

24 March 2015

Dear Parent/Carer

St George's School for Girls and Nursery Class, Edinburgh

Recently, as you may know, my colleagues and I inspected your child's school and the school's residential accommodation, Houldsworth House. We also worked together with the Care Inspectorate to inspect the nursery provision. During our visit, we talked to parents, children, young people, members of the Board of Governors and the Parent Teacher Forum. We worked closely with the headteacher, senior leadership team and staff. We wanted to find out how well children and young people are learning and achieving and how well the school supports children and young people to do their best. The headteacher and the senior leadership team shared with us the school's successes and priorities for improvement. We looked at some particular aspects of the school's recent work, including transition arrangements as children and young people move through the stages of the school from nursery to the Sixth Form. We also looked at the development and delivery of new qualifications. As a result, we were able to find out how good the school is at improving children's and young people's education.

How well do children and young people learn and achieve?

Children and young people, including those who reside in Houldsworth House, learn and achieve very well. Across the nursery and all stages of the school, children and young people are very courteous, motivated and enjoy their learning. In the nursery, children engage very well in their learning through play. Babies and toddlers are warmly welcomed and for the few who require reassurance to settle, staff are very caring and patient. In the pre-school rooms, children concentrate very well on their chosen activities. They play well together for extended periods of time. For example, a group of girls worked together to make a collage of an alien inspired by their moon topic. In the nursery, children's learning is recorded regularly in personal learning plans (PLPs). Staff should continue to develop the use of PLPs to show more clearly the progress that children make in their learning.

At the Junior, Lower, Upper classes and Sixth Form, the overall quality of children's and young people's learning experiences are very good. At all of these stages, children and young people engage very well with their tasks across all areas of the curriculum. They work very well with each other in groups and teams and independently on solving tasks. Children and young people share ideas, contribute very well to discussions and feel happy to ask for further explanation and help. They know themselves increasingly well as learners and, as a result of regular discussions with staff about their learning, they know how to improve. Across all stages, children

and young people are taking responsibility for their own learning and are becoming independent learners. In a number of curricular areas, such as English and history, children and young people demonstrate higher order thinking skills by asking each other challenging questions and thinking beyond the texts they are reading. Across the school, children and young people feel they have a say in school matters. Children and young people who stay in Houldsworth House report that they feel safe and well cared for. They enjoy the various social spaces across the accommodation and feel that they can express their views to staff members in one-to-one discussions and house meetings.

Children and young people are developing important skills for learning, life and work through their experiences in the school including Houldsworth House. The school provides an extensive range of opportunities for children and young people to develop their abilities and interests. In the nursery, children are learning about citizenship and thinking about others through raising funds for charities. For example, children planted bulbs and decorated flower pots to raise money for the Marie Curie Cancer charity. Across the other stages of the school, the wide range of 'out of class' clubs and activities encourages all children and young people to achieve. As a result, children and young people participate very successfully in sporting, musical and cultural activities, locally, nationally and internationally. For example, they compete in hockey, lacrosse, and netball competitions, and produce an exciting range of musical events and productions. Children and young people are developing their citizenship skills very well. For example, they act as members of the Pupil Council and PowWow consultation groups, and participate enthusiastically in many exciting and life-changing international experiences. Learning in a global context is highly valued at St George's and the school's excellent work in this area has gained them a third International School's Award. In Houldsworth House, children and young people are developing confidence, resilience and organisational skills. They believe that living with peers is developing their social skills and sense of independence.

Across the school, almost all children and young people are making excellent progress in their learning. In the nursery, children are developing important early literacy and numeracy skills. They enjoy stories read aloud to them and bake regularly which encourages them to estimate, count spoonfuls and measure ingredients. At the Junior stages, almost all children are making very good progress in English and mathematics. Almost all children present their work very carefully with appropriate attention to handwriting, spelling, punctuation and grammar. By P6, almost all are confident with mathematical calculations involving number, money and measurement. At the Lower stages, young people have many opportunities to write for a wide range of purposes and do so with increasing skills, confidence and enthusiasm. At the Upper stages, almost all young people are able to discuss the main points of fiction texts and are confident about writing in different genres. Across the school, children and young people use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) well, for example to research aspects of history and produce presentations. At Upper 5 and in the Sixth Form, young people continue to perform exceptionally well in almost all subject areas. In August 2014, almost all young people achieved 5 Highers at A-C grades and almost all young people achieved 3 Advanced Highers at A-C grades in national qualifications. Commendably, all young people who were presented for 'A' level examinations achieved their 'A' level qualifications, with most achieving A*-B passes. The school demonstrates strong performance in ensuring positive destinations for all

young people. In 2014, almost all sixth formers progressed to their first choice of university.

How well does the school support children and young people to develop and learn?

Across the school and in Houldsworth House, staff are very successful at supporting children and young people to develop and learn. In the nursery, staff observe learning and use this information to plan next steps and plan learning around children's interests. Children who require additional support in their learning benefit from nursery staff working closely with the school's support for learning team. Staff should ensure that nursery children's personal information is reviewed and updated on a six-monthly basis. Across all other stages of the school, teachers use a variety of activities and successful approaches to help support individual children and young people to learn. In most lessons observed by inspectors, learning activities were well matched to children's and young people's learning needs with staff providing well-judged support and challenge. In the best lessons, staff challenge the highest attaining children and young people and support effectively those who require additional help. The school deploys successfully a range of assessment approaches to help identify children's and young people's needs. This begins at P1 and P2 where children who require support in literacy and numeracy are identified through early intervention strategies. Support for learning staff ensure that children's and young people's learning needs are being met very well. They work successfully as a team, across the whole school to provide helpful support to individuals and small groups of children and young people. Staff work very well with a wide range of partner agencies to provide learning opportunities to meet children and young people's needs as they move through the different stages of the nursery and school.

