



# **INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE**

**SIR WILLIAM PERKINS'S SCHOOL**

**STANDARD INSPECTION**

# INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

Full Name of School	<b>Sir William Perkins's School</b>
DfE Number	<b>936/6535</b>
Registered Charity Number	<b>1060597</b>
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Email Address	<b>head@swps.org.uk</b>
Head	<b>Mrs Del Cooke</b>
Chair of Governors	<b>Dr Alun Jones</b>
Age Range	<b>11 to 18</b>
Total Number of Pupils	<b>561</b>
Gender of Pupils	<b>Girls</b>
Numbers by Age	11-18: <b>561</b>
Number of Day Pupils	Total: <b>561</b>
Inspection dates	<b>05 Oct 2010 to 16 Oct 2010</b> <b>01 Nov 2010 to 03 Nov 2010</b>

## PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in November 2006.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010\*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

\*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects, though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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## **1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL**

- 1.1 Sir William Perkins's School is an independent school for girls between the ages of 11 and 18 years. It was founded by a local merchant as a boys' school in 1725 and girls were first admitted in 1736. It moved to purpose-built accommodation on its present twelve-acre site in 1819. As the school has grown and the curriculum expanded, the original buildings have been adapted and new accommodation built. Whilst it is underpinned by a Christian foundation and ethos, girls of all faiths and their families are welcome. The school is a registered charity and operates as a company limited by guarantee, with fourteen governors who are directors of the company. The head was appointed in 2007. The school aims to build confidence, integrity and excellence in a caring, innovative and happy community in which girls are given the best chance to realise their potential and leave with sound values, and a breadth of skills and knowledge, and 'ready to take on the world'.
- 1.2 The school consists of 561 pupils, of whom 120 are in the sixth form. Pupils are drawn from a ten-mile radius of the school and come from families of a wide range of economic, ethnic and religious backgrounds. Since the last inspection a considerable amount of refurbishment has taken place. An artificial turf pitch and new tennis courts have been laid, and the library has been extended to include a dedicated careers area.
- 1.3 Admission is based on the school's own selection procedures. The average ability of pupils is above the national average, with almost all pupils above or far above the national average. About three-quarters of pupils transfer to the sixth form after GCSE, and with few exceptions, sixth-form leavers proceed to higher education, while a small number take a Gap Year. Seventeen pupils do not have English as their first language, but all are proficient in written and spoken English. One pupil has a statement of special educational needs (SEN), part funded by the local authority, and thirty-four receive support for learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD).
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

## **2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL**

### **2.(a) Main findings**

- 2.1 Throughout the school pupils are well educated, and enjoy a rich and varied educational experience that resonates with the school's aims. The curriculum and extensive extra-curricular programme make an excellent contribution to pupils' excellent achievements and personal development. They are highly successful in public examinations and across a wide range of activities in drama, music, sport and non-examination pursuits. Good teaching, with many excellent features, has a positive impact on the good progress pupils make when compared with others of similarly far above average ability. As the school is aware, some teaching does not allow pupils sufficient opportunities to be independent or investigative in their response. Pupils have a strong desire to be successful. They concentrate well and work hard.
- 2.2 The pupils' personal development is excellent. Pupils are friendly and self-reliant, reflecting the school's emphasis on integrity, high standards of behaviour and sound personal values. They are confident and have a sense of responsibility for the school, the environment and the wider community. Pupils respond with enthusiasm to the many opportunities to take responsibility, organise activities themselves in the school as well as in the local community, and lead fund-raising activities for charity. The school succeeds in its aim to create a caring, innovative and happy community. The quality of pastoral care is excellent, and effective systems identify and respond to individual needs. Excellent procedures for safeguarding pupils and their health and safety are implemented rigorously.
- 2.3 Governance is effective and strongly supportive to the school, ensuring that its aims are central to its work. Governors are thorough in their oversight of their responsibilities, including provision for safeguarding and the health and safety of pupils. The school has addressed the regulatory non-compliance reported at the time of the last inspection, and is now fully compliant. Teamwork at senior management level is strong, and there is a powerful commitment to continuous improvement and doing the best for pupils. The school recognises that there is insufficient sharing of good practice from the monitoring of teaching and learning at middle management level. Links with parents, guardians and carers are excellent. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire expressed high levels of satisfaction with the education provided. A small number of parents said that the school does not provide worthwhile support for pupils with LDD, but inspection evidence does not support this view. In the pupils' questionnaire, almost all pupils said that they like being at school.

