

# School inspection report

19 to 21 March 2024

## **Sydenham High School**

Westwood Hill

London

SE26 6BL

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. The school's leaders, trustees and governors work together successfully, to promote their aims, achieving this through a clear focus on educating the whole person. This leads to a positive and effective learning environment, which benefits the pupils' development as young people, ready for the outside world.
2. Teachers in the early years deliver an effective and enhanced curriculum. This allows children, including those receiving support for their learning needs, to make good progress in the classroom and to develop their skills through play. The knowledgeable and committed staff enable each child to meet the early learning goals, as well as realising their wider potential, so that they are well prepared for moving into Year 1.
3. Teachers across the school, have good knowledge of their subjects and can address the differing learning requirements of pupils, both within the curriculum and outside of the classroom. The positive relationship between staff and pupils helps to promote successful learning.
4. The school provides an environment in which pupils make consistent progress, and actively involve themselves in their learning. Pupils express themselves confidently and develop their own opinions in a secure setting. They build effectively on the ideas of others and work with focus and determination.
5. The wellbeing of pupils in the broadest sense is central to the school's ethos and approach. This starts in the prep school with their 'culture curriculum', an active approach to developing character values which then progresses into creating a positive and happy learning environment for pupils. The senior school continues this process through an extensive provision for supporting physical and mental health, although some pupils do still feel challenged by the pressures of work.
6. A sense of community pervades the whole school. Pupils respect and support each other wholeheartedly in school. Pupils have a clear understanding of global world issues.
7. The school's leaders and staff work hard to prepare pupils for their futures through the practicalities of careers guidance and skills for life, as well as more broadly, their development as young people, within a safe environment, monitored closely by the pastoral team.
8. Leaders maintain a robust approach to safeguarding in terms of policies and procedures so that pupils' safety and welfare are paramount. Governors and trustees have regular oversight of safeguarding issues and directly support the safeguarding team across the school, to understand trends and current themes that might impact on pupils within the school.

## 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:

- review ways of increasing the effectiveness of the school's support for pupils' mental health, especially among the older pupils.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The Girls Day School Trust (GDST), in their role as proprietors, in tandem with the local school governing body fully understand their responsibilities for monitoring the appropriate implementation of policies, as part of the school's quality assurance process. They also ensure the school addresses the needs of its pupils, both in terms of their academic achievement and their wellbeing.
10. The school's leaders and governors work together successfully, to promote their aims, with a clear focus on educating the whole person. The leaders are a committed and passionate group who drive the school forward, supported wholeheartedly by the staff. This leads to a positive and effective learning environment, which benefits pupils' development as young people, ready for their next steps in education and employment.
11. Leaders in the early years implement a robust framework which embraces a holistic approach to a child's development, by learning through play. This enables pupils to flourish at their own pace acknowledging the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) principle of every child being unique. Leaders are committed to teamwork and put the child's progress and wellbeing at the centre of decisions. Staff receive regular training and use consistent language and behaviour management in their approach to teaching, described as the 'culture curriculum'. This is a concept that the children understand and which models the school's core values.
12. Leaders in the prep school have appropriate skills, knowledge and experience, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively and consistently. The leadership team has consciously implemented this 'culture curriculum' as a consistent, supportive framework for learning, encompassing all elements of how a pupil experiences their education and which prepares them for future success.
13. The premises are well maintained, secure, comfortable and welcoming. Those responsible for this aspect of the school, are knowledgeable in terms of both the expected standards and appreciating the areas for further development for the premises. Trustees and leaders ensure that a comprehensive programme of ongoing maintenance provides a well-maintained and bright environment for the pupils. They ensure that specialist areas are audited and monitored regularly through health and safety meetings, the sharing of information, checking logs and ensuring regular up-to-date training for staff is in place.
14. Leaders, working alongside the governors and trustees, actively promote the wellbeing of all pupils through taking a strategic and inclusive approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils. The school safeguards and promotes pupils' wellbeing through effectively identifying potential contextual risks and taking appropriate action to mitigate their impact.
15. There is a clear complaints policy on the website with defined stages, including an additional second stage where the complaint is reviewed by the GDST. If needed, the trust will then organise a panel stage with one member independent of the management of the school and the trust. Any concerns are recorded fully with dates and appropriate action taken in line with school policy.
16. Key information about the school is shown on the website, which provides a comprehensive overview of school provision and policies. There are formal reports of pupils' academic achievement and their wider personal development, through the year, as well as parents' meetings so that pupils' academic progress and general wellbeing can be understood.

