

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

James Allen's Girls' School

Full Name of the School	James Allen's Girls' School
DCSF Number	210/6002
Registered Charity Number	312750
Address	East Dulwich Grove, London SE22 8TE.
Telephone Number	020 8693 1181
Fax Number	020 8693 7842
Email Address	registrar@jags.org.uk
Headmistress	Mrs Marion Gibbs
Chair of Governors	Dame Valerie Strachan
Age Range	4 to 18
Gender	Mixed 4 to 7; Girls 7 to 18
Inspection Dates	4th to 7th February 2008

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 162A(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002 as amended by the Education Act 2005, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003 as amended with effect from January 2005 and May 2007.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

CONTENTS

1.	INTRODUCTION	1
	Characteristics of the School	1
2.	THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION	3
	The Educational Experience Provided	3
	Pupils' Learning and Achievements.....	6
	Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils	8
	The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment).....	10
3.	THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS	12
	The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils.....	12
	The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community	13
4.	THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT	15
	The Quality of Governance	15
	The Quality of Leadership and Management	15
5.	CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS.....	17
	Overall Conclusions	17
	Next Steps.....	17
6.	SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE	18
	List of Inspectors	18

1. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 1.1 James Allen's Girls' School is an independent day school for girls aged from four to eighteen and for boys aged four to seven. It was established in 1741 and moved to its present site in Dulwich in 1886. Originally an Anglican foundation, it welcomes pupils of all cultures and faiths. The school is an independent charity, but it is also one of the seven beneficiaries of the charity, Alleyn's College of God's Gift.
- 1.2 The school's original foundation commits it to providing a "practical, liberal and religious education". Its aims are: to encourage all pupils to develop their full potential by stimulating their intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm and imagination; to promote excellence in academic, creative and athletic endeavours; to teach the value of integrity, morality and a concern for others; to enhance pupils' appreciation of their own and other cultures; and to develop pupils' self-confidence and independence so that they are well equipped to play an active role in society.
- 1.3 The school is situated in 22 acres on the northern edge of Dulwich, in the inner London borough of Southwark. The pre-preparatory section is housed separately in a large Edwardian villa, a short distance from the main school site. Substantial improvements have been made to the accommodation and facilities over recent years and more were being made during the inspection, as well as others being planned. The current development includes the conversion of a 1930s swimming pool hall into a two-storey dining room and the construction of new classrooms, a drama studio and staff areas. The school has extensive sports facilities; these and other resources are open to the local community throughout the year.
- 1.4 At the time of the inspection, the school had a total of 1045 pupils. James Allen's Preparatory School (JAPS) had 107 pupils aged from four to seven years in the pre-preparatory section ('pre-prep') and 191 pupils aged seven to eleven years in the preparatory section ('prep'). The senior school had 747 pupils, including 189 in the sixth form. In total, 36 places are available in the Reception class, increasing to 48 in Year 3 and to 112 in Year 7. Most pupils move from Year 6 into the senior school. They are joined by pupils from other independent and maintained primary schools. Pupils come from a wide, cosmopolitan catchment area, including most of South London. Some travel from north of the Thames.
- 1.5 The school has a broad cultural and social mix. Some fifteen per cent of the preparatory school pupils and just over a quarter of the senior school pupils are from ethnic minority backgrounds. Currently, pupils speak 46 different home languages. A few of the preparatory school pupils and just over a fifth of the senior school pupils speak a language other than English at home, although almost all have a very good command of English. The school was providing fee support for 270 pupils at the time of the inspection.
- 1.6 Entry at all ages is competitive and the school sets its own entry tests. Additional standardised tests taken by the pupils indicate that the average ability of the current pupils is well above the national average. If the pupils are performing in line with their abilities, their results will be in line with those of maintained selective schools.
- 1.7 At the time of the inspection, the school had one pupil with a statement of special educational needs, funded by the local authority. The school had identified a further 36 pupils as having learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD), mainly of a mild dyslexic nature.

- 1.8 Strategic management of the whole school is in the hands of the headmistress of the senior school. She is also responsible for the operational management of the senior school which is generally referred to as JAGS. She is supported by the bursar, who facilitates the work of the whole school. The preparatory school is managed on an operational basis by the headteacher of JAPS. The headteacher of JAPS and the bursar report to the headmistress of the whole school as well as reporting to and being accountable to the governing body.
- 1.9 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The Educational Experience Provided

- 2.1 The education provided by the school is consistent with its aims and philosophy to offer a first-class education for pupils through a rich curriculum of academic subjects and a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The education encourages a love of learning and fun in lessons and promotes excellence in every endeavour. The claims in the prospectus emphasising qualities such as inspiration, inclusion and challenge are justified.

