

School inspection report

5 to 7 March 2024

St Joseph's Preparatory School

Rookery Lane

Trent Vale

Stoke-on-Trent

ST4 5RF

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 and school leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively and leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure the wellbeing of pupils.
2. Leaders are ambassadors for the school's values. The pupils understand these, and act with care and compassion towards one another. They understand the need to make a positive impact on wider society. They contribute to local charitable causes and support pupils in other schools across the world.
3. Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum and extra-curricular programme. The warm and positive relationships between staff and pupils create an inclusive environment, which is conducive to learning.
4. Overall, pupils make good progress. In many lessons, teachers utilise prior assessment data as well as using the information available to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Feedback to pupils on how to improve their work is generally, but not always, helpful. Overall, pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. However, the quality of teaching is not consistent across the school and sometimes pupils' progress is not as strong. Leaders do not regularly assess the impact of teaching on pupils' progress.
5. The school site is secure, potential risks are mitigated and pupils feel safe and valued. Leaders plan to begin collecting data to analyse patterns to provide more consistent oversight of pupils' welfare needs. Currently leaders use their knowledge of their small community to monitor pupils' pastoral needs.
6. Leaders encourage pupils to support one another and act with advocacy and humility. Senior pupils wear their leadership badges with pride and a culture of peer mentoring and support means that pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence and bullying and unkindness are not tolerated.
7. Pupils of all faiths are welcomed into the school's equal and inclusive community. Leaders' effective role modelling of tolerance and respect encourages pupils to understand the role they can play within their local and global communities.
8. The early years setting is a safe, happy and inclusive space. Children have the freedom to explore their interests within a vocabulary-rich environment whilst being given individual support for their physical and social development. As a result, children develop well.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- strengthen the oversight of teaching and learning so that pupils make consistent progress in all lessons
- ensure that teacher's planning consistently takes into account the needs of pupils who have SEND and EAL
- ensure all teachers make the most effective use of assessment data in their planning and provide helpful feedback so that pupils understand their next steps in learning
- monitor pupils' pastoral and welfare needs more systematically so that patterns and trends can be analysed and addressed.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors understand their responsibilities and play an active role in overseeing the school's operations. They visit the school and review safeguarding and health and safety concerns through regular meetings with leaders. Governors understand the culture of the school and the areas for improvement.
10. School leaders have a clear vision which is reflected in the school's culture. The 'eight essentials' have been translated into age-appropriate language and are understood by pupils. They are apparent in pupils' everyday actions. Leaders particularly embody the values of compassion and respect for others, and this is reflected in the pupils' behaviour and attitudes around school.
11. Leaders understand areas for improvement through their communication with staff and have acted to address these. However, some actions have had unintended consequences. For example, the introduction of a new mathematics scheme of work has not achieved the planned improvement in the quality of teaching and learning.
12. The breadth of leaders' responsibilities means that limited time is available to evaluate the impact of their decisions on the pupils' education and personal development. The lack of monitoring of the quality of teaching and the use of assessment information has not identified the inconsistencies in learning outcomes for some pupils.
13. Children in the early years are tracked across all areas of their development and help is put in place to support individual children's progress. Planning is developed around the children's interests and, as a result, children are engaged in their learning and develop their language and communication skills and emotional wellbeing.
14. Leaders fulfil their statutory responsibilities. Policies are regularly updated to reflect the latest guidance and effective links with external agencies are established. An appropriate three-year plan is in place to improve accessibility to the site and the curriculum. It clearly lays out the school's commitment to avoid any form of discrimination and comply with the Equality Act 2010. Accounts for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) are provided to the local authority and parents receive regular progress reports for their children.
15. At the point of inspection, the school was transitioning to a new website and so regulatory information was not easily available. Leaders uploaded the school's safeguarding policy and a list of available documents onto the temporary website to ensure coverage for the interim period.
16. There are effective written risk assessments of the school site and activities. The site is secure and pupils feel safe. There is coverage of the most overt risks such as school trips and the risk from fire. Leaders recognise a need for more formal processes to monitor the welfare needs of the pupils so that trends can be recognised and addressed.
17. The complaints procedure is effectively implemented. The school's complaints policy outlines a three-stage approach with clear timeframes. When concerns arise, they are dealt with promptly and outcomes are recorded.

