

School inspection report

Date 13 to 15 February 2024

Northampton High School

Newport Pagnell Road

Hardingstone

Northampton

NN4 6UU

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 school is led and managed effectively. Leaders across both the junior and senior schools work together as a coherent team to ensure that pupils from early years onwards are actively engaged and well supported in their learning as they progress through the school. The curriculum is sufficiently broad and balanced so that it challenges pupils and meets their individual learning needs.
2. Pupils make good progress and achieve well in examinations and internal assessments. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress because their individual needs are identified and suitably targeted. Likewise, the small number of pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), receive appropriate specialist support to improve their English fluency.
3. Governors in the form of advisory board members and trustees of the trust form a strong partnership with school leaders. Together, they quality assure the effectiveness and impact of the school's work. There is close oversight and checking on the quality of teaching and learning across all age groups.
4. Senior leaders and trust members prioritise keeping pupils safe. They have a key focus on all matters related to the safeguarding of pupils, including staff recruitment procedures for which the necessary processes and procedures are in place. Risks to pupils' wellbeing are identified and appropriately mitigated.
5. Leaders carefully monitor the mental health and emotional wellbeing of the pupils so that pupils can maximise their educational experience. This is supported through the school's life skills programme, known as the 'Coach programme', which provides individualised pastoral care and personal development opportunities. Pupils engage positively with the programme, because they feel that it helps them to get the best out of their school experience.
6. Pupils learn about other faiths and cultures and celebrate the multi-ethnic diversity of the school's community. Pupils of all age groups, including early years, are actively engaged in supporting their local community in numerous ways. During whole school focus days, pupils learn to celebrate and value cultural diversity, equal opportunity and engage in a variety of religious events.
7. There is a well-planned curriculum with a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities which allows pupils to develop their skills and interests. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and fully understand the importance of respect and tolerance. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is effectively established and meets the 'undivided' diversity aims of the school in creating a fully inclusive environment.
8. Pupils are well prepared for future life in British society and are inspired to contribute positively as global citizens. This is achieved through the schools comprehensive personal, social, health and economics (PSHE) programme. Older pupils are well supported in making choices about their future careers and next steps in education. However, the delivery of careers education in years 7 to 10 is more limited in terms of the scope and range in introducing pupils to possible opportunities for post-secondary education.

9. Pupils value the numerous opportunities to contribute their ideas and views. They say they are listened to. Pupils can point to changes that are put in place in response to suggestions they have made. This is in part because of the positive relationships which the pupils develop with their teachers.

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:

- Continue to broaden the scope and range of careers guidance for pupils in Years 7 to 10

