

School inspection report

19 to 21 March 2024

St. Francis' College

Broadway

Letchworth Garden City

Hertfordshire

SG6 3PJ

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 leadership team work effectively with support and challenge from the new proprietors to promote the education and wellbeing of pupils. Governors have leadership roles in other schools in the proprietor group and this helps with the quality assurance of provision. Governors are effective in ensuring leaders have the suitable skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities. However, not all policies were up to date and this was corrected during the inspection.
2. Self-evaluation is thorough and the risks associated with change are carefully considered by leaders to ensure the focus remains on the development of pupils' skills.
3. Pupils access a broad and balanced curriculum, including an extensive range of recreational activities from which pupils gain a wide range of skills. Leaders use the grounds and well-maintained facilities to enrich education, training and recreation. For example, the theatre is used to help develop pupils' creative and speaking skills.
4. Leaders ensure that teaching takes account of the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Effective use of resources and regular communication between teachers ensures that pupils' needs are met and pupils make good progress. Teachers make effective use of an assessment framework to assess pupil work and to measure progress.
5. In the prep school, including the early years, resources are effectively used in teaching, lessons are well planned, supporting pupils to acquire new skills and pupils make good progress. However, planning and delivery of some lessons in the senior school is inconsistent and in these cases, pupil progress is slow.
6. Leaders implement the anti-bullying policy effectively. Behaviour is monitored and tracked in order to identify patterns. Pupils behave very well and their interactions are characterised by mutual respect.
7. Well-trained teachers deliver personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. These lessons, support and develop pupils' self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-confidence. Pupils know how to stay safe, including online and live healthy lives.
8. Democratic processes are encouraged and supported through the election of pupil heads of school and form representatives.
9. Leaders provide several appropriate methods for pupils to speak to adults to discuss any concerns. However, leaders do not consistently consider alternative methods to hear pupils' voices that are harder to hear.
10. Leaders have a comprehensive careers policy. However, provision for careers education is not always aligned with the policy and pupils do not consistently feel supported in making informed choices about their futures.
11. Governors and leaders prioritise a culture of safeguarding. Training is regular and effective and school staff know and understand their responsibilities.

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 all policies and associated references are up to date
- ensure consistency in the planning and delivery of teaching in the senior school to enable pupils to make good progress in all lessons
- establish additional pathways for pupils to raise any concerns to adults in school so that all voices can be heard
- ensure that the careers programme is embedded in order to support all pupils to make informed choices about their futures.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Since the last inspection the Inspired Learning Group (ILG) have taken ownership of the school. Governors work closely with leaders in the school and provide appropriate support and challenge, which ensures that pupils' wellbeing is actively promoted.
13. Leaders safeguard and promote the wellbeing of pupils through a comprehensive approach to identifying and managing risks. The school makes good use of external specialist advice to identify areas for consideration, including those risks related to site security. The emotional and physical wellbeing of pupils is prioritised. Access to high-risk areas on the school site are monitored and protected. Dangerous substances, such as chemicals in science, are kept safely in accordance with relevant regulations. Leaders oversee a robust planning and risk assessment process in considering pupil safety whilst on school trips.
14. The aims and ethos of the school have been redefined recently by leaders and the process of embedding these in all areas of school life has begun. The values of determination, resilience, empowerment, appreciation and motivation in a secure environment (DREAMS) are known to staff, parents and pupils. Leaders provide daily reminders of the values, but they are not fully embedded and are not seen to work well in practice in all sections of the school. However, the positive impact of these values on pupils is emerging.
15. The proprietor body provide a suite of policies for the school to customise. This process has not been completed, and some legacy policies and incorrect references were updated during the course of the inspection. The school manages complaints effectively so that matters do not escalate. Published policies and everyday procedures are understood by staff and pupils.
16. Leaders report regularly to parents on pupil progress. The school provides information to parents and others as required. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and a well-considered and routinely reviewed accessibility plan is implemented.
17. Safer recruitment processes, and governor oversight of arrangements for recruitment are effective.
18. Leaders have effective oversight of all arrangements for boarding. Pupils are well looked after in the boarding house and accommodation is well appointed. Adult supervision is appropriate and pupils know how to find an adult during the night if needed. Leaders facilitate cultural and linguistic integration activities for those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) in boarding, which develops pupils' confidence and understanding.
19. Leaders make effective use of self-evaluation to identify next steps in the school's development. For example, targeted training in the prep school is effective in helping staff to apply new skills in their teaching across the curriculum to meet pupils' needs.
20. Plans for a new 'curriculum 2024' have been developed following self-evaluation and leaders are consulting with parents and staff. Leaders are also considering risks and unintended consequences associated with the implementation of a new curriculum.