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- 2.2 In the pre-prep, the curriculum provides a good range of activities. Pupils follow all the subjects of the National Curriculum and, in addition, study French, religious education (RE) and drama. Pupils' personal, social, health and citizenship education (PSHCE) is successfully promoted. Pupils have a clear awareness of staying safe and staying healthy. This is exemplified by the organisation of activities in ways which promote sharing and caring for others. Pupils respond to this approach with considerable maturity and success. In the prep school, PSHCE is developed further by the study of community and environmental issues. The National Curriculum continues to be supplemented by RE and drama. Strong and highly effective emphasis is given to the acquisition of literacy and numeracy needed for the next stages of education. Delivery of the curriculum is greatly enhanced by specialist teachers in many areas. Since the last inspection, the provision for information and communications technology (ICT) has been greatly improved, although it is still yet to be exploited fully in individual subjects. A good range of trips and visiting speakers supports the curriculum at all ages. During the inspection, Year 5 visited a Buddhist centre as part of their RE provision. Regular trips are made in relation to history, geography and science topics. In both the pre-prep and prep, there is a particularly good range of extra-curricular activities and clubs, which the pupils love to attend.
- 2.3 Pupils in the pre-prep are well prepared for their move to the prep school by visits and lessons in that school involving different teachers and by receiving letters from their prep 'buddies'. In the prep school, pupils are given increasing independence and confidence which prepare them successfully for their move to senior school. The introduction of reasoning in Year 5 and emphasis on literacy and numeracy prepare pupils thoroughly for examinations to senior schools. Familiarity with the senior school is helped by pupils having lunch there, being taught by some staff from the senior school, having taster lessons and meeting with senior school pupils.
- 2.4 Planning of the curriculum is good and generally consistent across departments. Recent reviews of subject planning and policies have ensured that most subjects follow similar approaches to planning across the prep although assessment and marking do not follow a consistent pattern between, and occasionally within all subjects. The timetables in both pre-prep and prep are generally well balanced. However, at present science is taught in the pre-prep as part of 'topic' and has an insufficient time allowance. The school is aware of this and has planned to address the issue. While there are links between the curriculum in the prep and senior schools, these are not sufficiently explicit.
- 2.5 During the present year, the school has focussed on improving provision for pupils who are gifted and talented. This is developing well although, as the school recognises, more needs to be done within the classroom. The special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO) has developed particularly good systems for identifying pupils who need support for whatever reason, including the gifted and talented, and has links with a range of external agencies, including the local authority.

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- 2.6 The senior school achieves its aim to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which provides an excellent education for all. The curriculum contributes positively to all aspects of pupils' learning. It is planned effectively and is clearly stated. It provides equality of access and opportunity for all pupils and promotes participation in a wide range of activities.
- 2.7 The curriculum successfully provides pupils with many opportunities for linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative development. These opportunities are provided through the formal curriculum and by the excellent range of extra-curricular activities available. More traditional subjects are well supported; for instance, all three sciences are taught separately in Years 7 to 9; there are six modern languages available with the use of a modern language laboratory. Latin is taught from Year 7 and, together with Greek, is taught to A level. From Years 7 to 9 the arts, humanities, physical education (PE) and technology are all represented. In the sixth form, there is a very wide range of options including A-level critical thinking, economics, philosophy, politics and theatre studies, and a non-examined liberal studies course is shared with a local boys' independent school. JAGS also offers minority subjects, allowing small groups to study Greek, Japanese and Russian.
- 2.8 ICT is used in all subjects and has been developed effectively since the last inspection. Some high quality examples of pupils using it were seen in lessons in music and design and technology. There are many opportunities for pupils to be involved in drama, both within the curriculum and outside it, using the school's own theatre. In the immediate period before the inspection, the school staged a highly successful production of *The Love of the Nightingale*. Year 9 pupils expressed regret that the double period of drama provided in Years 7 and 8 is reduced to a single period for them. Pupils' requests for cookery are intended to be met with the new building developments which will allow it to be included in the extra-curricular programme.
- 2.9 The monitoring of pupils' progress is effective and girls feel well supported. Pupils who are having difficulties with their work programme are identified by subject staff and their profile recorded on concern sheets. They are then seen by their tutor and head of section and their progress is monitored through regular meetings until they are no longer necessary. The amount and nature of homework is an issue raised by some parents and pupils lower down the school. The school is already addressing the issue.
- 2.10 Girls' experience of PSHCE reflects the school's aims and ethos. There is a useful and well-delivered programme in Years 7 to 9 and this is carried on into Years 10 to 13 in various forms. Some outstanding PSHCE lessons were observed where the pupils were encouraged to develop their ideas and discuss challenging material, such as the Leah Betts DVD and the manipulation of facial images by advertisers. However, some aspects receive less attention, for example the relationships element of sex education and the legislation concerning issues such as age and gender discrimination.
- 2.11 Appropriate attention is given to preparing pupils for employment and for adult life. This is co-ordinated by a well-stocked and well-organised careers department which provides open access at all times. Careers guidance begins in Year 9 when pupils are encouraged to develop an awareness of the skills they will need in future. Pupils write their own career planning profiles. The school is a member of the Independent Schools Careers Organisation and Year 10 pupils are encouraged to take psychometric tests although these are not compulsory. In Year 11, one week's work shadowing takes place after GCSE examinations. Placements have included work with a photographer on a fashion shoot and work with a pharmaceutical company which contributed to a pupil's decision to pursue biochemistry at a

competitive university. Alumnae and parents make valuable contributions to both the work shadowing programme and the lecture programme in Year 12. Alumnae working for a range of high profile companies contribute regularly to this programme.