17. The needs of pupils are met, in line with the terms of the Equality Act 2010. The curriculum and the wider opportunities offered by the school show no discrimination between groups or individuals. There is a detailed accessibility plan with appropriate timescales in place, which covers both the physical environment and access to the curriculum.

### **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 broad and relevant curriculum is appropriate to the ages and aptitudes of pupils in the school, addressing the differing needs of pupils and prepares them for their futures.
20. The school's results at GCSE and A Level have improved significantly over the past five years, with pupils making good progress and generally outperforming their predictions in most subjects. Progress results for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are also in line with expectations.
21. An enhanced curriculum in the early years, delivered through effective teaching methods, allows children, including those receiving support for SEND, to access the curriculum and develop skills through play. Knowledgeable staff enable children to meet their early learning goals and consequently the children are well prepared for the transition in Year One. Teachers take time to pause, to allow children to solve their problems independently, yet they are there to support those children who seek some guidance. Children in the early years, experience valuable interactions with staff and older children, as well as their peers and this ensures an environment of rich language and enables the children to become confident communicators.
22. In the prep and senior schools, teachers implement schemes of work effectively and develop activities which are appropriate to meet pupils' needs. Pupils are interested in their lessons and actively involve themselves in their learning. Pupils acquire new knowledge, develop a wide range of skills in such areas as research, public speaking, problem solving and make good progress as a result of their teachers' good subject knowledge. The school provides additional opportunities to stretch pupils' learning even further and pupils respond positively to these challenges.
23. The marking and feedback provided to pupils assists them to understand new material and pupils know how to improve their work, responding to comments in lessons and books, on what went well and what could be better. Pupils are adept at self- and peer-marking but prefer the feedback from their teachers. Senior leaders monitor carefully, information on pupils' achievement through the year and can then promote their progress still further.
24. Teachers know their pupils well and understand how to support their learning effectively. The resources used by teachers help to enhance pupils' learning experience, such as in a geography lesson for Year 9, where pupils explored for themselves, scenarios on climate change, using website software. School leaders also are currently developing the school's digital strategy to further support pupils' learning.
25. Pupils are proud of their work and approach tasks with focus and determination, encouraged by the professional, respectful and warm relationships between pupils and teachers. For example, pupils work collaboratively with their teacher whilst discussing new concepts in sixth form lessons.
26. Leaders ensure that suitably qualified staff are in place to support pupils who have SEND. Effective strategies are used and integrated into lessons so that pupils are well supported. Leaders have appointed another member of staff to increase provision for pupils who have SEND in the senior school. The SEND department shares information on pupils' needs with all relevant staff so that teachers can make adjustments to their teaching to ensure that lessons are accessible to pupils.