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors and trustees have set a clear vision for the school. There is effective quality assurance in place which helps to inform the target areas in school improvement planning. These targets appropriately reflect both academic and pastoral objectives as well as being compatible with the aims and ethos of the school.
11. Governors, both at local and trust level know the school well. There is an experienced team of trust board members with the requisite skills and experience to support the advisory governors in managing the school. Regular and focused audits of the operation of the school are conducted and this also helps ensure that leaders fulfil their roles effectively.
12. Leaders communicate and implement policies and procedures effectively and consistently, so that staff and pupils understand what is expected of them. Senior leaders take care to implement appropriate plans, schemes of work and programmes of activities to meet the needs of pupils across the curriculum, including for those who have SEND.
13. An appropriate range of information is published for parents on the school's website. Parents receive regular detailed information and feedback about their child's academic progress. Parents are informed of any targeted support provided for individual pupils. Any complaints received are taken seriously, are addressed promptly and managed in line with the school's complaints policy.
14. Appropriate safeguarding processes and procedures are in place. There are well established links with local support agencies, including social services, the local authority and the police, to access advice and support and to make referrals as required.
15. Leaders and managers have a comprehensive approach to managing health and safety. Those responsible for identifying risks and hazards have a clear understanding of their role. Their analysis of risks is used effectively to reduce the impact on pupils' academic and pastoral welfare. Suitable mitigations of risk are put in place as required; for example, in the production of robust risk assessments set up for pupils taking part in high-risk activities such as adventurous training or on ski trips.
16. Leaders closely check the quality of teaching and learning. They regularly visit classrooms. There is a culture of sharing of good practice so that staff can continue to improve and develop. Leaders use effective systems to keep parents well informed of their child's progress, whilst also identifying any pupils who might benefit from the additional support of a mentor.
17. The school meets the relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010. An accessibility plan highlights where adjustments are made to support pupils' individual needs, such as the availability of disabled washroom facilities for pupils.
18. Leaders prioritise supporting the wellbeing of pupils. This is reflected in the provision of wellbeing hubs which allow pupils easy and discrete access to pastoral support systems. This service is highly appreciated by pupils and is viewed as being valuable in supporting their enjoyment of school life.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. There is a broad well-structured curriculum, which includes the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) for sixth-form pupils. The academic curriculum is supported by a wide-ranging programme of activities appropriate to pupils' ages, aptitudes and needs, including sports, dance, music and drama. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have targeted learning enhancement profiles that are used well. Most pupils who have SEND meet their set targets and, in many cases, exceed them.
20. Teachers systematically check that all pupils make good progress in their learning. Almost all pupils attain grades at GCSE and A Level in line with and or above those predicted. Children in the early years and the junior school make good progress from their starting points, particularly in English, mathematics and science. Teachers make effective use of assessment information to plan learning to meet pupils' needs. They provide useful feedback to pupils so that they have a clear idea of what they need to do to improve further.
21. In the early years there is an effective programme of age-related activities which develop children's spoken language, physical and communication skills. For example, pupils use of play base stations to develop number skills and working together using syringes of water to fill holes in trays. Such activities increase both their social and fine motor skills. Well-judged interactions with their teachers support children to become increasingly confident in using a wide range of vocabulary and language structure. This is supported by quality resources which support children's learning.
22. Teachers plan and explain learning well and in different ways, which helps pupils to learn in a supportive environment. Pupils enjoy applying their knowledge and skills across a range of subjects, such as using their mathematical understanding when plotting graphs to demonstrate the effects of evaporation and condensation in science. Leaders develop pupils' literacy and numeracy skills from an early age. Pupils are keen to answer questions and explain their learning. In the senior school the consistent support and challenge, particularly around the teaching of English and mathematics, benefits pupils.
23. Teachers use their skilled knowledge of their subject areas to effectively plan and teach lessons, which are well matched to the needs of the pupils. They provide suitable support for pupils who have SEND and additional challenge to extend pupils' learning further. Pupils' work in art, chemistry and psychology demonstrates the interest and motivation of pupils to succeed.
24. Leaders provide teachers with training and a comprehensive range of resources to support them in their teaching. Leaders have a focus on promoting digital technology to inspire pupils to use technology effectively, confidently and successfully. Electronic devices are seen by most pupils as being an essential tool to enhance their progress. Pupils apply themselves readily to acquiring new skills and are willing to take risks in their learning. Pupils develop their self-confidence and self-esteem. Adults have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and classroom management is effective. Pupils behave well and try their best with their learning.
25. Pupils participate enthusiastically in a range of practically based subjects such as art, textiles, music and science. Displays of pupils work around both junior and senior schools reflect pupils' many talents. Pupils' talents are well illustrated through pupil led groups, for example, in rehearsing for

school productions, in which pupils demonstrate their enthusiasm for and engagement in drama and the performing arts.

26. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, covering academic enrichment, sporting and recreational pursuits. Currently, pupils can choose from activities such as enterprise clubs, football, cricket, dance and drama, a 'medvet' society and a yoga club. Activities are age appropriate and enhance the pupils' aesthetic, social and creative skills, while also offering individual developmental opportunities. Pupils relish these clubs and activities. There is a high level of pupil participation in team sports some of which involve pupils representing the school at local, regional, national and international level.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Pupils engage in activities which promote equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupil champions take on leadership roles to promote the 'undivided charter', which focuses on the girls united together school approach. Pupils lead a flourishing 'FemSoc' society which focuses on the role of females in society. Likewise, pupils are familiar with the differences between people and can discuss their understanding in a range of lessons such as Latin and English. Pupils feel the school is inclusive and that it is fine to be different.
28. Leaders have designed a coherent approach to pupils' academic and personal development. This is exemplified through the school's well-respected Learn-Reach-Coach model. Pupils know and can explain the key components of this model; collaboration, curiosity, perseverance, independence and risk taking, and how these intellectual characteristics help to keep them focused throughout their school career. Pupils develop their self-confidence and esteem, including in competitive events, group participation and by presenting to fellow pupils in assemblies.
29. A suitable PSHE programme runs throughout all age groups and is supplemented with effective provision for relationships and sex education (RSE). The curriculum is well planned, is age appropriate and adapted to meet pupils' needs. Pupils gain a clear understanding of the importance of making appropriate choices in life and in developing healthy and positive relationships. The wider PSHE programme is taught through assemblies, tutorials, drama and in English lessons.
30. Pupils engage in a philosophy and ethics curriculum which introduces them to different spiritual beliefs and values. This supports the school's ethos of empowering individuality by considering aspects of faith and beliefs which are periodically celebrated through whole school focus days.
31. Pupils are supervised appropriately. Pupils behave well both in lessons and informally outside the classroom. Pupils say they feel safe in school and can concentrate on their work without disruption. Children in the early years are kind to each other in their classrooms and in their free play activities. They particularly enjoy the fun and interactions they have in the outdoor woodland area.
32. Pupils enjoy a wide range of physical activities and sport. Teachers ensure that pupils learn the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle, with many pupils contributing to school sports teams. Leaders make additional professional support available to pupils in the form of medical first aiders, counsellors and psychotherapists. Additionally, there is a friendly school dog who is on duty in the pastoral hub, whose role is to provide pupils with comforting support.
33. The anti-bullying policy is implemented effectively, and teachers act promptly to take appropriate action on the rare occasion that bullying occurs. Pupils feel that sanctions are fair and reasonable. They are confident that adults handle bullying and behavioural issues well. The school is a calm, happy and purposeful place in which to learn.
34. The maintenance of the building and upkeep of the premises are of a high standard. Leaders meet on a regular basis to review health and safety matters. Any incidents are dealt with and staff are well trained in dealing with health and safety matters. Trustees also conduct and commission extensive audits, including fire safety which includes the checking of evacuation procedures and the regularity of fire drills. Pupils are regularly briefed on safety rules especially in subjects such as science and

physical education. Children in the early years learn about using equipment such as saws, safely and well.

35. Attendance registers are appropriately recorded, and parents are contacted in the event of any absence, in line with the attendance policy. The local authority is appropriately notified of any school joiners and leavers.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

