

# School inspection report

24 to 26 September 2024

## **St. Helen's College**

Parkway  
Hillingdon  
Uxbridge  
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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. Experienced and knowledgeable leaders have instilled a culture that supports all pupils to, in the words of the school's motto, 'Excellentiam e concordia' strive for excellence from harmony. The cohesive staff team is encouraged to place pupils' wellbeing at the centre of their work. The team ensures that each pupil is seen as an individual with the potential to thrive.
2. Clear communication from competent leaders, combined with ongoing involvement from the former proprietors has ensured that, throughout the recent transition to a new proprietor, the clear aims of the school remain. Leaders and the new governors work together closely. They make sound decisions, manage risks effectively and meet regulatory requirements.
3. Leaders have high aspirations for pupils. The decision to prioritise oracy skills and to provide opportunities for pupils to use them, results in highly articulate, confident individuals. Pupils readily express their thoughts and opinions. This is a significant strength of the school. Pupils use verbal reasoning skills to explain their independent thinking. They are empowered to be dynamic individuals who lead initiatives that make a positive and impactful contribution to the school and wider community.
4. The early years curriculum provides a balance of nurture and challenge across the key areas of learning. An emphasis on oracy skills begins in the Nursery, where effective language development is promoted through modelling, high expectations, and specialist Spanish teaching. Staff and children relate well together, creating a positive learning environment.
5. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils gain new knowledge and develop skills across the subject range. Checks on pupils' learning are systematic and methodical. This means that leaders have a secure understanding of pupils' progress. A life-skills matrix and learning logs, where pupils record their success, are used to create an individualised approach, which meets pupils' needs. This also allows them to participate actively in their learning. Reports to parents on their children's achievement is detailed. However, relationships education is not reported as consistently well as other subjects.
6. Leaders prioritise pupils' mental health and their emotional wellbeing. Consequently, pupils are happy. Their emotional needs are met effectively. The calm environment promotes reflection, allowing pupils to focus on and engage with their work. Mindfulness practices, such as yoga and time in the zen garden, develop a sense of emotional regulation. Pupils develop resilience through critical thinking, problem-solving and the expectation of challenge in learning. This boosts their confidence and willingness to take risks.
7. Pupils are well known to leaders. Collectively, leaders have a strong awareness of the diversity and wide-ranging needs of the school community. A culture of open communication means that there are positive and trusting relationships between staff and pupils. This results in a prompt response to any concerns. Pupils are proud of their school. This is reflected in pupils' high-level of mutual respect and extremely positive behaviour.
8. Leaders maintain a school culture that has a strong understanding of its contextual safeguarding risks. Effective liaison with external agencies underpins leaders' understanding of the support accessible in the local area. Responses to safeguarding matters are timely. Record-keeping is meticulous for all areas including health and safety, behaviour and safeguarding.

## 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 reporting on progress and attainment in relationships education is shared with parents, to the same high quality as that for all other subjects.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have a clear vision for the school. They set high expectations for their pupils. They review the quality of all aspects of the provision regularly. Priorities for improvement are identified. Pupils' wellbeing and happiness are central to any changes made. Effective development planning, endorsed by the new governing body, makes it clear that pupils' all-round education is as highly valued as their academic achievement. Recent changes have had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes, including in supporting their wellbeing. For example, mindfulness is now taught from the Nursery onwards. The recently introduced role, linked to sustainability and global citizenship, has enhanced pupils' awareness of global issues, such as climate change.
10. The oversight provided by the new proprietorial body is insightful and robust. As regular visitors to the school, they have a well-informed understanding of current strengths and relative weaknesses. Regular meetings with the highly effective senior leaders ensure that the school's 'family feel' is maintained. Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised and routinely promoted. Governors are clear that leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to secure policies, systems and procedures in fulfilling their responsibilities so that all the required standards are met.
11. The accessibility plan is thoughtful and meets the requirements of the 2010 Equality Act. This plan is specific about how the curriculum and site are adjusted to cater for the needs of the pupils in the school. Leaders take bold steps to ensure that pupils achieve well. Actions such as the removal of busy displays, to avoid sensory and cognitive overload, have been researched and implemented with consideration.
12. Risks are managed effectively. Leaders work closely with external agencies to protect pupils from harm. Through the provision of comprehensive risk management procedures, governors and leaders pre-empt any potential concerns. Frequent discussion and a robust training schedule ensure that the actions implemented mitigate the risks identified. Lessons learned influence the management of future events. Risk assessments for trips, for example, are methodically reviewed through systematic evaluation and feedback forms.
13. Clear communication channels for parents and staff help to ensure that the necessary information about school systems, procedures and policies is provided. Much of this is available on the school's website. Leaders ensure that the local authority receives the required reporting about pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans. Parents receive regular information about their children's progress. This includes ongoing updates throughout the term for those children in the early years. Other age groups receive twice-yearly reports. Typically, reports indicate each pupil's levels of achievement, effort and next steps in learning. However, the reports to parents about relationships education do not contain the same quality of information.
14. Leaders have established an open and welcoming culture. Parents are happy to raise any concerns. The cohesive staff team respond promptly to any issues. There are very few parental complaints. Any that do arise are dealt with according to the clear policy. Leaders maintain an appropriate record of complaints. This allows the identification of any trends or patterns so that they can be acted on quickly.
15. Effective leadership of the early years secures the ambitious vision for children's achievement. Activities are well planned and delivered in a stimulating environment both indoors and outside. This