27. Pupils who speak English as an additional language are identified through information supplied on admission to the school. The school uses recognised definitions and descriptors to identify pupils' needs and teachers provide effective in-class support for pupils, with a focus on key vocabulary.
28. A comprehensive range of extra-curricular activities is available to pupils, which centre on the 'Mind, Body and Soul' bespoke school programme. These include discussion activities such as 'Hot Topics', run by a group of sixth formers and involving younger pupils, as well as a host of sporting, academic and creative clubs. Most pupils attend these clubs and activities, which run throughout the school day. Pupils attending these are motivated and happy, applying themselves with effort and enthusiasm while extending their skills in different and varied areas. A range of relevant and engaging trips and visits, local and international, are organised with risks appropriately managed, providing a range of further educational and recreational opportunities for 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' sense of wellbeing is promoted in lessons across the curriculum and through the extensive extra-curricular programme. As a result, pupils acquire an understanding of the importance of maintaining both their physical and emotional health.
31. The provision in the early years encourages children's physical development both through specialist teaching and through play. Children in the early years learn how to be healthy and have several opportunities to take risks in their learning and to challenge themselves.
32. Experienced staff support children in the early years to manage their feelings with a dedicated reflective area, respecting each child's need to learn how to regulate in their own way. This is in line with the school's 'Mind, Body and Soul' initiative.
33. There are many opportunities for children in the early years and in the prep school, to take on roles and responsibilities promoting the schools 'giraffe girl' values, which is a method for recognising desirable behaviours, particularly those which empower girls. Pupils are encouraged to 'stick their neck out' and give of their best. Pupils have a sense of fun, warmth and zest for life whilst remaining courteous, polite and living by the school values.
34. The leadership team in the prep school has consciously developed initiatives to provide an environment in which pupils can thrive in their learning and their relationships. The 'culture curriculum' underpins every aspect of life in the school. Leaders take an active approach to character development, promoting a positive and happy learning environment.
35. Pupils in the senior school generally behave well in lessons, listening respectfully to their peers and confidently contributing answers and thoughts to the lesson. The extra-curricular 'stomp and shake' group is led by pupils and develops their self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as successful dance routines.
36. Pupils are tolerant and positively embrace the diversity of the school community. Pupils have a clear sense of justice, helped by the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme, which includes case studies to support pupils to interact positively with others who have different opinions. Pupils have trusted adults that they can report any issues to, and leaders tackle any rare cases of bullying effectively and in line with school policy.
37. The premises, including relevant health and safety standards are suitably maintained and provide suitable facilities to meet the needs of pupils. Leaders maintain effective records, acting on external expert advice as part of their internal quality assurance process. Leaders are aware of recent changes in health and safety regulations and take swift action to update policy and practice.
38. First aid is administered to pupils appropriately by trained staff from a suitable medical room. Children in the early years receive first aid from suitable paediatric trained staff. Levels of supervision of pupils throughout the school day, including at social times are suitable.

39. The process of monitoring pupil admissions and attendance are efficient, involving external organisations as needed. For example, the local authority is notified of any pupils who join or leave at non-standard transition points.
40. Pupil wellbeing is carefully planned and monitored. The provision for physical and mental health are reviewed often and thoroughly, both within school and with trips and activities. Potential risks to pupils are systematically assessed and suitable mitigations are put into place.
41. Pupils in Year 12 receive training to provide mentoring support, and this is much appreciated by younger pupils. Older pupils acknowledge the many levels of support provided by the school, but some do not always feel they are coping with their workload effectively.

