

School inspection report

30 January to 1 February 2024

St John's College School

73 Grange Road

Cambridge

Cambridgeshire

CB3 9AB

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. Governors, leaders and staff are fully committed to ensuring the pupils' wellbeing, and this is at the forefront of their decisions. Pupils enjoy their time at school. They are well cared for, happy and self-motivated. The Emotions for Learning programme (E4L) helps pupils to develop emotional literacy and self-regulate their emotions. This programme is particularly effective in the lower part of the school, and pupils develop their inter-personal skills quickly. In the senior school, pupils understand the foundations of the E4L programme, but leaders recognise the need to extend and adapt it to support the emotional needs of the older pupils.
2. Pupils are attentive and focused in lessons, challenge themselves to try to achieve their best and show resilience and perseverance to succeed. Pupils achieve well and make good progress because leaders ensure that the curriculum includes engaging learning experiences. Supportive interactions between staff and pupils help to advance their learning. Teaching is characterised by thorough planning so that pupils increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught. There are some inconsistencies where teaching does not follow the school's policies.
3. The standard of pupils' achievement through the school, including that of children in the early years, is high, and they make good progress. Leavers are successful in obtaining places at a range of senior schools with challenging entry requirements, including gaining numerous scholarships each year across varied disciplines.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs met overall. Leaders' employment of skilled and knowledgeable teaching assistants contributes well to pupils' learning and development, particularly for those pupils who may find the learning process more challenging. Pupils who have SEND make good progress overall.
5. In the early years, children make good progress because learning is carefully planned to meet the interests and needs of individual children. Children are enthusiastic learners, and they speak confidently in a range of situations using a well-developed vocabulary.
6. Leaders and staff ensure boarders are well cared for, both academically and pastorally. The choristers who sing in St John's College Choir are supported appropriately in school and in the boarding house, to ensure they manage the workload and pressures of their roles, yet still have some time to relax and enjoy their free time with their friends.
7. Leaders encourage pupils to adopt a sense of responsibility towards others that goes beyond the school. Consequently, pupils show initiative and understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality in which the school is situated, and to society more widely.
8. Detailed risk assessments and effective health and safety arrangements support pupils' wellbeing. The school's arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are in line with current statutory guidance. Staff are suitably trained and receive regular updates. Staff know how to report concerns, and records are kept as required. The governors maintain an effective oversight of the safeguarding procedures, and have identified and addressed some late recruitment checks.