- 2.12 Preparation for the next stage of education and training is effectively overseen by the head of sixth form. The 'Bridge to A2' programme at the end of Year 12 includes drafting applications to university and excellent opportunities to enrich subject knowledge prior to university interviews. Large numbers of successful applications to competitive university departments and girls' success in achieving their first choice university places are testament to the school's effectiveness.
- 2.13 The scope and organisation of extra-curricular activities are outstanding. Physical activities include a wide variety of sports such as hockey, netball, karate, yoga and dance as well as swimming and tennis. Success at both county and national levels is enjoyed in many sports but the ethos of the PE department is 'sport for all'. Excellent facilities such as the large indoor swimming pool and well-equipped fitness suite make a significant contribution to the overall programme on offer. There are opportunities for girls to join The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme and to take part in a wide range of subject based expeditions overseas, recently including a geography field trip to Iceland and a history trip to Rome as well as regular language exchanges. There are twenty-four musical groups including four orchestras, five choirs, a jazz band and Big Band. All pupils fill in a 'profile' for the music department in Years 7, 8 and 9 to identify what they can do in music so that they can be included in extra-curricular music appropriate to them. There is a choir which has open access to all and pupils are encouraged to try out new instruments in trial lessons.
- 2.14 There are 160 pupils who speak a language other than English at home but almost all have a very good command of the language. There are 34 pupils identified as having LDD who are given help, support and some individual sessions. Individual Education Plans have been drawn up for these pupils and the resulting support given in lessons is appreciated by the pupils and by their parents. All pupils have full access to the curriculum.
- 2.15 The senior school provides well for the most able, in part through the high standards of work, in part through the setting of modern languages and mathematics, and in part through the great variety of opportunities offered in most subjects. There is no whole-school register of the most able, although the PE department keep registers and monitors such pupils' involvement in teams and sporting activities. In addition, the music department ensures that the most talented musicians play solo parts in the many school musical performances. The most able pupils in French have the opportunity to take GCSE French in Year 9 and AS French in Year 11.

Whole School

- 2.16 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the curriculum [Standard 1].

Pupils' Learning and Achievements

- 2.17 Throughout the school, pupils achieve high standards and develop good skills and attitudes to work. Results in national tests and public examinations are far above the averages for maintained schools, and individual and group achievements are noteworthy. However, the school does not limit itself solely to academic success. Pupils' positive, inquiring and enthusiastic approach to learning unlocks their creativity and underpins their reasoning.

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- 2.18 From the start of Reception, pupils develop secure foundations in the core skills of literacy and numeracy, supported by good listening and speaking skills. In an outstanding Year 1 literacy lesson, pupils used brainstorming techniques to review their learning about Queen Victoria's life and organised ways of recording their ideas, including a time line for confirming key dates and correct spellings. In the prep school, pupils' ability to think critically and act creatively is apparent in their written work and in lessons. In a Year 6 drama lesson, pupils acted the witch scene from *Macbeth* in small groups, followed by an effective analysis of the strengths of each performance. Pupils of differing abilities achieve well. Those with LDD make good progress as a result of the good support they receive. The most able extend their writing with detailed reasoning as well as producing well-researched projects.
- 2.19 Pupils do exceptionally well in national and standardised tests. Tests on entry to the school indicate that pupils are above the national average in reading and mathematics. Over the last few years, the results of national tests in Year 6 in English, mathematics and science have been consistently far above the average for maintained schools, thus indicating that the school adds value to the initial attainment. Pupils are successful in gaining places at their chosen senior school and regularly gain academic, music, art and sports scholarships.
- 2.20 Enthusiastic participation in clubs, music and sports events is reflected in the pupils' success in a wide range of activities. Swimming, hockey, netball and cross-country teams regularly win competitions locally and sometimes nationally. Pupils have reached the finals of the national Mathematics Challenge for the past three years. There are many successes in music and drama exams as well as awards for science and art competitions.
- 2.21 In lessons, pupils listen attentively to their teachers and to each other and are articulate and self-assured when they speak. They enjoy reading and respond well to the challenge to analyse and discuss what they have read, both orally and in writing. Noteworthy is the fact that they are responsive to spoken French from an early age. Writing in books, on displays and in school magazines shows fluency and imagination. Pupils have good understanding of mathematical concepts and can use them effectively in investigative work; for example in a Year 6 lesson, they used their knowledge about the area of a circle and applied it to a practical activity. In science and geography, bar charts and graphs are used effectively.
- 2.22 Pupils use ICT more frequently and effectively than during the last inspection, although there is still limited use in lessons other than ICT. Pupils in Year 4 used ICT to help in electricity switch designs in a design and technology lesson. Work in books shows efficient use of the internet for research in history, geography and science.
- 2.23 Throughout the prep school pupils are developing strongly into independent thinkers as they extend their reasoning skills. In a Year 4 science lesson, pupils argued logically when deciding which different surfaces would have least friction. By Year 6 their work shows increasing independence and creativity, and is carefully organised. Art is particularly strong and a wide variety of different media is used to produce both two and three dimensional

work. Pupils enjoy working on their own and co-operatively in small groups or teams. They concentrate well and behaviour during lessons and around the school is good and sometimes excellent.

