

School inspection report

23 to 25 January 2024

The Manchester Grammar School

Old Hall Lane

Manchester

M13 0XT

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 fulfils its aims successfully. Leaders nurture pupils' talents and interests from a young age. They provide a broad curriculum and an extensive co-curricular programme, which engage pupils to excel. Leaders are dynamic, visible and approachable, and constantly seek to further improve the wellbeing of all pupils.
2. Pupils achieve highly in public examinations. This is due to the guidance, support and encouragement pupils receive from their knowledgeable teachers. The provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is a significant strength of the school. There is a whole-school approach. Meticulous planning of each individual's needs for every lesson enables teachers to teach effectively and pupils to learn at pace. Inclusivity and diversity are at the core of this success: pupils who have SEND are fully integrated and are able successfully to challenge themselves to achieve their scholarly potential. Pupils who speak English as an Additional Language (EAL) are equally successful.
3. The extensive co-curricular and enrichment programmes are a significant strength of the school. They bring challenge, inclusivity and diversity to pupils' education. Careful planning ensures pupils develop their skills and interests to become confident, well-rounded learners. Many clubs are deliberately pupil-led to develop leadership and teamwork skills. Because of the range on offer and strong staff encouragement, pupils with additional needs also find activities that inspire them and they thrive.
4. Self-evaluation and reflection are integral to leaders' approach to strategy and planning. Knowledgeable, supportive governors provide strong systematic oversight of leaders' work, whilst ensuring an appropriate level of challenge. Both leaders and governors understand the need for close monitoring of policies and their effective implementation to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In a recent revision of the behaviour, sanctions and rewards policy, leaders proactively identified the use of inappropriate, unkind language among some pupils, in response to which they changed the policy.
5. Leaders have put in place effective programmes to support pupils in their personal development. Personal, social and health education (PSHE) informs pupils well about important topics relating to wellbeing. Pupils respect each other, understand the importance of feeling valued and valuing others and how knowing yourself well is key to wellbeing and achievement. Pupils speak positively about the relationships and sex education (RSE) programme, though some older pupils in the senior school lack interest and engagement.
6. In line with the school's aims of service to others, pupils contribute to the local and wider community through a range of community service and charity initiatives. The careers programme is effective in helping pupils make decisions about their future pathways.
7. Pupils are taught about safeguarding matters. They know how to keep themselves safe, including online, and how to report a concern. Leaders prioritise training for all staff and governors on effective 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:

- Continue to challenge the inappropriate use of unkind language by some pupils.
- Further strengthen the RSE curriculum so that older pupils in the senior school are more effectively engaged and interested.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders throughout the school fulfil their responsibilities successfully and ensure that the school meets its aims. The wellbeing of all pupils is actively promoted and lies at the heart of planning and decision-making. An effective digital strategy has had a positive effect on the quality of teaching and learning, enabling pupils to become confident independent learners.
9. Governors bring expertise and a wide range of skills to their role. They monitor leaders' work systematically through sub-committees, reports and regular visits to the school. They know the school well and challenge leaders appropriately, including asking questions about examination results. Leaders are self-reflective and welcome challenge as a means to improve pupils' wellbeing. For example, leaders decided that their performance in safeguarding matters be regularly audited by the safeguarding governor.
10. Self-reflection is embedded in the curriculum, including among the youngest junior pupils. As a result, pupils understand themselves well, and know how to improve their work and their learning. Leaders are dynamic, visible and approachable. High-quality relationships between pupils and teachers promote respect and trust and help to create a calm learning environment.
11. Leaders and governors place a high priority on risk management. Risk strategies are comprehensive and constantly reviewed to take into account changing current and potential contextual risks. Leaders ensure that staff are well informed about risks and pupil safety through discussion and ongoing training, including in relation to the 'Prevent' duty.
12. Policies are published on the school website. These are regularly reviewed by leaders, with governor oversight, and monitored for effectiveness of implementation. Leaders are pro-active in identifying any areas that require improvement, as in the recent revision of the behaviour, sanctions and rewards policy. This has had a positive impact on pupil behaviour.
13. Leaders have introduced effective tracking systems. Through these, they are aware of the current and developing needs of all pupils. As a result, pupils' needs are managed highly effectively by teachers in line with the school's vision and values.
14. Leaders provide an extensive range of co-curricular and enrichment programmes so that all pupils have equal opportunities to develop their skills and interests beyond the formal curriculum. This enables pupils to work well naturally and collaboratively, challenge themselves and become rounded individuals true to the school's aims. Leaders fulfil the requirements of the Equality Act to improve access to the school and its curriculum for a wide range of pupils with different needs.
15. Leaders engage effectively with others outside the school and in the wider community. The school has close links with local schools for female pupils. Leaders stay up to date in relation to matters of pupil safety and communicate regularly with the local authorities.
16. Leaders provide the required information for parents and prospective parents via the school website. Parents receive regular detailed information about their child's attainment and progress. This also covers participation in co-curricular and enrichment activities.