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 the quality of teaching is consistent across all subjects and year groups, so that pupils receive a consistent experience across year groups and subjects.
- develop the Emotions for Learning programme in the senior school to meet the needs of the older pupils.
- ensure that the recent improvements to the recruitment processes are embedded so that all required checks are undertaken in a timely manner.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The governors ensure that leaders and managers have the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Policies are implemented effectively and consistently. Governors ensure that each area is scrutinised regularly through visits and reviews of policy and practice. The promotion of pupils' happiness and wellbeing is a key determinant in all decisions taken by the governors, leaders and managers.
10. Leaders aim to include, inspire and challenge all pupils to achieve highly, and this is evident in pupils' positive attitudes to their learning and the good progress they make. In some cases, leaders do not ensure that teachers' planning follows the school's policies.
11. The characteristics taught through the school's E4L programme are evident in the attitudes of the pupils. This is particularly the case with the younger pupils, who are provided with the tools to develop their emotional literacy and to self-regulate their emotions. Staff are very proud of this culture and are passionate about leading by example. They favour discussion when issues arise and in most cases this has the desired effect. Leaders recognise a need to develop this programme further to support the needs of older pupils.
12. Leaders in the early years plan carefully to create an environment in which activities are well matched to children's interests and needs. Children enjoy coming to school, where they feel safe and happy, and grow in confidence through positive interactions with the adults around them.
13. Leaders and managers ensure that all the information that needs to be made available to parents and parents of prospective pupils is accessible through the school website. Parents receive information about their children's progress through regular meetings and detailed written reports.
14. Leaders, managers and governors ensure that policies around health and safety are implemented effectively to ensure the safety of all members of the school community. Arrangements for assessing risk are effective, and risk assessments identify appropriate actions to mitigate identified risks. Staff understand procedures and manage risks well. Leaders in the early years provide a safe and stimulating learning environment that is fully risk assessed and well supervised.
15. Leaders and managers use guidance and support external agencies where necessary to support pupils and ensure the safety of all on the school site.
16. Complaints are handled in line with the school's published policy and procedures. Complaints are resolved in a timely manner. Most are dealt with face to face at the informal stage of the published procedures. Suitable records relating to any formal complaint are kept. Boarders feel their opinions are heard through suggestion boxes, boarding committees and listening staff; they are happy that any complaints are dealt with quickly and effectively.
17. Governors, leaders and staff ensure that the school promotes principles of equality and respectful, fair treatment across all areas of the school. Leaders have an appropriate accessibility plan. The plan has been reviewed, and funding has been used to improve access to the curriculum for pupils who have SEND. They fulfil their responsibility under the Equality Act 2010.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The curriculum is broad, rich and well planned, and supports the school in meeting its' aims. Teachers have the skills and subject knowledge to ensure that pupils of all abilities are challenged through tasks that meet their needs. Well-planned activities and effective teaching generally enables pupils to make good progress across the curriculum. In a few cases, teaching does not consistently follow the school's policies and pupils' experience is less consistent.
20. Pupils appreciate teachers' feedback, both written and aural, and use it effectively to improve their classwork and homework. The quality of feedback, however, varies between different teachers, and in some cases is less useful.
21. The school's creative lessons are an integral and important part of the school curriculum. Throughout the curriculum, and as seen in art, design and technology (DT), drama and music, pupils learn to express their individuality and grow in self-confidence, showing focus, attention to detail and enjoyment in collaboration.
22. Leaders and staff in the junior school, through the creative curriculum, ensure that pupils develop their emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills. Many activities focus on investigative learning and are child led, supporting the younger pupils to become independent, in line with the school's aims.
23. Leaders adopt an effective approach to supporting pupils who have SEND. Teachers typically adapt their lessons well so that pupils' needs are met effectively. Pupils who have SEND also receive additional support within or outside the classroom, often through the effective deployment of skilled and knowledgeable teaching assistants. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress. The younger pupils who have SEND benefit from a morning sensory circuit, which builds their self-esteem and self-confidence and sets them up positively for a day of learning.
24. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate individual support to develop their language and speaking skills. This enables these pupils to access the curriculum rapidly and to make good progress in their fluency of English.
25. Throughout the school, pupils are enthusiastic and independent learners. They engage well in lessons across the curriculum. Pupils are resilient and not worried about making a mistake, as leaders and managers encourage pupils to persevere with problems to find their own solutions. Children in Reception class showed resilience in an outdoor education lesson, trying hard to identify birds for the RSPB Big Bird Watch and working collaboratively to meet physical challenges set for them.
26. The school's assessment framework successfully tracks a series of key skills in each subject area for each pupil. Leaders and staff are then able to ensure individual pupils are supported in the areas needed. The standard of pupils' work, including that of children in Reception, is high for their age. Pupils maintain high levels of achievement across the age range, due to the teachers' good subject knowledge and the building of supportive relationships with the pupils.
27. In the early years, learning is carefully planned, uses a good range of resources and is personalised to the individual child. Children are enthusiastic learners, as many varied and exciting challenges are used effectively to engage them in their learning. Teachers encourage children to speak confidently

in a range of situations using a rich array of vocabulary. A range of open-ended resources helps to develop children's physical skills. Adults interact appropriately with children while they undertake guided play in the outdoor environment, keeping them safe and promoting their language acquisition. As a result, children make rapid progress against their early learning goals.

28. Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities before school, during lunchtimes and after school. These activities enable them to develop their talents and interests beyond the classroom and in areas that they particularly enjoy. The choice currently ranges from jewellery making and real tennis to music and dance clubs. The additional Thursday afternoon enrichment programme encourages pupils to work independently and research a variety of topics. The wide range of other activities from sports leadership to mindfulness, interview practice to philosophy enriches the experience of the pupils.