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

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Pupils access a well-planned curriculum which offers a broad range of subjects and activities to all age groups, including the youngest children in the Nursery and Reception classes. This includes a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and recreation activities for pupils appropriate to their ages and needs. A large proportion of pupils take full advantage of these opportunities and engage enthusiastically, enabling pupils to develop a wide range of skills.
23. Teachers use a range of resources and teaching methods effectively so that pupils develop their skills and increase their understanding. For example, in the Nursery class, the use of natural materials and art reinforces children's understanding of the parts of a flower. Teachers use appropriate questioning which stimulates interest and pupils are engaged as they acquire new knowledge. Pupils' listening and speaking skills are well developed and teachers create an environment in which pupils speak freely without fear of getting answers wrong.
24. Teachers understand pupils' specific needs and use this knowledge to help pupils to fully access the curriculum. Leaders' regular monitoring, and effective use of external specialist support where needed, ensures that pupils with additional needs learn well.
25. Staff training helps teachers to understand how best to use different techniques to support pupils. For example, leaders use blogs and videos to explain how gestures, intonations and time and tenses are different in different cultures. This helps teachers to broaden their understanding of the needs of pupils who speak EAL.
26. However, in the senior school, leaders do not consistently ensure that effective teaching methods are employed. Teachers do not consistently provide activities which match pupils' ability and in these cases, this limits pupil progress.
27. Teachers adeptly employ a range of resources matched to pupils' ability and pupils rapidly acquire new skills. For example, in ICT lessons in the prep school, teachers' expertise and planning prompt pupils to delve deeper into the topic and extend their learning. Pupils enjoy 'learning the skills of learning' and are self-motivated.
28. There is a clear and robust framework for the assessment of pupils' work, progress and attainment which is consistently applied by teachers across the school. Leaders make use of standardised data from a variety of sources and use this to monitor and track pupil progress. Teachers employ a standard approach when assessing pupils' written work in and out of lessons. The framework within which written comments and feedback are given is valued by pupils and helps them to make further progress.
29. Leaders provide a suitable outdoor space for pupils to play and learn. Teachers deliver appropriate risk-assessed activities for pupils including for the youngest children. Pupils develop social, creative and physical skills as a result of the wide range of social and physical activities.
30. Leaders ensure that there are a wide range of recreational activities for boarders, in both evenings and at weekends. In addition, pupils are able to suggest activities they would like. Boarders welcome the opportunity to invite day pupils into boarding after school, as well as weekends.

