the community, both teaching and support staff, are equally strong and this strength gives particular character to the school. Pupils have great tolerance and a sensitive awareness of the beliefs and traditions of other religions through their curricular studies across the school and the school's foundational ethos.
- 4.9 Pupils are well aware of the need to lead a healthy and balanced lifestyle. During formal and informal interviews across the year groups, they spoke appreciatively of the opportunities available for exercise in games and physical education, of the guidance provided for healthy eating and the support given from staff should they encounter a problem. Pupils valued the school's 'mental health week', finding it informative and encouraging. They are cognisant of the potential dangers in the use of the internet and social media as a result of the comprehensive information and annual training they receive, which is age-specific.