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. Pupils experience a balanced curriculum and extra-curricular programme. A timetable which features modern languages, outdoor learning and physical education from the early years onward is supplemented by a wide variety of clubs which include choir, gardening and cookery. Almost all pupils attend clubs and as such, the school's provision promotes pupils' physical and emotional health, fosters their interests and talents and develops life skills.
20. The school's assessment data and outcomes in external examinations confirm that pupils make good progress overall. However, leaders do not routinely monitor standards of teaching across age groups and subjects. Some lesson planning does not fully consider pupils' aptitudes and needs. Pupils sometimes complete tasks which do not always reflect their prior attainment.
21. Overall, pupils who have SEND make good progress. Leaders have effective processes to identify pupils who have SEND. Suitable adjustments have been made for pupils who have education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including effective individual support. A wide range of support strategies helps pupils to develop their knowledge and skills. However, some teachers' planning does not fully consider the identified strategies.
22. Assessment information shows that pupils who have EAL are making good progress overall. However, there is a lack of monitoring to ensure the on-going effectiveness of this provision.
23. Early years leaders ensure that the early years curriculum is mapped out to cover all areas of children's development. Children's communication and language are developed well throughout the setting. Rotating role play areas, a home corner and an on-site outdoor learning area encourage the children to communicate and explore language during imaginative play. Teachers encourage children to use a wide variety of vocabulary and a themed approach supports the children in developing more technical language. For example, hibernation and nocturnal were the focus words during a recent study of owls and hedgehogs. Children receive regular one-to-one intervention and support to ensure their literacy and numeracy skills are developing in line with age related expectations. As a result, the majority of children achieve their early learning goals.
24. The warm relationships between staff and pupils enable children to develop trust in adults from an early age. As a result, pupils are generally enthusiastic and well behaved during lessons. When this culture is coupled with effective lesson planning, pupils develop their knowledge, understanding and skills, often doing so with independence and self-motivation. For example, in Year 5 mathematics effective planning ensures that pupils are working in line with their individual learning objectives. In a Year 4 English class pupils are able to access a challenging text with the support of vocabulary cue cards.

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

25. Leaders encourage pupils to support one another's emotional wellbeing through regular opportunities for communal prayer and reflection. Senior pupils identify issues within the community, source related gospel readings and develop a message of the week for other pupils to follow. Pupils who adhere to this message are then celebrated. For example, the theme of 'loving thy neighbour' was adopted following some minor disagreements in the playground, and behaviour improved as a result. Pupils are empowered to manage their own conflict resolution and help to build their social cohesion.
26. A culture of mutual trust, respect and consistently good behaviour is prevalent across the pupil community. Senior pupils spend breaktimes in the early years and act as mentors to pre-prep pupils, listening to them read. Staff model positive and warm relationships. The impact of this role modelling is evident in the pupils' interactions as they are quick to champion and support one another. Bullying and unkindness are not tolerated and are dealt with swiftly and effectively by staff if they do occur. Pupils receive suitable relationships education, which helps them to prepare for later life.
27. Pupils benefit from the breadth of leadership roles available to them. Their self-esteem and self-confidence are enhanced by the visible impact they are having on school life. These roles also build self-knowledge as pupils discover how they can best contribute to their school community. For example, pupils have the choice of spending breaktimes playing team sports and activities, reading in the library or spending a reflective moment in the prayer garden.
28. The early years setting is a safe and healthy environment. Staff promote the children's wellbeing by providing systems of support for emotional regulation, including a visual and age appropriate approach to behaviour management. Leaders are vigilant about staff to child ratios and supervision is conscientious. The youngest children's emotional health has been particularly enhanced by the introduction of a new outdoor learning area on site. Activities such as den building and role play allow the children to engage with the natural world and enhance their teamworking skills.
29. Leaders ensure pupils are kept physically safe and healthy at school. The site is secure and well maintained and the pupils are supervised in all areas. Health and safety checks and fire prevention measures are robust and adequate first aid care and provision are in place.
30. The pupils learn to stay physically healthy through physical education, team sport and range of active clubs such as dance. They also learn about healthy bodies and relationships in science and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.
31. The admissions register contains the required information, and school leaders follow local authority procedures for providing information about joiners and leavers. The attendance register is up to date, checked daily and any unexplained pupil absence investigated.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. Pupils of all faiths are welcomed into the school's equal and inclusive community. Weekly Catholic services are open to all and are often led by non-Catholic pupils. Leaders encourage pupils' engagement by deliberately setting broad themes relating to moral understanding and a sense of service. For example, a recent chaplaincy service, led by a diverse group of senior pupils, encouraged the assembly to consider how they might build a more inclusive community, both in school and beyond.
34. Pupils' understanding for the school's ethos translates into a deep respect shown toward the diverse range of cultures within the school community. Leaders further promote these attitudes through a multi-cultural week which includes a study of the world's major religions. This includes presentations by pupils and staff on their own beliefs and traditions and visits to local places of worship. Pupils demonstrate tolerance, understanding and empathy when they discuss difference.
35. Pupils' understanding of the democratic process is developed within the pupil leadership programme. Nominees are elected to a wide range of positions of responsibility and, as such, wear their badges with pride and show commitment in their duties. School leaders promote an informed understanding of causes rather than simple charitable giving. As a result, pupils have opportunities to choose and learn about the cause they support. Examples of recent initiatives include a partnership with a local football club to offer care for the elderly and support for a local food bank via the 'reverse advent calendar challenge'.
36. In the early years, Children in the Nursery and Reception interact on a daily basis. The youngest learn from their older role models who, in turn, develop their own sense of social responsibility. Children have ample indoor and outdoor space and resources are planned and used to encourage exploration and teamwork. Children collaborated well on a flower arrangement for Mother's Day and patiently wait for their turn on the trike racetrack whilst cheering each other on. Leaders in the early years seek opportunities for children to engage with the wider world. Examples include visits from owl and hedgehog experts using animals to teach the children about their habitats.
37. The culmination of the pupils' social and economic education is the Edmund Rice award scheme in Year 6. Senior pupils are tasked with developing a project which promotes a fairer and more sustainable world and gives a 'voice to the voiceless'. Numerous fundraising events are held throughout pupils' final months at St Joseph's. These events often have a theme underpinning the causes being championed, for example, a fair-trade bake sale. As part of the award scheme, pupils reach out to global partner schools, hosting zoom chats with their international peers and consequently grow a deeper understanding of their own responsibility to wider society.
38. The curriculum includes units which help the pupils to prepare for future life in British society. The Year 5 curriculum includes a study of public institutions and in Year 6, pupils learn about taxes and pensions using an online platform. The multitude of charitable initiatives also afford the senior pupils the opportunity to learn how to manage a budget and maximise a profit.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