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- 2.24 Girls continue to develop critical and creative thinking and to acquire good levels of knowledge and understanding as well as a wide range of skills. Examples of both logical and independent thought are evident in lessons, in written work, and through conversations with the pupils. Creativity continues to be demonstrated in the high quality of pupils' art well presented throughout the school. Girls' environmental awareness is high, not least as a result of the work of the pupils' environmental committee and school council, leading to the recent award of Eco-School status.
- 2.25 Levels of attainment in public examinations are high. They are also high relative to pupils' abilities and show an upward trend. GCSE and A-level results in the last three years for which national comparative data is available, were far above the national average for maintained schools and well above the average for maintained selective schools. This means that pupils make very good progress. Thirteen individual commendations were received from exam boards last summer when pupils were in the top five or ten in the country in various subjects.
- 2.26 Subjects about which there were concerns at the last inspection have been a focus for management, and standards have improved. There is no apparent difference between the performances of different groups in the school. The well-organised tracking system led by the three heads of section ensures that no pupil is lost in the crowd.
- 2.27 Girls' achievements in extra-curricular activities are wide-ranging and include: high level awards in mathematics, music and sports; representing England in debating competitions; playing in national orchestras; acting with the National Youth Theatre; success in art competitions; winning prizes for French, German, Italian and Spanish poetry; qualifying as National Pool Lifeguards; gaining bursaries for summer holiday projects at universities. School teams regularly reach the national finals in cross-country, hockey and swimming.
- 2.28 Pupils are focused. As a very articulate sixth former said in interview: "we are allowed to follow our passions; it's not about being pushed, it's all about engaging." They take notes assiduously and with some thought, highlighting key passages and annotating well, using mind maps and time lines for draft work. There are numerous examples, from all subject areas, of work that is immaculately presented and efficiently organised. Girls work extremely well together, often relying on each other to explore their own ideas, and to learn from others. A pupil commented: "you learn as much from your fellow students as you do from teachers; it's amazing what they say." Another pupil in a mathematics class copied out a spare set of notes ready for her friend who was absent from the class. Pupils work well together in teams, both in and out of class. A particularly good example was seen in a Year 11 drama class, where co-operation between the pupils performing and their audience listening was remarkable. All of this is in addition to the precise co-operation necessary in sports teams and in music.
- 2.29 Girls' attitude to work is excellent. They come to class ready to work. For example, in an ICT class, pupils walked into their classroom, sat straight down in front of their computers, logged on, opened their coursework, and started work, without a word from their teacher. Pupils are eager to learn. In conversation, it is clear that they view learning as an exciting process of discovery. They derive enormous satisfaction from achievement. In simple terms, learning is not a chore, not even just a challenge; it is fun.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural Development of Pupils

- 2.30 The school is successful in establishing a consistently strong, and at times excellent, foundation for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of its pupils.
- 2.31 Pupils' spiritual development is strong. During their time at school, they develop self-awareness and greater awareness of others. Their sense of self-worth is strong and their aspirations become increasingly clear – to themselves and to others. Their understanding of concepts such as beauty or love is well developed. Outstanding examples of two and three dimensional artwork displayed throughout the prep and senior school contribute significantly to developing a sense of “awe and wonder”. Pupils' self-esteem is fostered by the school's recognition of the fact that every child matters; in the prep school, all pupils receive a birthday card, printed in the child's house colour. Pupils of all ages take part in a wide range of performance activities, including drama productions, poetry recital evenings, choirs, major school concerts and small informal recital concerts and ensembles. They have many opportunities to represent the school or their house in sporting fixtures and competitions. Their self-esteem is further developed by the reward system; pupils value the house points and credits they are awarded for good work, effort and behaviour.
- 2.32 Pupils are used to articulating their emotional responses, as seen in Year 11 drama where exploration of a text afforded the opportunity for pupils to consider their responses to difficult situations. The local vicar works closely with the school, and regularly takes part in assemblies. The school's police liaison officer also works to good effect.
- 2.33 Pupils' moral development is strong. Pupils throughout the prep school have a secure understanding of right and wrong; they respect the “Golden Rules” which they have helped to formulate. In addition, Year 6 pupils have helped the headteacher to revise and extend the anti-bullying policy. By the time pupils enter the senior school, they are already very aware of the issues involved in healthy eating and living, and the PSHCE syllabus includes subjects such as smoking, alcohol, eating disorders and drugs. Pupils of all ages hold strong views. In a powerful PSHCE lesson, through role play, Year 8 demonstrated their preference not to be aggressive but assertive. In other subjects, pupils also develop strong moral values, for example in the study of the Holocaust in history and the study of Chaucer's *The Merchant's Tale* in a Year 13 English literature lesson.
- 2.34 Pupils' social development is excellent. First and foremost, they work very well together – in class and in extra-curricular activities. They are courteous and well mannered, showing good self-discipline and consideration for others as they move around the school and during unstructured time in the playgrounds. They demonstrate a high level of self-confidence and are articulate communicators. In the prep school magazine, pupils write their own outstanding contributions, including thoughts about their friends, reflecting the school's aim to empower pupils to express themselves.
- 2.35 There are numerous examples of pupils of all ages accepting responsibility: the head girls of both prep and senior school; house captains; “buddies” in the prep school; and “big sisters” in the senior school; all of whom provide a support network for their peers.
- 2.36 There are active school councils in both the prep and senior schools, which deal with important school issues. The elected pupils learn important lessons about representing the views of others and taking responsibility as well as developing very good reasoning, debating and committee skills.
- 2.37 Pupils' contributions to the community outside the school are extensive; for example pupils in Year 10 upwards are encouraged to be involved in community work. They visit the

elderly, help with reading at the Saturday Literacy Scheme, assist at a local special school and most recently helped to set up the National Citizens Service. Social awareness permeates every level of the school, as reflected in Year 12 form time where a valuable discussion about privilege and deprivation took place.