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

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

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

43. The curriculum and the ethos of the school encourages pupils to respect each other and to accept responsibility for themselves and each other. Pupils interact with each other with kindness and with adults with confidence, reflecting the school's values.
44. Pupils learn about different faiths and beliefs in the relevant PSHE programme. Pupils consider themes of diversity and equality in the assembly programme, including anti-bullying and the celebration of languages, as well as in planned events such as neurodiversity week.
45. Children in the early years have a clear understanding of the school culture of kindness and respect and are proud of their community. The 'Syd Sisters' programme provides an opportunity for older pupils to work with children in Reception.
46. Children in the early years are respectful of each other and readily support their peers. In their work and in their activities, children work effectively with their partners to help each other and enjoy everyone's success.
47. In the prep school, a diverse programme of learning activities encouraging independence, critical thinking, and collaboration supports pupils' next steps into the senior school.
48. The focus on the future, continues in the senior school with comprehensive guidance on careers and 'preparation for life' woven into the PSHE programme and the co-curriculum. There are a wide range of relevant careers talks and events that give pupils in the senior school the opportunity to gather information about their futures. Pupils use an online platform to increase their knowledge of a broad range of careers, and leaders provide opportunities to link with former pupils to discuss career options. In addition, pupils in Year 9 and Year 11 have individual discussions with senior leaders who give appropriate advice on next steps. There is a high level of pupil engagement with the careers programme.
49. Senior pupils volunteer with local care homes and schools as well as going into the prep school to help with activities with younger pupils. The school provides support for the local food banks and pupils put a great deal of energy into fundraising for charities, recognising the importance of helping others.
50. The school's curricular and extra-curricular programmes include developing pupils' perspectives on the global world, such as on environmental issues. They promote valuable insights into working together effectively and there is a clear sense of community running through the school. Pupils are also involved with local enterprises such as the food bank and the Lewisham 'Young Mayor' initiative with its focus on community issues.
51. Pupils throughout the school develop their knowledge and skills and learn how to contribute to the society of school and country. Pupils consider their roles as British citizens, exploring British laws and the democratic process and participating in a mock trial. Pupils are effectively prepared for the opportunities, responsibilities, and experiences of life in British society.

52. Pupils learn about looking after their personal finances and broader economic issues. For example, pupils discuss pocket money in the prep school, and consider wants and needs in Year 8. Pupils develop their understanding of budgeting, bank accounts and mortgages in the sixth form.

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

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

## Safeguarding

54. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures are comprehensive and maintained appropriately. Leaders are committed to promoting a clear sense of teamwork among staff so that pupils' progress and wellbeing is always at the centre of any decision-making. Leaders ensure that staff have the opportunity to get to know pupils well and therefore are well placed to notice any changes in behaviour. Leaders ensure that staff understand the school's aims and ethos, and these pervade all the school's activities.
55. The school has a positive relationship with external agencies in the local area. Staff understand the school's processes and procedures that underpin safeguarding well, including what to do if they have a concern about an adult or feel that a concern has not been dealt with appropriately.
56. The safeguarding team receive regular and appropriate training and in turn ensure that all the staff keep themselves up to date with procedures, making use of a variety of training resources. The designated safeguarding lead in the school provides training for all staff on induction and maintains a record of courses undertaken. Safeguarding is an item on the agenda of staff meetings and a feature of weekly briefings.
57. The school's proprietors and governors regularly monitor that recruitment checks are completed before appointment for all staff and volunteers. They also review the register at intervals, to check its efficient maintenance.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Sydenham High School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	209/6309
<b>Registered charity number</b>	306983
<b>Address</b>	Sydenham High School Westwood Hill London SE26 6BL
<b>Phone number</b>	020 8557 7000
<b>Email address</b>	senior@syd.gdst.net
<b>Website</b>	www.sydenhamhighschool@gdst.net
<b>Proprietor</b>	GDST
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Zara Berry
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Antonia Geldeard
<b>Age range</b>	4–19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	757
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 February 2020

## Information about the school

59. Sydenham High School, located in south-east London, is a day school for female pupils aged between four and nineteen. It was founded in 1887 by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), the council of which provides governance for the school. The local school governing board provides advice and support to the school but does not hold legal responsibility.
60. The prep and senior sections of the school share many facilities. The junior school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), was rebranded as the prep school in 2018 and provides for pupils up to Year Six. It is located a short walk from the senior school.
61. Since the previous inspection a new head and chair of governors have been appointed, along with a new head of the Prep School and other senior leaders.
62. There are 18 children in the EYFS.
63. The school has identified 206 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan, which is not funded.
64. English is an additional language for 45 pupils.
65. The school states its aims are to inspire the future generations of creators, independent thinkers and trailblazers and to open eyes and hearts by educating the whole person: through the diversity of academic and enrichment opportunities that enable every girl to forge their own path, strive to be their best and who make a positive difference to their community.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

19–21 March 2024

66. A team of 6 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. 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 a group of trustees and governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders 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.

68. 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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