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. Pupils feel safe at the school, supported by leaders and staff who have built a culture based on kindness and mutual respect. Staff know the pupils very well, and all play a part in ensuring each individual pupil is understood and all are supported in line with the school's aims
31. Governors, leaders and staff prioritise emotional and social wellbeing. Each lesson begins with a mindfulness moment which helps pupils to be calm and be ready to learn. Pupils are well motivated and behave well. They treat one another with respect and work collaboratively towards a common goal. As a result, they develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.
32. The E4L programme enables pupils to self-regulate their emotions so they can begin to solve problems independently. Pupils' social skills and emotional regulation are well developed, particularly the younger ones. Leaders recognise the need to develop this programme further so that it is fully matched to the needs of older pupils. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme is age-appropriate and enables pupils to develop an understanding of friendships, families, and health. A comprehensive and appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) programme is taught through the PSHE and E4L programmes.
33. Leaders, staff and fellow pupils all support the choristers who sing in St John's College Choir. These pupils have many additional commitments to rehearsals and performances which mean they may need additional pastoral or academic support to manage their time pressures. Choristers are well cared for and know they can ask for help from staff if they need it. The links with the chapel promote a tangible sense of spirituality. The school community all benefit from the involvement with St John's Chapel, access to services, and sharing in an uplifting and motivating experience.
34. Physical education (PE) and sport are an important part of the curriculum. Pupils experience a broad range of planned physical activities. Leaders ensure that schemes of work enable pupils of all abilities to be included. Pupils feel they benefit from participation in competitive fixtures where the focus is on developing their mindset during games and analysing team performance afterwards.
35. Behaviour of pupils in lessons across the school is good and pupils are keen and enthusiastic learners. Leaders maintain logs of any behavioural incidents and review these to analyse any trends in behaviour. Pupils understand what to do if they are a victim of or witness bullying. If there are any incidents, they are dealt with effectively in line with the whole-school approach of restorative justice.
36. Children in the early years manage their emotions well because of the routines established by their highly supportive teachers who embed the principles of E4L at an early age. These enable children to build social skills and develop friendships. Leaders provide a stimulating and safe environment for them to learn and explore.
37. Leaders and managers ensure that there is suitable supervision of pupils in both buildings at all times of the school day and when on trips and visits. Boarding pupils understand the supervision timetable for staff and feel confident that they can always contact someone.

38. Admission and attendance registers are maintained as required. Leaders monitor and promote attendance, with the result that rates of attendance are high. The required reports are made as pupils join or leave the school.
39. Governors and leaders have appropriate systems in place to ensure that the premises and accommodation are well maintained and safe. Boarding accommodation is comfortable and well maintained and provides personal spaces to keep possessions safe. Appropriate precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Pupils take part in termly fire drills and staff have the required training.
40. Leaders provide suitable accommodation to meet pupils' medical needs, and there are thorough and effective procedures for dealing with any medical issues in a timely and competent manner. The school nurse liaises closely with staff to ensure they are aware of pupils with acute medical needs so that they are cared for effectively. Many staff have appropriate medical training, including in the early years, where all staff have completed paediatric first-aid training.