31. Pupils achieve well and make good progress compared to their starting point at both CGSE and A level. Leaders make effective use of tracking data and measure pupil progress in all years, also considering the achievement of smaller groups. Leaders use this to identify where additional resources are needed.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. Pupils' wellbeing is a high priority for leaders and governors. Mental and emotional wellbeing is fostered through an emphasis on care and strong relationships between pupils and teachers.
34. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum are appropriate and meet the needs of pupils. Pupils discuss practical strategies for staying safe and understand the importance of a healthy lifestyle and diet. This is further supported through the well-considered physical education programme.
35. Leaders promote inclusive attitudes through assemblies and pupils learn to be collaborative and respectful. Spiritual and moral development is fostered by leaders through PSHE and assemblies. Older pupils make use of the school chapel as a space to be quiet and to reflect.
36. Pupils understand the importance of managing their own wellbeing and appreciate the support of form tutors and other pastoral staff, including the school dog. For example, in Year 8, pupils describe how they resist peer pressure and reflect on how risk taking can be positive if it means you are being brave and trying something new or different.
37. Pupils are courteous and respectful in their behaviours because leaders create an atmosphere of support and trust in school. Boarders have a separate rewards and sanction policy and through pupil council meetings and thorough induction processes, leaders promote positive behaviour.
38. Boarding accommodation is welcoming, clean and in good condition. Leaders provide a varied range of activities for boarders and pupils enjoy trips out of school. A range of staff, including a school nurse, are readily available to boarders throughout the day and overnight. Consistent staff oversight of boarding ensures that effective routines are embedded into boarding culture.
39. Staff are deployed effectively across all phases of the school so that pupils, including the youngest in the Nursery and Reception classes and boarders, are appropriately supervised
40. Leaders actively promote the personal growth and self-esteem of pupils. For example, the confidence and understanding of pupils who speak EAL is enhanced through cultural and linguistic integration activities. Pupils take a lead role in assemblies which promotes self-confidence. Older pupils are given a variety of leadership roles covering different aspects of school life.
41. The school buildings and grounds are well maintained and leaders ensure that relevant health and safety legislation, including fire safety is met. Risks are understood and appropriate risk assessments are in place so that the physical wellbeing of pupils is prioritised across the site.
42. Qualified nurses manage a medical centre which meets pupils' medical and first aid needs. Staff, including those in the early years are appropriately trained. The administration of first aid is supported by well-established and effective routines and medical help is administered in a timely and competent manner.
43. An effective anti-bullying strategy is in place and leaders carefully monitor trends in behaviour and keep detailed logs of any incidents. Pupils feel that leaders deal effectively with any cases of bullying that arise.

44. Leaders maintain an effective register of admissions and attendance and liaise as required with the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
45. Leaders provide appropriate outdoor space which includes opportunities for stimulating physical and social development in the early years.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

47. Pupils are taught to value positive relationships and cultural diversity and are encouraged to share their experiences. For example, in Year 11 photography, pupils explore diverse perceptions, conditions and disabilities. In the Nursery and Reception classes, leaders actively encourage children to show interest and respect for others. Throughout the school, pupils' differing backgrounds are celebrated through displays and reading. Leaders prioritise texts that reflect diversity and gender balance. As a result, pupils learn about and display mutual respect for all groups of people.
48. Pupils socialise between year groups and are welcoming when new pupils join. Day and boarding pupils develop strong friendships across year groups and backgrounds. Pupils behave well throughout the school and play safely, being mindful to include each other so that no one feels left out. Leaders implement a consistent approach to teach pupils about the law, public services and to distinguish right from wrong. Pupils are polite and respectful to their peers and to staff members.
49. A range of leadership roles exist in the boarding provision, such as boarding prefects. Staff meet regularly to listen to pupils' views, for example, the boarding food committee views have influenced recent changes to the choice of food available to pupils.
50. Pupil heads of school and form representatives are elected and serve the school community in a variety of ways. For example, in Year 8, pupils with positions of responsibility support the choreography in a music production and give feedback on performances. Leaders regularly seek pupils' views through surveys.
51. Careers advice is delivered through the personal development programme. Pupils receive guidance through an online careers platform, which highlights potential career choices. Careers convention days give pupils the opportunity to meet industry professionals. The school supports pupils appropriately with university applications. However, there is limited support for pupils who do not wish to go to university. Younger senior school pupils would value a greater emphasis on careers guidance.
52. Younger pupils are well supported to transfer between years. Their needs are carefully considered by leaders, and they are well prepared for the next stage. The youngest children access high quality outdoor space and take part in a range of activities that give them opportunities for appropriate physical and social development. For example, children in the early years happily take part in construction, digging, role play and multi-level play. Pupils are well prepared as they move from primary to secondary-age education. For example, pupils in Year 5 and Year 6 attend well-planned transition days which help them feel confident in the transition before they move into the next academic year.
53. Leaders provide a curriculum which gives pupils relevant experience of human, social and economic education. In sixth-form A-level economics, pupils consider the impact the exchange rate can have on the selling of financial services. In A-level politics lessons, pupils evaluate the efficacy and impact of the European Union. In the sixth form, leaders provide pupils with an understanding of living in the wider world through suitable enrichment sessions. This helps pupils to gain an understanding of the wider world, current affairs and the importance of sound money management.