is combined with high-quality additional adult support from committed and caring staff who understand individual children's needs. Early years' leaders build positive relationships with parents. They work effectively with external agencies when required, such as the local authority's children's services, to support pupils' welfare and needs.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The curriculum is age-appropriate and inclusive. Pupils learn how to think critically using their knowledge and skills from different subjects. They enjoy creative learning in aspects, such as art, drama and music. Pupils express their ideas clearly and build confidence in sharing them. Projects and cross-curricular thematic studies, allow pupils to explore their interests. This increases their motivation to learn and curiosity to find out more. The curriculum design is dynamic in responding to pupils' needs. Quality feedback from pupils, stating what they have learned, any challenges they faced and what else they would like to learn, informs future planning. Consequently, they play active role in shaping their educational experiences.
18. The inclusive culture of the school community ensures that pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported. They are fully integrated in all aspects of school life. Pupils' needs are identified carefully. Staff use the associated support plans effectively. Pupils, regardless of their ability, make good and often rapid progress because of high-quality support and individualised resources.
19. A comprehensive assessment framework feeds into teachers' planning. Any gaps in learning are addressed quickly. Staff use the information from routine checks systematically to set pupils' individual targets. They put timely additional support in place as needed. Pupils are encouraged to talk about their learning. These actions empower them to take ownership of their development, enhancing motivation and self-awareness.
20. Learning is characterised by engaging and challenging content that encourages pupils to apply effort and show their creativity. Pupils are encouraged to listen. They respond appropriately, justify their answers and value every voice in the room. They express their individuality confidently and challenge themselves to learn more. This contributes to their high-quality outcomes overall. Highly effective questioning promotes advanced oracy skills in lessons. Pupils articulate their reasoning confidently, using subject-specific vocabulary effectively, orally and in their written work. Teachers plan lessons thoughtfully. The school's online platform supports pupils' learning, teachers' collaboration and resource sharing.
21. Teachers monitor the progress of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) closely to identify individual learning needs. Tailored actions are thoughtfully integrated in the classroom. Staff ensure that these pupils receive the support that they need without being singled out. This encourages those pupils who speak EAL to persevere through challenges with confidence so that they achieve well alongside their peers.
22. The early years curriculum is carefully planned across all areas of learning and through important aspects of child development. Regular checks on learning are used to plan the next steps and to inform discussions with parents. Where necessary, other professionals are involved. Effective modelling and skilful questioning extend children's understanding and help to develop their oracy. For example, teachers using soft dough alongside children to create a farm animal, while encouraging discussion about the required features and colours. Children make good progress from their starting points. Most achieve well by the end of Reception.
23. Recreational activities are an essential part of the school's approach to an effective all-round education. Leaders provide a wide range of extra-curricular clubs to enhance pupils' physical, mental

and social skills. Activities, such as French, chamber choir and active artists support pupils' language development and creative skills. The clubs provide an environment which motivates pupils and promotes collaboration.

