

School inspection report

28 November 2023 to 30 November 2023

St Mary's School

Packhorse Road

Gerrards Cross

Buckinghamshire

SL9 8JQ

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The governing body and senior leaders are committed to promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors receive regular reports from senior leaders about their work. Nominated governors visit the school to provide oversight of policy implementation related to safeguarding, safer recruitment and health and safety. However, this oversight does not extend to every aspect, in particular their oversight of the work of leaders with regard to the implementation of the relationships and sex education (RSE) policy and the arrangements for online monitoring and filtering.
2. Senior leaders meet their responsibilities, and the school meets the Standards. In conjunction with the governors, they have a strategic vision for how the school's aims and ethos will be achieved. They also ensure that parents are well informed about their child's education.
3. Teachers plan lessons which meet the interests and needs of pupils. Warm and purposeful relationships between teachers and pupils encourage the pupils to engage with their learning and achieve well. Pupils, including children in the early years, make good progress in relation to their starting points.
4. Support for individual pupils, particularly for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), is effective because teachers understand how to tailor activities in lessons to meet individual needs. The school also provides additional support so that pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) make good progress with their English language skills.
5. Children in the early years make good progress because leaders provide a wide and varied curriculum, which is tailored to children's individual needs and interests. Leaders ensure staff are well trained and provide children with a warm and supportive environment.
6. Pupils at every level have access to an extensive range of sporting, cultural and recreational activities. Teachers actively encourage pupils of every ability level to participate so that levels of engagement are high.
7. Pastoral leaders and teachers support pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing effectively. They are highly responsive to pupils' needs and quick to suggest appropriate sources of support and guidance. Leaders create a tolerant, respectful and accepting community in lessons, assemblies, class time and through visits to places of worship. Pupils respond well to the positive values they encounter and they behave well in lessons and around the school.
8. From the earliest years, leaders encourage pupils to take on positions of responsibility. Pupils appreciate the value of learning about and giving to others. Pupils receive helpful guidance about the next stage in their education or career. Leaders also enable pupils to learn about their rights and explore how to be a responsible citizen, particularly within personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons. However, leaders do not monitor the effectiveness of these lessons sufficiently well.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that governors are fully involved in the oversight of policy implementation, in particular of relationships and sex education and the development of online monitoring and filtering
- monitor the delivery of personal and social education, including relationships and sex education, to ensure that they are delivered more consistently at every level.

Material change request

9. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to increase its capacity to 428 pupils.
10. On inspection, the school was already operating at 428 pupils. The school has an appropriate number of staff at every level trained to act as designated safeguarding leads for this number of pupils.
11. Procedures to maintain health and safety and fire safety are effective and there is appropriate supervision at all times around the school. Risk is managed appropriately through the implementation of detailed risk assessments.
12. There are sufficient suitable toilet and changing facilities for the current number of pupils and there are adequate facilities for first aid and medical care. The school buildings and classroom facilities are sufficient for the number of pupils and are well maintained. There is also sufficient suitable and safe outdoor space.
13. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Governors know the school well and support the promotion of pupils' wellbeing in many ways. This has included the development of new facilities for sport, science and early years and greater provision of support for pupils who have SEND.
15. Through half-termly reports and meetings, governors have oversight of the decisions leaders make. The safeguarding governor meets regularly with the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) to monitor arrangements for child protection and safer recruitment and inform the annual safeguarding review. A health and safety governor visits termly to monitor risk management and the implementation of appropriate policies. However, monitoring and oversight of policy implementation in some other areas, such as the teaching of relationships and sex education or the development of online filtering, is not as well informed.
16. Senior leaders have the relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They form appropriate links with other agencies, such as children's services, to ensure that pupils' needs are recognised and supported effectively. They have a clear vision for the school based upon the school's aims and ethos and this is reflected in the school's strategic plan. Their vision permeates the whole school, and staff at every level can link their own work back to the fulfilment of the school's core aims of delivering an excellent, wide-ranging and well-balanced education.
17. Middle leaders are empowered to take decisions in their areas of responsibility to encourage the development of their pupils. Pupils are also strongly aware of the importance of their own personal development and wellbeing through the recent whole school 'TAKE CARE' initiative.
18. Governors ensure that leaders and managers identify and manage the risks of harm and take appropriate action to reduce them. Leaders mitigate risks to pupils' wellbeing, including premises, trips and activities and the welfare of pupils. Pastoral staff are aware of the needs of individuals, including those whose needs may initially be less apparent, and take suitable steps to reduce risks to their wellbeing.
19. Leaders in the early years ensure that children receive a varied and engaging curriculum, which promotes good progress. Specialist staff, including some trained in outdoor education, further enrich the children's learning experience in areas such as learning foreign languages. Leaders in the early years ensure that staff have regular supervision meetings and attend appropriate training so that they cater for children's needs effectively. Leaders provide detailed information to parents, and staff quickly address any concerns which arise.
20. Parents receive appropriate information about their child's education and welfare. The school sends information about pupils' progress and achievements to parents at regular intervals. Parents' evenings are held at least annually. Leaders and staff are available to parents to listen to concerns. They handle complaints promptly, and keep appropriate records, including any actions taken.
21. Leaders understand their responsibilities to make reasonable adjustments for those pupils who have SEND so that they have equal access to the education and facilities provided by the school. In recent building projects, leaders have prioritised greater accessibility, for instance in the new classrooms for early years children.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance

22. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Senior leaders ensure that pupils at all levels have access to a broad and varied education. The curriculum takes into account pupils' ages and aptitudes. In the senior years, it allows pupils scope to pursue their own academic and practical interests across a wide range of subjects, supporting their good progress.
24. Teachers use the information they have about pupils who have SEND to provide additional support, for instance with verbal or written guidance, assistance with structuring written tasks or alternative approaches to practical work. Staff provide extension activities for those with particular talents or for those who are more able through an additional mathematics qualification in Year 11. Support with building higher level vocabulary and developing extended writing enables pupils who have EAL to make progress in line with their peers.
25. In the early years, children experience a varied programme of activities related to their individual needs and the areas of learning and development. Specialist teachers in modern foreign languages and music enable pupils to explore new ways to express themselves. Outdoor learning also allows children to experience new ways of challenge. Children develop their linguistic, speaking and listening skills so that they are confident in discussion and when voicing opinions. As a consequence, they make good progress across the curriculum.
26. Leaders have created a clear framework within which to evaluate pupils' work. In the prep school, teachers use this framework to identify the relative strengths and weaknesses of each pupil. From this, they devise appropriate teaching strategies and set individual targets for pupils. As a result, almost all pupils across Years 1 to 6 make rapid progress in literacy and numeracy. In the senior school, teachers regularly track pupils' performance against nationally standardised data and target grades. This enables teachers and pastoral leaders to identify where additional academic or personal support or challenge may be required. Consequently, most pupils meet or exceed their predicted grades at GCSE and A level. Pupils who have SEND make similar progress in line with their peers because of careful monitoring and support tailored to their needs.
27. Teachers are confident in their subject knowledge and plan lessons effectively using a variety of approaches. There is a warm and respectful relationship between teachers and pupils. This encourages pupils to take an interest in the subject matter, engage with activities and give of their best. Verbal and written feedback from teachers helps pupils to improve their work.
28. Leaders offer a diverse programme of co-curricular activities to develop pupils' independence, health and life skills and enable them to pursue their own creative and other interests. This is supported by residential and day trips. The school day is designed to allow pupils time to undertake a variety of different activities. Pupils in the senior school lead clubs in the prep school, developing their leadership skills and creating a sense of community. Leaders in the prep school have created a programme of Collaboration, Organisation, Resilience and Initiative (CORI), which allows pupils to pursue activities of such as enterprise, engineering, coding, movie making or food and nutrition. Older pupils also engage in a wide range of clubs and societies.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