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

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

55. The safeguarding team comprises the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), deputy DSLs and two members of the boarding team. Leaders are well trained and work effectively with external agencies. Thorough records are kept in line with requirements.
56. Training for staff in safeguarding and safer recruitment, is up to date and is in line with statutory guidance. All staff receive appropriate training when they join the school and this continues regularly, including through weekly staff meetings. Pupils' and boarders' welfare is well-supported by effective communication between adults and robust systems for recording, acting on and monitoring any safeguarding incidents.
57. The safeguarding governor provides effective support and maintains regular contact with the DSL. Through meetings with those in similar roles in the proprietorial group, the DSL regularly reviews safeguarding practice. Governors receive annual reports and regular updates and maintain an effective oversight of safeguarding.
58. Leaders analyse trends and patterns in behaviour and adapt practice to support the safety and wellbeing of pupils. Leaders have effective oversight of pupils' work on electronic devices and arrangements for filtering and monitoring are robust. Leaders provide a programme of internet safety workshops to support pupils to be safe online.
59. Those with responsibility for recruitment and management of the single central record are secure in their knowledge and skills of the relevant regulations. Governors oversee recruitment practices and records to ensure that those who work or volunteer at the school are thoroughly vetted and that appropriate records are kept.
60. Leaders are fully aware of the risks associated with safeguarding, including those related to boarding, and mitigate them effectively. Effective communication systems and a comprehensive approach to the management of risk from leaders ensure pupils' welfare is actively promoted.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 61. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	St Francis' College
Department for Education number	919/6029
Registered early years number	273243
Address	St Francis' College Broadway Letchworth Garden City Hertfordshire SG6 3PJ
Phone number	01462 670511
Email address	headspa@st-francis.herts.sch.uk
Website	www.st-francis.herts.sch.uk
Proprietor	Inspired Learning Group (UK) Limited
Chair	Mr Amit Mehta
Headteacher	Mr James Nichols
Age range	0 to 18
Number of pupils	318
Number of boarding pupils	43
Number of children in the early years registered setting	25
Date of previous inspection	22 to 23 January 2020

Information about the school

62. St Francis' College is an all through girls' day and boarding school. The Nursery and Reception classes are co-educational. The school opened a registered nursery setting for boys and girls in November 2023 on the same site, situated within the prep school building. The school is located in the heart of Letchworth Garden City.
63. The school was founded in 1933 by the Sisters of Charity of Jesus and Mary, a Congregation of Roman Catholic Sisters. In 1983 the running of the school was transferred to an educational charity, St Francis College Trust, run by a Board of Governors. The school became multi-denominational, but continues to be run on Christian principles, using the motto "One Heart, One Soul". In 2022, the school became part of the Inspired Learning Group (UK) Limited.
64. The boarding provision comprises one boarding house located on the same site as the school buildings. The boarding provision is for girls from the age of eight to 18.
65. The early years setting is accommodated in the prep school building on the same site as the senior and boarding sections of the school. There are 25 pupils in the early years, comprising one nursery and one Reception class.
66. The school has identified 128 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
67. English is an additional language for 102 pupils.
68. The school states its aims are to encourage and expect all to dream, dare and achieve. To achieve this, it aims to:
- provide a seamless, rigorous and stimulating educational experience, with a focus on close individual care, which equips our students to thrive in an ever-changing global environment
 - build intellectually creative minds and to instil core values of DREAMS: determination, resilience, empowerment, appreciation and motivation in a secure environment
 - be a community that values the unique qualities of each member and promotes mutual respect, personal and social responsibility and high self-esteem.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

19 to 21 March 2024

69. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

70. 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 areas and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

71. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net