17. Leaders value good relationships with parents and staff are easily accessible should parents have a concern. Complaints are taken seriously and managed in a timely manner, following the school's policy.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders plan and regularly review the curriculum to promote the core school value of scholarship. As a result, pupils have appropriate challenge and opportunity to pursue their interests and develop high-level skills. The teaching of different languages to pupils from Year 3 means that pupils acquire essential language skills and understanding of different cultures from an early age.
19. Teachers challenge pupils to go beyond the syllabus and to develop their ability to analyse and explain complex ideas, for example, explaining in sixth-form biology how and why cells differ. Overseen by leaders, teaching actively encourages pupils to grow in confidence as successful, increasingly independent learners who think for themselves as they pursue their love of learning.
20. Whilst retaining its distinctive identity, the junior school benefits from a strong partnership with the senior school. The sharing of facilities and provision of specialist teaching prepare junior pupils well for the transition to the senior school, so they make rapid progress.
21. Pupils display competence in the use of digital devices. In Year 3, computer literacy skills are advanced, with pupils using computers with ease to retrieve and edit work independently.
22. Pupils of all abilities achieve high results at both GCSE and A level. Precision monitoring through effective tracking systems enables leaders to optimise pupils' performance, with any underperformance identified early and appropriate interventions put in place. As a result, pupils have a wide choice of higher education opportunities, with many gaining places at establishments with the most demanding entrance requirements.
23. Assessment is systematic with significant input from pupils through self-evaluation and target-setting for improvement. This reflective approach motivates pupils to take charge of their learning and effectively identify their strengths and areas for development.
24. Pupils acquire skills of self-regulation from an early age, learning to manage more complex feelings and behaviours to promote consistent learning. The quiet use of libraries, with subject-related drop-in sessions organised by teachers, further supports pupils' progress. The clear expectations for good behaviour throughout the school are understood and responded to positively by pupils.
25. Leaders foster high-quality relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves. In response, pupils are respectful, valuing others' opinions. In an enrichment philosophy class focused on artificial intelligence, pupils demonstrated mature oracy skills and persuasive reasoning. In lessons, both pupils and teachers demonstrate highly effective active listening. Teachers consistently provide high-quality feedback, upon which pupils act and which therefore contributes to their learning.
26. Pupils who have SEND receive highly effective support and appropriate resources to support their learning, so they make rapid progress in line with and sometimes exceeding that of their peers. At all stages there is careful, detailed planning, taking into account each individual's needs so that teaching is meaningful, relevant and appropriately challenging for learners. Careful monitoring ensures prompt intervention where necessary. There is a triangulated approach to supporting pupils by class and specialist teachers, well-trained teaching assistants, pastoral staff and parents. Pupils who have SEND are fully integrated within their teaching groups, with the focus on inclusivity

minimising the need for withdrawal. Pupils who speak EAL are similarly supported and make equally good progress.

27. The co-curricular and enrichment programmes are carefully planned to enable all pupils to develop their interests, talents and leadership skills, and to become well-rounded learners. Inclusivity and diversity are central. Many clubs are pupil-led, with a vast array on offer, ranging from high level sport to *Dust and Monsters*, in which pupils prepare a presentation on an area of interest to them. Libraries are extensively used, with plentiful resources for research and personal reading. There is a very well-attended, vibrant book club.