30. Leaders encourage every pupil to be involved in a range of physical activities so that they enjoy a healthy lifestyle. Pupils enthusiastically take part in a wide variety of sports. The decision to introduce a club for any pupil simply to 'have a go' at a particular sport has further increased participation. Pupils of all ability levels also gain greater self-confidence and develop their talents through involvement in the expressive arts.
31. Leaders promote the value of faith, in line with the school's aims and ethos, welcoming pupils of all faiths and none into its community. Pupils consider the spiritual dimensions to life as they learn about different religious traditions. Leaders pose challenging philosophical questions in lessons and assemblies. Pupils undertake visits to a range of different places of worship and gain insight from presentations by their fellow pupils about aspects of their own faith. As a result, pupils are respectful towards those with different beliefs and supportive of their friends who practise aspects of their faith, such as fasting during the month of Ramadan.
32. Leaders have developed a programme of PSHE to provide pupils with the knowledge and skills for their adult life. This includes relationships and sex education at age-appropriate levels. However, leaders in the senior school do not have processes in place to ensure all pupils make consistent progress.
33. Leaders successfully develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Staff implement the school's behaviour policy, which is based on a restorative approach, fairly and consistently. As a result, pupils behave well in lessons and around the school. They respond well to an approach which focuses on encouragement and reward and recognises the needs of the individual.
34. Pastoral leaders ensure that pupils know who they can talk to if they have any worries or concerns. Older pupils particularly value the school's recent investment in extending counselling provision and the development of a wellbeing pod. Leaders' decision to establish two hubs in the prep and senior schools for the Learning Enhancement and Personalised Support [LEAPS] team means that pupils know where they can go for additional academic help or personal guidance.
35. Leaders in the early years are vigilant to any risks to children's wellbeing and take appropriate steps to minimise these. Staff guide children's behaviour effectively, encouraging them to consider others and manage their emotions.
36. A clear anti-bullying strategy means that pastoral leaders and teachers are alert to those pupils whose needs or characteristics might make them vulnerable. They respond promptly and put appropriate pastoral care plans in place to help both victims and perpetrators to overcome the impact of bullying. The strategy is supported by appropriate training for staff. Anti-bullying workshops, talks and assemblies raise pupils' awareness of strategies to address any bullying they encounter.
37. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance by keeping suitable admission and attendance registers and promptly following up unexplained absences. Where a pupil joins or leaves the school outside the normal transition points, leaders inform the local authority.

38. The school's premises are well maintained. Health and safety procedures ensure that risks from accidents and other hazards are minimised, and appropriate precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. The fire policy details clear arrangements for the safe evacuation of the school. Regular fire drills take place and staff receive suitable fire safety training.
39. Leaders make sure that pupils of all ages are well supervised. As a result, pupils feel safe around the school. Pupils receive appropriate treatment if they feel unwell or need first aid. Staff undertake regular training in first aid and a sufficient number of staff are trained in paediatric first aid. Staff in early years promptly inform parents of any accidents which occur and ensure that when children need to take prescribed medication, they receive appropriate help from a qualified member of staff.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

40. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 4: Pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

41. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils of all ages to learn about society and the wider world through aspects of humanities, social science and PSHE lessons. Assembly talks, class discussions and participation in charitable work supplement these. Pupils respond enthusiastically to opportunities to help the school community by taking on leadership roles such as sports captains, society leaders and membership of the school council. Year 6 pupils act as peer mentors to younger pupils. Leaders ensure that age-appropriate roles are available from an early age so that pupils are ready to take on increasing responsibilities as they move through the school.
42. Leaders effectively promote tolerance and respect towards others in lessons and through assemblies and visiting speakers. They encourage pupils to participate in discussion about the sort of society in which they would like to live. Consequently, pupils learn about people who have diverse life experiences, including those with disabilities, from different ethnic or religious backgrounds or those living in different types of relationships. They understand that difference does not necessarily limit someone's ability to contribute meaningfully to society. Leaders also encourage the development of pupils' social and cultural understanding through events such as cultural diversity days.
43. Pupils of all ages understand right from wrong and the importance of moral choices. Pupils learn to show high levels of respect, empathy and responsibility towards others in line with the school's aims and ethos. Pupils acquire a broad knowledge of public institutions and enjoy exploring aspects of civil and criminal law in class discussions and prep school assembly debates. Teachers offer a balanced presentation of opposing views so that pupils can form their own conclusions and beliefs.
44. The school supports pupils as they make informed decisions about their next steps. Teachers encourage younger pupils to think about their relative strengths and talents and to start to learn about the commercial world through participating in enterprise events as part of the CORI programme. Pupils become more financially aware as they move up through the school and understand the importance of money management and budgeting through PSHE lessons and organisation of fundraising activities.
45. Senior pupils receive guidance about subject choices and have regular access to careers information. Leaders' decision to appoint a higher education co-ordinator in the sixth form provides pupils with the opportunity to explore a wide variety of different next steps including employment, apprenticeship schemes and further education courses as well as the degree courses in Britain and overseas, which the majority of pupils go on to pursue.
46. Pupils enthusiastically offer support to help the lives of others, both in the local and global communities. Leaders ensure that pupils always learn about the cause they are supporting through their charity work, whether it is filling a Christmas box to be delivered to an elderly resident in a local care home or raising money for those affected by natural disasters.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society

47. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

48. Governors ensure that leaders have effective arrangements in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils, including those in the early years. There are an appropriate number of leaders trained as designated safeguarding leads, including a specialist DSL for pupils in early years. Pastoral staff are alert to the needs and vulnerabilities of individual pupils and guide them towards the different sources of support they may require. The school acts upon any reported safeguarding concerns promptly and works effectively with local partners, including children's services and the police.
49. Governors review the school's safeguarding policy and procedures at least annually. The safeguarding policy reflects current statutory guidance. A nominated safeguarding governor meets at least termly with the DSLs to monitor how effectively the school's policies and procedures are implemented. This oversight does not extend to online filtering and monitoring arrangements. However, leaders ensure school has appropriate systems in place.
50. There are effective measures in place to protect pupils from harm. All staff, volunteers and governors receive appropriate safeguarding training upon joining the school, and this is updated periodically. Staff know what to do if they have concerns about a pupil, including for risks related to online safety, child-on-child abuse, and radicalisation. Leaders select visiting speakers with care so that pupils learn about any sensitive issues appropriately and can form their own opinions. Staff know how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern to the DSL or directly to local children's services. Staff understand the school's whistleblowing procedures and talk to leaders if they have concerns about safeguarding. Pupils from the youngest years learn how to stay safe online.
51. The school ensures that it completes safer recruitment checks for all staff, volunteers and governors and records them accurately on the single central register of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

52. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	St Mary's School
Department for Education number	825/6006
Registered charity number	310634
Address	St Mary's School Packhorse Road Gerrards Cross Buckinghamshire SL9 8JQ
Phone number	01753 883370
Email address	office@st-marys.bucks.sch.uk
Website	stmarysschool.co.uk
Chair	Mr Derek Wilson
Headteacher	Mrs Patricia Adams
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	428
Date of previous inspection	24 to 26 September 2019

Information about the school

53. St Mary's School is a day school for female pupils located in Gerrards Cross, Buckinghamshire. The school consists of a prep school and a senior school which includes a sixth form. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of trustees who act as governors.
54. There are 23 children in the early years, comprising one nursery and one Reception class, both of which are accommodated in a separate building.
55. The school has identified 90 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
56. English is an additional language for 22 pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to provide excellence within a caring, happy environment underpinned by a value system based on tolerance and high moral standards in a Christian context. It seeks to provide a wide-ranging, stimulating and well-balanced education and offer challenge to its pupils within a supportive environment. The school aspires to develop independence, personal confidence, self-discipline and responsibility so that pupils achieve their potential and are ready to take their place in the world as responsible citizens.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 November 2023

58. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

60. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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