- 2.38 Pupils' general knowledge of public institutions, democratic procedures and services is uneven. Some, such as sixth form politics students, have a very good understanding. Relevant topics are also covered in a citizenship course which is taught in Years 7, 10 and 11. Pupils in the pre-prep school demonstrate an early knowledge of major figures in the government and the royal family. Pupils understand the principle of elections, for example when electing the head girls and the school councils.
- 2.39 Pupils have an excellent cultural awareness. Their understanding of art, music and dance, for example, is extensive. The quality of displays around the school is testament to this. The pupils' knowledge and understanding of different faiths and cultures are good and well illustrated by participation in special events such as the celebration of lights, the multicultural evening, and the faith forum. Their understanding of different cultures in the United Kingdom is enhanced by the wide range of ethnic groups represented in the school. Equally, pupils enrich the school with their own experiences of music and dance, as seen in the Gospel Choir and Bollywood dance club. They have a good knowledge of British and overseas cultures, as a result of visits to relatively near locations such as Cornwall, Paris, Rome and Romania, but also to more distant venues. The wide provision of modern foreign languages allows further opportunity for cultural awareness. Use of, and links with, the local community constitute an important part of understanding local culture and London is an important resource. Pupils enjoy visits to the opera, theatre, proms and exhibitions, thus broadening their cultural experience. In addition, visiting speakers, sometimes past pupils, further enhance provision.
- 2.40 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [Standard 2].

The Quality of Teaching (Including Assessment)

- 2.41 The quality of teaching across the whole school is high, with many lessons observed during the inspection being outstanding. It is clear that the quality of teaching is taken very seriously. Teachers are valued as professionals.
- 2.42 Teachers are given enough time in their timetables for reflection and to pursue strategies for continuous improvement. Regular training is given within the school and teachers are encouraged to benefit from courses run by outside bodies. Standards are also maintained and raised by an annual performance review and by annual departmental self-review, including mutual observation of lessons.

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- 2.43 Teachers have high expectations of their pupils and this is reflected in the high standards achieved in intellectual, physical and creative aspects of the curriculum. Provision for pupils with learning difficulties and/or disabilities is good.
- 2.44 Pupils are encouraged to think and learn for themselves, as was demonstrated in a Year 3 mathematics lesson where pupils used reasoning skills to predict which nets would make a cube. This was followed by a practical activity to make cubes. In such work, the pupils' outstanding speaking and listening skills enable them to achieve high standards. They also achieve high standards when given opportunities to apply their abstract knowledge to practical situations.
- 2.45 Teaching encourages responsible behaviour and an enjoyment of learning. Pupils spoke appreciatively and positively about their work and the support which they receive from the teachers. In the best lessons, the objectives were made explicit and shared with the pupils, who showed a clear understanding not only of what they were learning but also why they were doing this work. Other good planning included detailed activities, adjusting work to meet different needs, assessment opportunities and identification of the resources required. On occasion plans were less detailed and learning and achievement were less successful.
- 2.46 Teachers have a good understanding of their pupils' prior attainment and are able to match work to extend the pupils' learning further. More able pupils, in particular, are able to work very well when given open-ended and investigative tasks. Specialist teaching is used in French, music and PE throughout the school. It is used for art and design and technology in the prep school and in Years 5 and 6 for the majority of lessons in English, mathematics and science, as well as in other subjects. Such specialist teaching has a significant and positive impact on the quality of learning and the standards achieved.
- 2.47 Specialist facilities and resources in the prep school for teaching art, science, design and technology, ICT, French and music are good, as is the range of resources available. Interactive whiteboards are used very effectively in both prep and pre-prep.
- 2.48 There is a planned framework for assessment. However, the marking policy linked to this does not provide detailed guidance on ways of marking in each subject. As a result, practices vary within and between subjects. In the best examples, written comments provide good guidance to pupils on the ways in which they can improve their work. Results of standardised tests are used to group pupils in Years 5 and 6; these results are used effectively to inform teachers' planning.

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- 2.49 Teaching enables pupils of all abilities to acquire new knowledge, make progress, increase their understanding and develop their skills. Teachers impart this to pupils who, in the main, are self-motivating. Teachers know how to encourage and do this firmly and sensitively. Teachers have very thorough knowledge of their subjects, enabling them to inspire their pupils and to explain complex and conceptually difficult ideas effectively.
- 2.50 Throughout the school, there is an expectation of achievement that leads pupils to work hard, both in and out of the classroom. Teachers are well skilled in stimulating pupils to work out problems for themselves and in encouraging independent study. Girls are encouraged to ask searching questions, which they do frequently.
- 2.51 Teachers manage classes well, ensuring that pupils are very well behaved in class. Teachers' enthusiasm ensures that pupils genuinely enjoy their lessons. Good use is made of time in lessons, which are normally well planned, brisk, challenging and interesting. Some particular examples of effective teaching were observed in Year 13 French, integrating textual study with film clips, in Year 10 music in which pupils analysed each other's work, and in English lessons where very good use was made of group and pair work. Teachers know their pupils very well – their strengths and their weaknesses. Pupils indicated that they considered that teachers are always there to help, seeing them as approachable and easy to talk to.
- 2.52 Teaching is supported by a generous range and quantity of resources, which are used effectively and, often, inventively. Significant investment has been made in recent years in the provision of ICT and the school has done much to encourage its use in the classroom. It is now used by many teachers to enhance teaching and learning. Very good examples were observed in design and technology and music. In some subjects there is an over-reliance on the use of worksheets, many of which are of a poor physical quality. The library provides an excellent resource to support teaching for all ages.
- 2.53 Homework is set regularly and marked thoroughly, usually with helpful comments so that pupils know how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve. One matter raised by both pupils and parents in their respective pre-inspection questionnaires was the issue of homework lower down the school. Some feel that there is too much, particularly when there are tests looming. The school is aware of this issue. The school's carefully constructed homework timetables are fine in theory but the school's highly aspirational pupils need help and encouragement to stick to the prescribed limits.
- 2.54 Grades for effort and achievement are awarded regularly, reported to parents and discussed with pupils so that sensible steps for improvement can be identified.
- 2.55 Each girl's grades, together with examination results and other relevant information are recorded on the school's central computer system. This enables the performance of each individual to be tracked over time. It is a very useful resource used extensively by teachers to inform lesson planning and to manage the progress of each pupil.