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

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



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

25. Pupils' emotional health is well supported through the school's life skills programme. Opportunities, including mindfulness, yoga and philosophy mean that pupils know the importance of self-awareness and how to manage their feelings, both physically and mentally. As a result, they can articulate their emotions confidently and describe the techniques they learn eloquently, such as finger breathing to help reduce anxiety.
26. The carefully planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme appropriately includes relationships education, which supports pupils' wider personal development. The PSHE curriculum is informed by appropriate consultation with parents, including through an annual survey of parents' views. The information gathered contributes to ongoing improvements to curriculum delivery, while it ensures that pupils' wellbeing is continuously assessed and supported. Leaders check regularly to check that the programme content is appropriate and relevant. For example, pupils learn about the importance of respecting boundaries, gain knowledge of different family structures and develop an understanding of consent.
27. The subject-specific monitor and prefect system assigns pupils with meaningful responsibilities and leadership roles across year groups. This builds pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Year 6 pupils for example, are all given a leadership role. In fulfilling their responsibilities, pupils contribute well to the school community. They appreciate the broad skills they gain from these experiences.
28. Teachers have consistently high expectations of pupils' behaviour in all aspects of school and daily life. They act quickly to identify and manage poor behaviour, or any occasional incidents of bullying. Leaders keep meticulous records so that any trends are addressed. Working together with caring staff, who know pupils extremely well, they identify potential problems at an early stage. Pupils listen to others' views. They are kind, respectful and empathetic to the needs of their peers and members of the school community. This results in positive relationships, while maintaining a harmonious atmosphere and an inclusive culture.
29. Teachers deliver a rich religious education (RE) curriculum. This ensures that pupils learn about different beliefs and festivals. The oldest pupils, for example, articulated the difference between faith and belief through a clear explanation of humanism and atheism compared to a range of world religions. A well-planned programme of debates, assemblies and workshops encourages pupils to look beyond their own setting. In this way, they learn to appreciate others and the world around them. In turn, this enhances the mutual respect evident between pupils.
30. Staff have developed a physical education (PE) programme that provides pupils with opportunities to develop their health and wellbeing. It is carefully designed to promote enthusiasm and confidence through a sport for all culture. Regular access to off-site facilities enhances pupils' learning. The effective teaching in PE and other relevant subjects, such as music, art and drama, encourages collaboration and mutual support. This builds pupils' self-confidence and resilience. They have a secure understanding of their own strengths and what they need to improve. Pupils embrace any challenges that they face positively.
31. A calm and purposeful atmosphere pervades the early years settings. Children feel secure and safe with familiar adults to provide support when required. The children discuss their learning

enthusiastically and display confidence with one another. They interact well with adults. Activities are planned to promote their physical development. For example, when developing fine motor skills through modelling with soft dough and using the climbing equipment to build gross motor skills to improve stamina and technique.

32. The premises and accommodation are well maintained. This provides pupils with stimulating and safe environments in which to play and learn. Sufficiently qualified staff ensure the effective supervision of pupils of all ages throughout the school day.
33. Admission and attendance registers are kept in accordance with the regulations. Staff have the appropriate skills, knowledge and understanding to maintain these. The local authority is informed about pupil transfers at standard and non-standard transition points. Absences and late arrivals are followed up to ensure legal compliance and to maximise pupils' opportunities to succeed through regular attendance.
34. Health and safety and other related policies are implemented effectively. Procedures include regular internal safety checks and external audits, together with a planned programme of staff training. There are suitable arrangements on all three sites for pupils who are ill, have an injury, become unwell, or who have specific medical needs. Staff receive regular and paediatric first aid training to support pupils, including those with more complex medical needs.

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

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

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

36. Economic wellbeing is an integral element of pupils' education from the Nursery class onwards. Relevant topics are taught within the PSHE programme, and through life skills. This includes age-appropriate study for all year groups on financial literacy. Children in early years, for example, visit a bank. Year 6 pupils understand the principles of budgeting. They enjoy putting this into practice by planning their birthday parties within a given budget. Pupils understanding of economic issues is improved through a variety of whole-school events, for example, finance day, where parents talk about a range of topics such as pensions and taxes.
37. Teachers use curriculum opportunities skilfully to allow pupils to question, make connections and to reflect on social and cultural issues in a balanced way. This helps pupils to develop an awareness of individual differences. Year 6, for example, articulated their understanding of British values, such as the need for rules and laws to help people live safely and happily in the community. Pupils recognise individual characteristics. They are quick to challenge stereotypes, such as those linked to age and race. They are purposefully encouraged to share information about their own diverse cultures.
38. The school council has representatives from Reception to Year 6. This provides a clear structure for pupil representation and introduces them to democratic voting. Consequently, pupils are knowledgeable about democracy. They understand how tangible changes have come about in the school because of their collectively agreed views. Pupils speak proudly about recent changes such as updates to the menu, and the development of the zen garden.
39. Children in the early years interact positively with their teachers. They explain their needs with increasing confidence. Clear routines are established, such as children unpacking their own bags. This develops their growing independence further. Children access a wide range of high-quality classroom resources, which enrich their play. They enjoy collaborating, as they share and take turns sociably and kindly. For example, when some children pretended to be farmers using real vegetables, while others pretended to apply face paints, nail varnish and tattoos to an adult.
40. Adults in the school emphasise empathy and mutual respect, so pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong. Pupils understand and respond positively to the school's rewards and sanctions system. This helps them learn to accept responsibility for their actions. Pupils are polite and supportive of each other, embodying the caring and kind ethos of the school.
41. Pupils are well prepared, academically and socially, for the next stage of their education, as well as life in British society. A well-planned programme of visits ensures that pupils have access to various careers education opportunities, such as workshops, talks and assemblies. These broaden their horizons and prepare them for the future. Events like citizenship day, involving services such as police, fire, RNLI and NHS, challenge gender stereotypes in employment. Pupils develop a greater awareness of different careers. Raised aspirations and enthusiasm are generated as a result.
42. The school has established strong community links. Pupils access opportunities to interact with local authorities and contribute to thinking on local improvements. The curriculum is designed to include community-focused events. Consequently, pupils are empowered to engage with and enact positive change in their local and wider communities. They are involved in, for example, incentives like young