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

28. Leaders actively promote pupils' participation in a wide range of physical and personal development activities. Pupils are helped to identify suitable options. In line with their emphasis on inclusivity and diversity, leaders ensure that the physical education curriculum, which includes fencing and dance, does not discriminate. All pupils, whatever their needs, have access to sport and activities to suit their levels and interests. As a result, participation is high.
29. Pupils are highly aware of the importance of protected characteristics. Understanding is promoted through PSHE, as well as cross-curricular subjects and societies. For example, religious societies run by pupils are open to all and enable those of other faiths to gain insight into different traditions and religions. As a consequence, pupils work naturally collaboratively, as exemplified in a joint bake sale.
30. From an early age, pupils are made aware of the issues surrounding homophobic and racial discrimination through PSHE. Pupils learn about others in multi-faith assemblies, through the LGBT society and in lessons such as philosophy and religion. In debating club, pupils learn how to disagree well and challenge with grace. As a result, pupils grow in self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence.
31. Leaders understand the importance of good pupil behaviour to achieve the school's aims. With this in mind, leaders recently identified the need to address issues around the inappropriate use of unkind language amongst some pupils, identified through a pupil survey. In response, leaders have undertaken a thorough review of the behaviour, sanctions and rewards policy and implemented a revised policy. This is having a positive impact as the process is embedded and its effectiveness continues to be evaluated by leaders.
32. Pupils are knowledgeable about bullying and know how to keep themselves safe online. Bullying is rare but when it occurs the school acts promptly to resolve any issue.
33. Tutors play a central role in overseeing the development of the whole person. Pupils receive constant support from tutors who know them as individuals. Older pupils take responsibility for younger pupils' wellbeing by running a buddy club.
34. Pupils value the recently improved PSHE programme, which helps them to understand important issues such as consent. However, some older pupils in the senior school are not as interested in or engaged with RSE as they could be.
35. Leaders respond to pupil voice. Pupils are encouraged to raise issues through an active student council. Recent examples of changes proposed by pupils include new equipment for the gymnasium and revised food menus. Individuals are not afraid to express their ideas, for example, in suggestions to improve the effectiveness of the prefect role, which senior leaders then addressed.
36. Pupils develop resilience through a programme of many carefully planned experiences such as the Owl's Nest trips in Years 7 and 8. In these, pupils learn teamwork, leadership and the need to stick to the task to get a job done.

37. The school premises are well maintained. Health and safety procedures are effectively implemented. There is regular monitoring and review by leaders with oversight by governors. Precautions are taken to reduce risks from fire, with fire training for staff and termly fire evacuation drills.
38. The medical centre, with well-qualified staff, ensures that suitable arrangements and accommodation are in place to care for any pupils who become unwell or have specific medical needs. Staff are trained in first aid, including mental health.
39. Admission and attendance registers are kept correctly. Staff are vigilant concerning any pupil absence and promptly follow up any unexplained absence.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

40. Leaders encourage pupils to reflect upon and accept responsibility for their own learning. Pupils are ambitious for themselves, yet supportive of each other, effectively working together to reach common goals. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) curriculum teaches pupils how to be good citizens and active participants in society. Pupils respond positively to challenge to broaden their perspective on life.
41. Underpinned by the code of conduct, pupils develop their understanding of the difference between right from wrong. Pupils can talk in depth about the complexities of morality, displaying high-level critical thinking and debating skills. They are taught about British laws and institutions and the concepts of democracy through a broad curriculum and an inclusive and diverse co-curricular programme. These promote pupils' cultural awareness which prepares them well for life in British society.
42. From a young age, pupils understand that skills learnt in school are transferable to real life situations, as demonstrated by Year 6 pupils writing to leaders in school and the UK about issues concerning mobile phones and their social implications. Pupils think for themselves and do not feel pressurised to 'go with the crowd'. Pupils' political and social awareness and understanding of democracy is enhanced through a range of visiting speakers.
43. Central to the school's aims, pupils are aware of their social responsibilities. In PSHE, pupils' discussion of social entrepreneurship focuses not just on making a profit for personal gain but how to develop a product to benefit others. Pupils are active in raising money for charities and appeals. They organise gift collections at times of religious celebration.
44. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to take the initiative to involve themselves in the local and wider community. The expectation is that all pupils are involved. Pupils give freely of their time, committing to the MGS service pledge. They support the local Afghan and asylum seeker community by undertaking Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) courses to teach English language skills and help integration into society. Other work includes paired reading in primary schools, food distribution, teaching EAL to the elderly, recycling, gardening and working with children in special schools.
45. In keeping with the founder's aims, leaders continuously look for ways to extend support for the local community. Pupils have embraced the school's new massive open online courses to share their talents and passions with pupils in local schools, ranging from language classes to 'chess and chat' sessions.
46. The many and varied educational trips, including three annual treks and four annual camps, enable pupils to learn teamwork and leadership skills. In the summer term there is no teaching for a week to enable all pupils and teachers to take part in activities week. Leaders encourage pupils to learn about responsibility by taking on the role of prefect, school council representative or running a society, to which pupils respond with enthusiasm.
47. There is an effective and well-planned careers programme. Leaders work together to support the next steps of pupils at each stage of their education. Pupils are encouraged from a young age to be