Whole School

- 2.56 The school meets the regulatory requirements for teaching [Standard 1].

3. THE QUALITY OF CARE AND RELATIONSHIPS

The Quality of Pastoral Care, and the Welfare, Health and Safety of Pupils

- 3.1 The quality of pastoral care and provision for the welfare, health and safety of pupils in the school is outstanding. The school meets its aim of providing support and understanding as pupils progress through the school and meet new challenges, and promotes pupils' confidence and awareness of the needs of others.
- 3.2 All staff provide very effective support for pupils. It is well recognised by pupils: in their questionnaires and in discussion with inspectors, the vast majority of pupils said that there is always someone they can turn to for help with both academic and personal matters. The school's approach is led by the headmistress who deals successfully with difficult issues. Other support also works very well; for example, the school nurses are well respected and work hard both as nurses and as PSHCE teachers. There is special mentoring by teachers for pupils who need particular help academically or pastorally. A drop-in counsellor for the senior school is a new and well-received resource. In the senior school, the tutorial system is effective, supported by sixth form representatives attached to each tutor group. Careers advice is well respected and received by pupils; for example those interviewed in Years 12 and 13 were very pleased with both GCSE advice in Year 9 and higher education advice in the sixth form. Support is further enhanced by pupils acting as "big sisters" to pupils starting the school in Year 7. The SENCO, in co-operation with staff, does a very good job supporting pupils with identified needs. The "buddy group" system in the JAPS is highly successful in encouraging pupils to take responsibility for others; in the pre-prep, a "friendship bench" serves as a location where pupils can find someone to play with or discuss any problems with a friend. Pupils also identify their "buddy teacher" as an adult to whom they can turn in case of difficulty.
- 3.3 A high quality of relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils is strongly evident, and meets the school's aims to teach the values of integrity, morality and a concern for others. Pupils show qualities of care, and are considerate and courteous to each other and to staff. In Year 7, pupils discussed intelligently and co-operatively the qualities of a good friend. Pupils say that their teachers are approachable and helpful. Pupils are not afraid to question their teachers and to ask for academic advice.
- 3.4 Good discipline and behaviour are effectively promoted through the high expectations of staff and through encouragement and positive attitudes. Pupils report relatively little bullying. When this occurs, it is dealt with quickly and efficiently. In the prep school, Year 6 pupils were involved in the review and re-writing of their anti-bullying policy. Good work and behaviour are recognised in the preparatory school through an effective rewards system which includes house points, "golden leaves" and spoken and written comments. In the senior school, credits, house points and rewards at end of term assemblies are used with equal success. Pupils understand the behaviour expectations and school rules and appreciate the sense of fairness and security which these provide.
- 3.5 Effective child protection procedures are in place and are successful, and the necessary checks are made on all those working with pupils. The headmistress is the designated child protection officer, and the headteacher of the prep school and deputy head of the senior school are her deputies. Governors have had appropriate training and all staff have received training in recognising and dealing with child protection issues. Girls in the senior school who are involved with the "big sisters" scheme or attached to forms, also receive thorough training. All necessary measures are taken to reduce risk from fire and other hazards.

- 3.6 There are school councils in all three parts of the school, and members are elected by their peers. These have shown their effectiveness; for example, in the pre-prep, a water fountain has been installed, and outdoor playtime equipment in the prep school has encouraged pupils to be active. Pupils are very conscious of the need for good eating and exercise habits. They are very well informed and act upon this, encouraged by the excellent catering arrangements and the raising of their awareness through a recent survey which enabled them to voice their opinions. There is ample opportunity for physical exercise, which is facilitated by the high quality and variety of the sports resources available. Most pupils participate in at least one form of physical activity.
- 3.7 Arrangements to ensure health and safety are effective, and the school has due regard for health and safety statutory obligations. There is good provision for pupils who are ill and a substantial number of staff have been trained as first-aiders. Effective and thorough risk assessments are made, covering provision and practice in the school as well as on school trips. The school buildings have systems in place to secure the safety of the pupils, and admissions and attendance registers are compliant.
- 3.8 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils [Standard 3].