The all-through curriculum is based clearly on the school's values of truth, honour, freedom and courtesy. The principles of Curriculum for Excellence are used highly effectively across the nursery and school to deliver a broad and stimulating education. In the nursery, Curriculum for Excellence guidance is very well used by staff to deliver learning through play and learning plans are displayed and shared with parents. The primary curriculum is enhanced by the ready access to specialist teachers in areas such as PE, music, art and modern languages. The teaching of modern languages is a strong feature across the Junior school and includes taster approaches to languages from nursery to P4 and more formal approaches to learning languages at P5 and P6. Junior school staff have worked very well with children to introduce elements of choice into their learning. For example, children discuss what they would like to learn as part of their topic work. There have been very strong developments to make use of the local, national and international environment to deliver an impressive range of outdoor education. Across the nursery and all stages of the school, staff plan programmes and courses very carefully to ensure there is coherence and progression in learning. For example, staff reviewed recently aspects of the social studies curriculum in Junior school to ensure better progression into history, classical studies and Latin at the Lower and Upper stages. There is excellent planned progression in art and design with many young people developing confidence in a range of media. As a result, the quality of children's and young people's art work is of a very high standard. Other exemplary programmes across the school include science and music. Partnership working to support aspects of the curriculum is very impressive. The school works

alongside other independent schools, local authority schools, local businesses, politicians and many other organisations to plan innovative and interesting elements of the curriculum. The quality of careers advice and approaches to preparing young people for the world of work is also very impressive with a range of talks, interviews and detailed discussions arranged by staff. Transition arrangements for children and young people as they move through the school are excellent. In keeping with the school's aims, children and young people progress at their own pace through the curriculum, with young people benefitting from short courses, different qualifications systems and packages of courses to meet their individual needs and aspirations. The recent introduction of GCSE subjects has been very well received by young people and their parents. A commendable and innovative range of bespoke courses is provided to meet the needs of young people in the Upper School. For example public speaking and art appreciation widen young people's knowledge and skills. With the aim to produce 'women of independent mind', young people in Houldsworth House are encouraged to develop skills that will enable them to live independently, such as managing their finances, taking responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and managing risks.

How well does the school improve the quality of its work?

Across the nursery and school, staff are strongly motivated to provide children and young people with high quality learning experiences and skills for life and work. They are very reflective practitioners who constantly review their learning and teaching approaches, the curriculum and how well they are supporting children and young people to succeed. Any changes to provision are very effectively managed and carefully monitored to evaluate the impact on children and young people. There is an excellent culture of self-evaluation embedded across the school. For example, staff have worked together very well to review aspects of the curriculum and build a coherent and progressive curriculum across the nursery and school. Staff use self-evaluation approaches very successfully to ensure that what they do is improving children and young people's performance and builds on their previous levels of attainment and achievement. The school's systematic approaches to tracking and monitoring children's and young people's performance provides staff with very helpful information about each child's progress and development. Staff in Houldsworth House are also very reflective practitioners and are keen to continue to provide a high-quality service to girls. The headteacher has a strong and clear vision for the school as a place where children and young people receive the best education to develop their ambitions and fulfil their aspirations. She has shared this vision successfully with the whole school community and strongly promotes continuous improvement through self-evaluation to achieve this. She is highly respected by staff, parents and the Board of Governors and is regarded by all as an outstanding headteacher. The headteacher is very well supported by a team of depute headteachers who bring complementary skills and knowledge to the senior management team. They provide strong leadership in their areas of responsibility and provide staff with clear, practical advice and guidance and are respected by all staff, children, young people and partners. Faculty and curriculum leaders and many unpromoted staff are leading developments very successfully. For example, staff members of learning and teaching groups work together willingly to develop their professional learning and expertise further. Young people are developing their leadership skills through citizenship activities, organising assemblies, and acting as prefects and mentors. Staff work closely with the Board of

Governors and the Parent Teacher Forum, informing them about developments, future action and incorporating their suggestions. The school involves many partners to enhance the quality of children's and young people's learning experiences and values them as true partners.

This inspection found the following key strengths.

- Dedication of all staff to providing a wide range of learning opportunities and opportunities to achieve for children and young people.
- Ambitious, determined and high-achieving children and young people.
- The effective way in which the school supports and prepares children and young people for their next steps in learning, life and work.
- An outstanding all-through curriculum and excellent self-evaluation approaches.
- The headteacher's leadership of improvement and change.

We discussed with the senior leadership team how they might continue to improve the school and nursery. This is what we agreed with them.

- Continue to take forward the school's improvement priorities as planned.

What happens at the end of the inspection?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that the school's self-evaluation processes are leading to improvements. As a result, we will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this inspection. During the inspection, we identified aspects of innovative practice in relation to the curriculum, self-evaluation approaches, achievement and attainment which we would like to explore further. We shall work with the school and the Board of Governors to record the innovative practice and share it more widely.

Hakim Din
HM Inspector

Additional inspection evidence, such as details of the quality indicator evaluations and national care standards gradings, for your school can be found on the Education Scotland website at <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/inspectionandreview/reports/school/primsec/StGeorgesSchoolforGirlsEdinburghCity.asp>.

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