40. Leaders promote an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school. Governors oversee an annual safeguarding review and the school's safeguarding policy is updated in line with the latest statutory guidance. Safeguarding is a standing agenda point on regular board meetings and so governors maintain oversight of ongoing concerns.
41. The safeguarding lead team are suitably qualified and trained in line with local procedures. The diversity of their roles ensures comprehensive coverage throughout the site and school day. Their identity is clearly signposted for visitors and staff. Pupils articulate a clear understanding of reporting channels in relation to different safeguarding concerns.
42. The DSL team play their part in protecting pupils from harm including through effective working with local agencies. When concerns arise, the safeguarding lead readily engages with local partners for advice and support. As a result, the team develop their understanding of reporting thresholds.
43. Staff understand the school's local contextual risks. This knowledge of contextual safeguarding risks supports the team in guarding against complacency. The school is linked with an agency which supports easier contact between schools and the police and has also organised for an expert in extremism to deliver staff training. Staff understand that they must remain vigilant regarding risks such as child on child abuse.
44. Staff undergo annual safeguarding training. Staff are aware of their responsibilities in line with the school's whistleblowing policy. The pupils learn how help themselves to stay safe online and the school has effective filtering and monitoring procedures in place.
45. Suitable recruitment procedures are in place, and checks are recorded accurately on a central record.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Joseph's Preparatory School
Department for Education number	861/6000
Registered charity number	254312
Address	St Joseph's Preparatory School Rookery Lane Stoke-on-Trent Staffordshire ST4 5RF
Phone number	01782 417533
Email address	enquiries@stjosephsprepschool.co.uk
Website	www.stjosephsprepschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Congregation of Christian Brothers
Chair	Mrs Loraine Atherton
Headteacher	Mr Daniel Hood
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	83
Date of previous inspection	18 December 2019

Information about the school

47. St Joseph's School, located in Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, is a co-educational day school and nursery for pupils aged 3 to 12. It is part of a group of five preparatory schools in England founded by the Congregation of Christian Brothers. They are the trustees of the school and oversee its operation, supported by a local governing body.
48. The school has identified 18 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Three pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
49. English is an additional language (EAL) for 10 pupils.
50. The school states its aims are to provide an education that is based on the Gospel, combines learning and experience, fosters belief and success and serves the local and global community. Each child is encouraged to strive for the highest possible standards of work and behaviour whilst learning to live as a well-mannered, self-disciplined and tolerant individual both inside and outside the classroom. The children learn to live as happy and caring members of the school community which values their unique individual talents and also the needs of others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 March 2024

51. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

52. Inspection activities included:

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

53. 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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