travel ambassadors, who strive to make travel to and from school safer by raising speed awareness in the local area.

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

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

## Safeguarding

44. Leaders have established an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school. Robust procedures to protect pupils from harm are successfully embedded. The clear and comprehensive safeguarding policy reflects the latest guidance. Safeguarding records are detailed, well-maintained and monitored so that any trends can be managed by the designated safeguarding leads (DSLs). A nominated governor with extensive experience of safeguarding oversees the effective implementation of procedures.
45. A comprehensive induction programme is in place for any new staff. This is followed up with regular training from the safeguarding team for all adults involved in the school. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about child protection procedures. This includes, for example, issues such as the absence of children from education and the risks posed by radicalisation. Staff, at all levels, including governors, understand the difference between a concern and a child being in immediate danger. They know the required actions in each case.
46. The experienced safeguarding team engages readily with local agencies for guidance and support. Working closely together, they have cultivated a positive relationship. Safeguarding leaders seek informal advice quickly about issues and potential referrals to the local authority. They make contact with specialist children’s services in an appropriate and timely manner.
47. Pupils, including the youngest, share any worries in confidence, such as using the classroom worry monsters or suggestion box. They know they can ask for a one-to-one tutorial or visit the time-to-talk room if they have a problem. They are confident that adults will respond appropriately.
48. A whole-school approach to online safety is reflected in policy and realised in action. Through teaching and frequent open discussions, pupils have a clear understanding of how to stay safe online. This supports them in using technology respectfully and responsibly. Their knowledge equips them with a sound understanding of the dangers of the internet. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place for pupil protection. These systems are regularly monitored by the DSLs.
49. Leaders are diligent in matters regarding safer recruitment procedures. The new proprietors have a systematic approach to policy oversight and implementation, including scrutiny of the single central record (SCR) of appointments of new staff joining the school. Those responsible for any aspect of recruitment are diligent in their roles. They ensure that all suitability checks are completed before staff commence work and accurately recorded on the SCR.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	St. Helen's College
<b>Department for Education number</b>	312/6058
<b>Address</b>	St Helen's College Parkway Hillingdon Uxbridge Middlesex UB10 9JX
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<b>Website</b>	www.sthelenscollege.com
<b>Proprietor</b>	St. Helen's College Ltd.
<b>Chair</b>	Mr. John Forsyth
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms. Shirley Drummond
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11
<b>Number of pupils</b>	355
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	16 to 19 November 2021

## Information about the school

51. St. Helen's College is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1924 and is situated in Hillingdon. The school comprises three sections, split across three sites, all within a half-mile radius: The Nursery for children aged 2 years; lower school for pupils aged 3 to 6 years; and upper school for those aged 6 to 11. Since August 2024, the school has been part of the Forfar Education group, which operates as a local governing board.
52. The early years section of the school comprises of 100 children in three Nursery classes and two Reception classes.
53. The school has identified 32 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
54. There are 121 pupils who speak English as an additional language.
55. The school states that its aims are to inspire academic excellence, mindful self-awareness and creative self-development in pupils. It seeks to be an inclusive, happy, vibrant community of pupils, staff and families, where respect, teamwork and teaching by example prevail. At its heart are their core values of love, harmony, spirituality and growth.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

24 to 26 September 2024

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

57. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assembly
- 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.

58. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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