curious, explore and be ambitious. The MGS Global Connect enables pupils to learn about different career pathways through an extensive network of alumni. There are also regular bespoke career sessions with each individual pupil. This helps pupils to gain personal advice and be confident in making decisions through informed choices. Pupils value the opportunities to undertake work experience and apprenticeships. Through talks, workshops and PSHE, pupils develop understanding of how to manage their own finances effectively.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. Leaders and governors promote a culture of transparency, visible through clear, strong, open channels of communication. Pupils and staff work together effectively to maintain an environment in which safeguarding is a priority.
49. There is a strong focus on the 'Prevent' duty with robust filtering and monitoring by leaders. Through this, leaders and governors assess and review contextual risks both locally and worldwide, taking into account current conflicts and the risks these pose to the school community.
50. Pupils state that they feel safe in school. From an early age, pupils are taught how to be safe, including online. Pupils can easily turn to a variety of staff for help if they are worried. Leaders take concerns seriously and record these in appropriate detail, taking suitable action when required.
51. The governor responsible for safeguarding frequently meets with the designated safeguarding lead and monitors through audits. There is effective oversight of safeguarding policies and their implementation through discussion with leaders, regular reports to the board and governors' visits to the school.
52. Leaders and governors are acutely aware of their responsibilities and ensure training for all staff is regular and up to date. Staff are knowledgeable about procedures and display confidence in knowing what to do if there is a concern about a pupil or member of staff. Induction for new staff is thorough to ensure understanding of the expectations of the school and responsibilities in keeping children safe.
53. Leaders are pro-active, readily working with external agencies to continuously improve their safeguarding knowledge and practice to enhance pupils' safety and promote their wellbeing. Leaders make prompt referrals to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police when appropriate.
54. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment and checks for all staff, volunteers and governors are robust. These are correctly recorded on the central register of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	The Manchester Grammar School
Department for Education number	352/6029
Registered charity number	529909
Address	The Manchester Grammar School Old Hall Lane Manchester M13 0XT
Phone number	0161 2247201
Email address	general@mgs.org
Website	www.mgs.org
Proprietor	The Manchester Grammar School Foundation Trustee Ltd
Chair	Mrs Clare Bolton
High Master	Dr Martin Boulton
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	1653
Date of previous inspection	30 April to 02 May 2019

Information about the school

55. The Manchester Grammar School is an independent day school. It is registered as a single sex school for male pupils. The school has representative, ex-officio and co-opted governors and is a private company, limited by guarantee. The junior school is for pupils in Years 3 to 6. The senior school consists of three sections: the lower school for pupils in Years 7 and 8; the middle school for those in Years 9 to 11; and the sixth form.
56. Since the previous inspection the school has appointed a new chair of governors and created two new deputy head posts covering teaching and learning and safeguarding.
57. The school has identified 208 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. English is an additional language for 222 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to offer an education that enables its pupils to lead rich and fulfilled lives beyond their time at the school, but also instils in them the importance of making a positive impact on their community and society more widely. It wants to ensure that access to the school is not governed solely by the ability to pay fees by providing a significant number of places to those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, including looked-after children. Scholarship, individuality, kindness, resilience and service are core values.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

23 to 25 January 2024

60. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussion 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work, including talking to pupils about their work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

62. 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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