36. Pupils benefit from a wide range of activities that extend their learning and provide skills for their future lives. Pupils support those who are less fortunate than themselves through charitable events and through fundraising for local and national charities, which are selected by pupils. Some examples include support for guide dogs, cancer charities and visits to care homes. Pupils gain a real insight into life in British society by participating in such charity events and at the same time enhance their personal and leadership skills by giving back to the school and the community.
37. Pupils learn about using money as part of the economic education programme within PSHE. For example, in Year 7, pupils participate in the 'invest a tenner' challenge, in which pupils have to wisely invest a sum of money to generate a profit. Sixth-form pupils learn about banking and managing university loans, tuition fees and budgeting. These are all skills which the pupils feel will be invaluable in organising their finances later in life. Additionally, school assemblies, many led by senior pupils, create a sense of topic ownership by pupils as they lead on issues such as Black History month, cultural fashion, international food and music event celebrations. Such presentations are much appreciated, most especially by the younger pupils, who listen intently and absorb the enriching experience.
38. Careers education is a current area of leaders' focus. The provision is effective for older pupils making university applications and applying for higher education. However, guidance currently on offer to Year 7 to Year 10 pupils is more limited and lacks coherence. Senior leaders are aware of this weakness and careers provision is an action point in the school's development plan. Year 11 pupils have parental careers presentation evenings and pupils are given advice and guidance on seeking appropriate work experience opportunities. Much positive work is done to promote career opportunities for the relatively high number of pupils who express an interest in National Health Service-related careers.
39. The school has successfully created an environment in which pupils develop both socially and culturally. Pupils are encouraged to show mutual respect. Pupils' enthusiastic participation in mock elections and debates increases their knowledge of living in a democratic society. Pupils willingly take up responsibilities on school councils, as heads of house, as peer mentors and undergo selection for positions of head girl and deputies. Pupils relish opportunities to take on positions of responsibility which offer leadership opportunities.
40. Participation in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) is popular with pupils. They also enjoy being active participants in the local community through the school's 'Coach' programme, which is the equivalent of the DofE scheme for younger pupils. This is a school-based programme for Year 7 to 9 pupils, in which pupils volunteer to assist in the junior school and help in guide groups, brownie packs and rainbows. Pupils of all ages, including children in the early years, can get involved in community service projects. These activities improve pupils' feelings of self-worth and promote their social development.
41. Pupils contribute their ideas and opinions to school leaders through the junior and senior school councils. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. Both teachers and senior pupils emphasise the importance of good manners and consideration for others. This is reflected in the positive and welcoming atmosphere which pervades both the junior and senior sections of the school.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

42. The school has a robust and comprehensive safeguarding policy that is effectively implemented. Pupils are well supervised around the school site.
43. The local advisory board and members of trust maintain a comprehensive overview of safeguarding arrangements. Regular and detailed governing board meetings, provide consistent support and appropriate challenge to promote the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures and their implementation. The pastoral team are well trained and have the best interests of the pupils at heart. Pupils say they concur with this view.
44. Pupils have a well-developed sense of keeping themselves safe, including when using online technologies. They are well supported in learning strategies for managing risks through their PSHE and RSE lessons. Pupils are confident that leaders and staff keep them safe and this is reflected in the high levels of trust and positive relationships with their teachers.
45. Senior managers and governors undertake regular and appropriate training in safer recruitment procedures. There are detailed recruitment checks completed for all staff, including volunteers, trustees and governors. A suitable record of appointments is accurately maintained.
46. Governing board members, together with trustees regularly check the school's operations. This includes careful monitoring of safeguarding incidents which is supported by regular and comprehensive audits.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Northampton High School GDST
Department for Education number	941/6057
Registered charity number	309929
Address	Northampton High School Newport Pagnell Road Hardingstone Northampton Northamptonshire NN4 6UU
Phone number	01604 765765
Email address	nhsadmin@nhs.gdst.net
Website	https://www.northamptonhigh.co.uk/
Proprietor	Girls' Day School Trust
Chair of Advisory Board	Mr Nick Allen
Headteacher	Dr May Lee
Age range	2–18
Number of pupils	490
Date of previous inspection	5–7 November 2019

Information about the school

47. Northampton High School is an independent day school for pupils aged two to eighteen years. It is registered as a single sex school for female pupils. The school is owned by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) which is both a registered company and a charity. The Trust Council provides oversight, holds legal responsibility, and appoints a local board to advise the school. The school moved to purpose-built premises on one site in Hardingstone in 1992 and joined GDST in 2007.
48. The junior school includes an early years setting, which accommodates children from age two.
49. The school has identified 91 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils have an education, health and care plan.
50. English is an additional language for a very small proportion of pupils, who speak another home language.
51. The school states its aims are to tailor everything to the needs of the individual pupil and to prepare self-confident pupils for a happy, balanced and fulfilling life. These aims echo the school's mission statement which is to encourage girls to believe in themselves and to define success in their own terms gaining in self-esteem, self-knowledge and confidence as they progress through the school.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

13 to 15 February 2024

52. A team of 5 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

53. 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 of governors and 'GDST' trust members
- 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.

54. 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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