The Quality of Links with Parents and the Community

- 3.9 The quality of links with both parents and the community is a strength of the school. Since the last inspection, significant progress has been made in both areas. The school enjoys a high degree of parental satisfaction and there are many opportunities for parents to become involved in school life. The school takes care to keep parents informed and to develop many positive and beneficial links with the community.
- 3.10 A significant proportion of parents responded to the questionnaire distributed before the inspection. In this, almost all parents were positive about the school and appreciated the academic opportunities, the high standards of pupil behaviour, pastoral care provided and the range of extra-curricular activities offered to their children.
- 3.11 The school provides many opportunities for parents to become involved in the activities of the school and in the work and progress of their children. These opportunities include becoming a governor (though not as a parent representative), providing opportunities for work experience, giving talks and lectures on their areas of expertise and providing costumes for school productions. Parents are involved in curricular activities in the pre-prep department and they accompany school outings with pupils of all ages. Active parents' associations in each part of the school meet regularly with the heads and organise a variety of well-attended family and adult social occasions. There are numerous opportunities for parents to support school events such as sports fixtures, music concerts, drama productions and art exhibitions. In the preparatory school, parents are regularly welcomed at assemblies as well as at other school celebrations.
- 3.12 Parents receive a wide range of information. A parental survey on communications was carried out three years ago and this has led to parents receiving more information through the internet. There are termly calendars, regular newsletters, the school magazine, parents' seminars and 'meet the governors' evenings, and much information is also available on the school's website. In the prep school, weekly newsletters provide details about events and highlight pupils' achievements. Pupils' diaries, used daily, provide an additional means of communication between school and home. Parents of prospective pupils are also provided with high quality information in the prospectus and on the school's very clear website. When pupils leave the school, an exit questionnaire for parents provides valuable feedback.

- 3.13 The arrangements for reporting to parents and for parents' evenings are good. In the senior school, written reports are of a high standard with comments which are constructive and encouraging. In the prep school, reports give grades for effort and achievement and provide positive feedback with, in the best examples, detailed suggestions for improvement. Extension of reporting to include RE and drama is currently being planned in the prep school, bringing it into line with practice in the pre-prep.
- 3.14 Parental complaints are dealt with using a well-structured complaints procedure, a copy of which is given to all new parents.
- 3.15 The school has excellent links with the community. Not least among these are the bursaries and scholarships it provides, making the school accessible to a diverse clientele. In the senior school, there are many community links and state school partnerships. Many of these links are long and well established, such as the Saturday Literacy Scheme for pupils in Year 3 from Southwark primary schools. The James Allen's Saturday School for the Performing Arts attracts 450 pupils aged 3 to 18 from over 80 schools to learn musical instruments, sing, dance, act and hear storytelling. Other links are more recent and ground-breaking, such as the new Southwark project to help raise standards and participation specifically in science and modern foreign languages in other local secondary schools, and a joint Latin-American project for Year 9 with a local academy. The school makes its excellent facilities widely available to others. For example, six local schools regularly use the swimming pool. This is also used to host local and regional galas, including those for people with disabilities.
- 3.16 The Community Action programme is a real strength of the school. At present, 135 pupils from the senior school are involved in weekly placements with a variety of projects such as King's College Hospital Trolley Shop, Aylesbury Academic Grass Roots and an exciting new scheme, Dulwich Picture Gallery Intergenerational Art in which pupils are involved in a weekly session with a number of local elderly people. Placements also take place outside term time with projects such as Crisis at Christmas, Kids' Company and a summer school held at a local all-age school for children with learning difficulties. In addition, JAGS pupils continue to take part, in partnership with pupils from another school, in a project in Romania in which the pupils plan, implement and evaluate workshops in music, art, drama, dance and PE. Last term, a small number of JAGS pupils addressed the Education Forum of the Independent Schools Council on the educational benefit of community action. All these activities help considerably to develop pupils' sense of responsibility and awareness of the world around them.
- 3.17 In the prep school, pupils sing carols and distribute harvest festival gifts at a local day centre. There are well-established sport links with other independent schools, as well as local primary schools. The school has recently allocated part of its grounds to a 'Forest Schools' initiative to enable younger pupils to play and learn in a woodland environment. The intention is for this to be used by the pre-prep and local primary schools, and for the senior school pupils and staff to help with its maintenance and development. The prep school council have organised a meeting with their counterparts from three neighbouring schools to share ideas and practice.
- 3.18 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the provision of information and the manner in which complaints are to be handled [Standards 6 and 7].

4. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The Quality of Governance

- 4.1 The quality of governance is high. The support provided by the governors is a significant strength of the school which helps to ensure that it meets its aims. The governors have a good range of skills and professional experience which support their effective oversight of the school. Their number includes former pupils and parents of current and former pupils. They meet four times a year and augment their knowledge of the school through sub-committees which monitor aspects of the school's work. The annual governors' away day, which is attended by the headmistress and the headteacher of the preparatory school, provides a useful opportunity for strategic thinking and planning.
- 4.2 The governors are fully aware of their statutory responsibilities and are conscientious in addressing these. They have a good knowledge of the school achieved by frequent contact with the headmistress and bursar, and through specific roles, such as linking with the preparatory school or non-teaching staff, and through documentation provided by the school. The annual audit of academic departments in the senior school is reported to governors and debated by them. The education provided by the school is the governors' top priority and this is reflected in the fact that there is no education committee since education is the focus for all governors. The governors emphasise the importance of the wide range of activities and experiences available to the pupils both through the formal curriculum and through extra-curricular activities. The annual accounts are scrutinised by the chairman of the finance and general purposes committee and she also liaises closely with the bursar to monitor the management accounts. Capital expenditure, maintenance projects and assisted places are of prime concern. School departmental budgets are carefully monitored.
- 4.3 The governors indicate their support of and involvement in the school in a number of ways. These include annual 'meet the governors' evenings for parents as well as for teaching and non-teaching staff, which are well attended. Governors enjoy their links with departments and are regularly available to meet staff and attend school events. They fully discharge their responsibilities for the welfare, health and safety of pupils including their responsibilities for child protection.

