




**South
Hampstead**
High School

GDST
GIRLS' DAY SCHOOL TRUST

Inspection Highlights

A SUMMARY OF OUR ISI INSPECTION REPORT 2026



Introduction from the Head

Since becoming Head of South Hampstead in 2023, we have had so many things to celebrate. Our pupils continue to shine in every aspect of school life, with record-breaking academic results and impressive achievements across our wide-ranging co-curricular activities. This year we were once again ranked as one of the top 20 schools in the country by The Times, as well as being crowned the best school in the UK for music by The Week. But aside from the headline achievements, I am especially proud of the everyday moments that showcase the quintessential South Hampstead spirit: our girls' relentless curiosity, tenacity, and good humour; our staff's unparalleled commitment to excellence; and our pervasive whole school culture of joyful scholarship.

We hope that everyone who comes to South Hampstead – whether that's prospective families or visiting inspectors – has the opportunity to experience this inimitable sense of warmth and purpose too. Just before the half term break in February, a team of ISI inspectors spent two and a half days assessing the quality of our educational provision. This document aims to capture just a snapshot of their extremely positive findings which you can find outlined in the full report.

Following an inspection, schools are very occasionally awarded a 'significant strength' - so to be recognised for two suggests that the ISI inspectors managed to glean a very good understanding of what makes South Hampstead so special. We are the first girls' day school to be awarded two significant strengths and we are delighted that the outstanding nature of our teaching and our unique oracy programme have been recognised in this way. The inspectors were particularly struck by the consistently positive comments seen in the parental, staff and pupil surveys – it was wonderful to hear such affirming feedback.

My thanks to everyone for all they did to support the inspection process and for all that they bring to the South Hampstead community every single day. I am so proud of our school; as we approach our 150th anniversary year, we have so much more to look forward to.

With warm wishes,

Mrs Anna Paul



The full inspection report is available here: www.shhs.gdst.net/about-us/governance/isi-reports/

What is an ISI Inspection?

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is appointed by the Department for Education to routinely inspect association independent schools in England, typically once every three years. The inspection involves a detailed assessment of various aspects of a school's operation. A team of inspectors announce their visit at the start of the week before observing lessons, assemblies and activities; reviewing school documentation and pupil work; and conducting surveys and interviews with parents, staff, governors and pupils to obtain a holistic view of the school. In February 2026, just before the half term break, a team of eight inspectors visited South Hampstead Junior and Senior schools. Reports no longer use single word judgements such as 'excellent' or 'good' but instead makes a series of evidence-based statements to describe the school's provision. South Hampstead was judged to be fully compliant, meeting the required standards in all five categories:

- Leadership, management and governance
- The quality of education, training and recreation
- Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing
- Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society
- Safeguarding

What are Significant Strengths?

In addition to assessing the categories above, inspectors occasionally identify a 'significant strength' of a school - these are rare accolades that recognise provision that is judged to be outstanding in the sector. A 'significant strength' must fulfil the following criteria:

- show a deep understanding of and aspiration for pupils' development of knowledge, skills, and understanding
- be attributable to the knowledge, skills and decision making of leaders, managers and/or staff
- have very clear and highly beneficial impact for pupils involved.

Our latest report identifies **two significant strengths** at South Hampstead. Whilst being awarded one significant strength is rare, receiving two is an exceptional achievement.

The first girls' day school to be awarded two significant strengths.

1 QUALITY OF TEACHING



"The quality of teaching is a significant strength, and results in pupils developing their subject knowledge to a high standard and making good progress across the curriculum. Teachers are highly knowledgeable in their subject areas. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities are included in the high-level discussions that are typical in lessons. Pupils are stimulated intellectually. As a result of the quality of teaching and assessment, pupils make good progress from their already high starting points. Pupils develop high levels of skill in the school's 'four pillars' of debating, drama, music and sport. Teachers have an extensive knowledge of and passion for their subjects [and] encourage pupils to reason, discuss, argue and expand in their responses. As a result, pupils develop high levels of analytical criticism and articulation."



2 ORACY PROVISION

"The oracy curriculum ensures that pupils 'find their voice' in line with the school aims. This has a considerable impact on pupils' learning and personal development and is a significant strength of the school. Teachers require pupils to discuss, argue and explain with clarity and reason... pupils are highly skilled in these areas. The Junior School curriculum prioritises the development of pupils' speaking and listening skills... Pupils in Year 7 are taught critical analysis, which further develops their oracy skills. Pupils learn how to develop responses to questions or effectively and tactfully challenge others' ideas... Pupils' speaking and listening skills are highly sophisticated as a result of the oracy initiative."



Report Highlights

“Leaders provide a programme that enables pupils to develop a love of learning and fulfil their academic potential.”

“The school’s ethos and curriculum help to develop pupils’ social and cultural maturity. Pupils recognise the value of service to other pupils and commit to volunteering.”

“Pupils’ wellbeing is consistently promoted. Leaders routinely seek pupils’ views through surveys and focus groups. All pupils have regular individual meetings to discuss their wellbeing with tutors.”

“Pupils in the Junior School are taught to listen to each other’s ideas and respond appropriately. As they move through the school, pupils develop high levels of respect for those who have particular needs, or different racial or religious backgrounds.”

“On Free Thinking Fridays, pupils in the Sixth Form attend lectures on a variety of scholarly topics. They develop their mental and physical wellbeing and share their perspectives on current societal issues in discussion groups.”

“The personal, social, health and economic education programme and visiting speaker series ensure that pupils receive up to date guidance on maintaining their physical and mental health.”

“A breadth of opportunities for pupils of all ages to take part in PE... padel tennis and indoor fitness programmes encourage more pupils to exercise regularly. Some individuals or teams achieve national success.”

“Pupils receive a thorough financial education. Pupils value the advice they receive about subject choice, careers and university admission at GCSE and in the Sixth Form.”



“Planning is clearly directed towards improving the educational experience for pupils in all areas.”

“The curriculum in the Junior School is enhanced by lessons in debating and philosophy... to enhance pupils’ articulation and fluency. Pupils speak confidently in front of each other and adult audiences.”

“Leaders with academic and pastoral responsibility liaise regularly and hence ensure that the support of individual pupils is coherent and focused on their long-term academic and personal development.”

“Pupils develop resilience and curiosity in a structured programme on Hampstead Heath... this results in pupils throughout the Junior School making good progress in their personal, physical, social and emotional development.”

“Pupils develop their academic passions in clubs such as French literature society and space society... the co-curricular provision contributes to the pupils’ self-confidence and resilience.”

“Pupils have a highly developed social understanding.”

“Pupils undertake leadership roles in almost all areas of school life [and] develop a greater understanding of how they might contribute to wider society.”

“Leaders have established a coherent programme that gives pupils opportunities to explore their future careers choices.”

“Pupils enjoy school.”





South Hampstead Junior School

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South Hampstead High School is part of the Girls' Day School Trust, a limited company registered in England, number 6400, and a registered charity, number 306983. www.gdst.net