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

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

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

42. Leaders are successful in promoting pupils' social and moral development. Pupils demonstrate a mature approach to moral issues, understand the difference between right and wrong and are encouraged to accept responsibility for their behaviour. Pupils are proud that they are able to manage conflict amongst themselves first. Such attributes equip them well for their future lives and enable them to contribute positively as responsible and caring citizens.
43. Pupils' leadership skills through activities such as a pupil forum in the senior school, and a similar forum for the younger pupils. The elected pupils meet weekly and value this opportunity to share their opinions and ideas with others and believe they make a difference to their community. The older pupils also benefit from opportunities to hold positions of responsibility, such as house captains, and to stand on a charity committee, with responsibility for planning events to raise money for charities. Leaders promote inclusive relationships between pupils by creating opportunities for different age groups to mix in after-school clubs and in sport. Pupils in Year 8 are buddied up to support a younger pupil, as are Year 4 pupils who buddy with pupils in the junior section of the school.
44. Pupils contribute to a range of local and overseas charities, as voted by the pupils' charities committee. For example, pupils organise and develop their own stalls for various school-led events, pupils in Year 6 organised a Victorian Fayre, and the school has supported an IT outreach project in The Gambia. These help to develop pupils' understanding of the wider world and the need to support those less fortunate.
45. Leaders and staff promote positive values through the PSHE and assembly programmes, such as that of respect for others, including all groups of people of diverse characteristics. Pupils show respect for other people, regardless of their background, culture and beliefs. Older pupils apply their understanding of the rights of other people when contributing to discussions in lessons on topics such as the morality of war.
46. Pupils in all years have opportunities to learn more about other cultures through religious education and humanities topics. Learning about other cultures is also reflected within the extra-curricular activities such as the Mandarin club. Visiting speakers and parents talk about their personal faith, and pupils' knowledge is further enhanced through visiting several local places of worship of different faiths. Pupils develop a secure knowledge and awareness of different religions.
47. School leaders support families to make an appropriate choice of senior schools based on pupils' ability profile and personal characteristics. Pupils are well prepared for life at senior school. Careers education is introduced through visiting speakers, in PSHE lessons and through topics in academic lessons. Pupils learn about money and economics in their daily lives through mathematics and PSHE curriculum in an age-appropriate way. Pupils understand how to make informed decisions relating to money.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. Governors and leaders ensure that there is an effective safeguarding policy which reflects current statutory guidance. The leaders and staff prioritise procedures to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Governors have oversight of all aspects of safeguarding and ensure that school procedures and processes are reviewed regularly through a nominated governor who has specific oversight of safeguarding and keeps in regular contact with staff who have responsibility for safeguarding. All governors are trained in line with latest statutory guidance.
50. Leaders regularly attend local authority safeguarding training and make effective use of the materials from these sessions to train other staff at the school. Those with responsibility for safeguarding maintain detailed records and make referrals to external agencies or seek advice in an appropriate and timely manner. Suitable arrangements for the handling of allegations against staff or senior leaders are included in safeguarding procedures.
51. A detailed induction programme for staff and volunteers enables them to act effectively in accordance with school policy. Staff understand their responsibilities and know how to deal with disclosures or any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare. Staff are aware of the expectations of their conduct and the importance of identifying low level concerns. They are alert to the dangers of extremism and child-on-child abuse.
52. The internet is suitably filtered, and effective monitoring procedures are in place. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils understand the potential dangers when using the internet, including the importance of not sharing personal information and how to recognise when certain internet sites may be unsafe.
53. Leaders understand safer recruitment requirements. However, whilst most recruitment checks had been undertaken in a timely manner, a small number had not. This was identified by the school prior to the inspection and had resulted in leaders and governors recently adding an additional layer of oversight to ensure the process is robust.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | St John's College School |
| Department for Education number | 873/6004 |
| Registered charity number | 1194790 |
| Address | St John's College School Grange Road Cambridge CB3 9AB |
| Phone number | 01223 353532 |
| Email address | shoffice@sjcs.co.uk |
| Website | https://www.sjcs.co.uk/ |
| Proprietor | St John's College School, Cambridge |
| Chair | Lindsay Dodsworth |
| Headmaster | Mr Neil Chippington |
| Age range | 4 to 13 |
| Number of pupils | 435 |
| Number of boarding pupils | 26 |
| Date of previous inspection | 21 September 2021 |

Information about the school

55. St John's College School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged between 4 and 13 years. It is predominantly a day school, with a small co-educational boarding house, which can house up to 40 boarders. The junior department is housed in one building, and the senior school is in additional buildings further along Grange Road.
56. In September 2021, the school became an incorporated charity which the Department for Education (DfE) recognises as the proprietor, although St John's College remains the school's owner. The school educates the choristers of St John's College Choir.
57. The school has 36 children in their early years' classes.
58. The school has identified 149 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
59. English is an additional language for 19 pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to instil a lifelong love of learning through a rich and broad curriculum, encouraging pupils to become independent, creative and critical learners and to become their best selves in the fullest sense. Further aims are that the pupils should have a generosity of spirit and embody the values of love, honesty, kindness, respect, service and trust.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 January – 1 February 2024

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

62. 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
- 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
- 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.

63. 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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