The Quality of Leadership and Management

- 4.4 The headmistress has an excellent and extensive grasp of the issues affecting the school and is a decisive inspirational leader and decision-maker. The headmistress monitors the work of senior school departments rigorously and maintains an oversight of the work of the preparatory school. Much of the atmosphere of the school comes from the senior management team working very effectively as a group with strong commitment. Discussions with senior managers revealed a strong team, which is confident and able to take bold decisions.
- 4.5 Heads of academic departments in the senior school have clearly defined responsibilities which they execute conscientiously. They can raise curriculum issues with the deputy head at any time and express their appreciation of the support which they receive from senior managers whom they regard as accessible and good listeners. The heads of department meet with senior managers several times each term to discuss relevant issues and review procedures and policies. The whole-school forum, with representatives from all areas of the school, meets termly with the chairman and another governor. This fosters an excellent, co operative ethos amongst all staff. Evidence such as the staff handbooks and minutes of

- meetings, as well as discussions with senior and middle managers and those who are managed, indicates excellent two-way communication at all levels.
- 4.6 The preparatory school headteacher has provided clear leadership since her appointment at the start of the present academic year. She has begun to identify her priorities and is in a good position to take these forward. She is well supported by the head of pre-prep. The pre-prep staff work very well as a team and this helps them to promote pupils' learning to high standards. The JAPS senior management team also works very effectively.
- 4.7 The school development plan is produced after school-wide consultation and is finalised by the governors. In the senior school, each academic department identifies its priorities accurately and the departmental development plans key into the school development plan. The heads of section ensure that the pupils' pastoral and academic needs are addressed and the excellent value of their work is acknowledged by staff and pupils. The school's self-evaluation is accurate and clearly states the main priorities.
- 4.8 The headmistress is very well informed in statutory matters and is quick to amend policies as the need arises. All policies are published on the school's intranet and in the well-organised and helpful staff handbook. The policies on teaching and assessment, recording and reporting are usefully placed in a prominent position at the front. The headmistress ensures that all policies are reviewed annually by the governors. It is apparent that procedures, such as those for the registration of pupils, are carefully devised and systematically applied.
- 4.9 The school runs very efficiently. The bursar's unequivocal commitment to the support of the education of the pupils makes a significant contribution to the high quality of the provision. So too does the strong contribution of all non-teaching staff.
- 4.10 The school has appropriate arrangements for checking the suitability of governors and all staff. The school offers newly qualified teachers very good support.
- 4.11 Overall, the impact of the governance and leadership and management is like that of a well-fitting jigsaw whose pieces interlock very effectively and enable the school to meet its aims.
- 4.12 The school meets the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff and for premises and accommodation [Standards 4 and 5].
- 4.13 The school participates in the national scheme for the induction of newly qualified teachers and meets its requirements.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

Overall Conclusions

- 5.1 The three parts of James Allen's Girls' School are outstandingly successful in meeting the school's aim of providing pupils with rich opportunities to develop both academically and personally. Pupils achieve high standards and make very good progress. Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is strong; they develop into confident, knowledgeable and reflective young people. The curriculum is rich, providing an appropriate focus on literacy and numeracy, and a good range of activities in the pre-prep and a good range of subjects in the prep and senior schools. There are many excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activity. The quality of teaching is high. Teachers care and this is reflected not only in the quality of teaching, but also in the quality of pupils' learning. Assessment information is well used to inform teachers' decisions on what is taught. The quality of all forms of care is outstanding; the pupils are well looked after. Equally good are the links the school has with both parents and the community as a whole, characterised by the number of scholarships and bursaries as well as the range of community activities in which the school is involved. The quality of governance and of leadership and management is high.
- 5.2 Governors and senior managers know the school well. They know what to do to preserve what is good and what to do to maintain high quality in the future. Together, they have successfully addressed all the points for improvement raised in the last report and more, the result being highly quality provision. Consequently, there are no significant weaknesses. All parts of the school have highly appropriate development plans as well as other aims and aspirations for the future.
- 5.3 The school meets all the regulatory requirements.

Next Steps

- 5.4 In order for the school to improve still further, there is a single recommendation:
1. that the school continues to implement its development plans successfully.
- 5.5 No action is required in respect of regulatory requirements.

6. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 6.1 The inspection was carried out from 4th to 7th February 2008. The inspectors examined samples of pupils' work, observed lessons and conducted formal interviews with pupils. They held discussions with teaching and non-teaching staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined a range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

JAGS

Mr Paul Armitage	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Marilyn Banks	Senior Housemistress, GSA school
Mr Nicholas Beesley	Headmaster, GSA school
Mr Ian Mitchell	Head of Department, HMC school
Miss Barbara Habayeb	Deputy Head, ISA school
Mrs Carolyn Shaw	Headmistress, GSA school
Mr Alan Simkin	Former Director of Studies, HMC school
Mrs Christine Townsend	Head of Middle School, GSA school

JAPS

Dr Martin Bradley	Reporting Inspector
Mrs Anthea Hickman	Former Deputy Head, IAPS school
Miss Mary Regan	Headteacher, IAPS school
Mr Stephen Hewitt	Head of Department, IAPS school
Mrs Alison Edwards	Head of Individual Learning, IAPS school