## **2.(b) Action points**

### **(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements**

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

### **(ii) Recommendations for further improvement**

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. Increase the variety of teaching methods to improve opportunities for pupils' intellectual development.
  2. Share more widely existing good practice from the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning by middle managers.

### **3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS**

#### **3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills**

- 3.1 The overall achievement of the pupils is excellent. They are well educated, in accordance with the school's aims for them to realise their potential and leave school with sound values, and a breadth of skills and knowledge which will equip them to be successful adults.
- 3.2 The pupils display high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding in lessons and across a wide range of extra-curricular activities. They speak with confidence, expressing their ideas cogently and they are good listeners, responding thoughtfully to the views of others. Pupils are literate and their written work is usually assured, showing their ability to organise ideas logically, although some over-reliance on worksheets restricts opportunities to develop skills in extended writing. They use information and communication technology (ICT) with enjoyment, for research and for the manipulation of data, whilst their fluent numerical skills are used across the curriculum. High quality displays and accomplished art work stimulate creativity and the appreciation of aesthetic values.
- 3.3 The following analysis uses the national data for the years 2007 to 2009. These are the most recent three years for which comparative statistics are currently available. Results at GCSE and A level have been excellent in comparison with the national average for girls in maintained schools and above the national average for girls in maintained selective schools. At GCSE, four-fifths of the grades achieved were A\* and A, and all pupils achieved five or more passes at grade C and above, including English and mathematics. Results in International GCSE have been higher than the norm for international and UK schools. At A level, well over four-fifths of the grades achieved were A or B and in 2010, the proportion was the highest ever at almost nine-tenths. The great majority of pupils achieved A\* or A grades in an extended project qualification, assessed by an English examination board.
- 3.4 These results at GCSE indicate that pupils make good progress when compared with others also of far above average ability, as supported by nationally standardised measures of progress. Close monitoring of pupils' work and high levels of individual support ensure that this rate of progress continues into the sixth form.
- 3.5 Pupils' individual and team achievements are strong. There are notable successes in local, national and international competitions in art, debating, drama, ICT, mathematics, music, science and sports. The rowing squad won gold and bronze medals in national schools rowing championships. Pupils have been finalists in national science and engineering competitions in the last three years and Young Enterprise teams are regular regional finalists. A high proportion of sixth-form pupils achieve gold in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (D of E) each year.
- 3.6 This level of success arises from the pupils' hard work and perseverance, and from the quality of teaching and sports coaching. Pupils respond well to a climate of encouragement, and they are ambitious for themselves and supportive to the aspirations of others. They use lesson time well, they develop good habits of work and they enjoy learning.



### **3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)**

- 3.7 The curriculum is excellent in its coverage of all areas of learning so that the pupils develop the skills, knowledge and understanding they need to make progress. Together with the excellent extra-curricular programme, it strongly assists the school in meeting its aims. They make a significant contribution to the quality of the pupils' achievements and their personal development, and prepare them effectively to make the most of their own lives and to contribute to society.
- 3.8 The curriculum is broad, appropriately balanced, and suitable for all ages and for the needs of high ability pupils. At every stage it is complemented by a full programme of activities, a number of off-site expeditions, visiting speakers and work experience, enriching the educational experience of the pupils. Field work takes pupils to locations as far afield as Barcelona, China, Germany, Iceland, Morocco, New York, Paris and Russia, in addition to centres closer to home in Cornwall and the Lake District. A comprehensive personal, social and health education programme is central to the curriculum in all year groups and makes a significant contribution to pupils' personal development. Since the last inspection, a learning support specialist has been appointed to strengthen provision. All Year 7 pupils are screened to identify, at an early stage, those who would benefit from extra help. Curriculum planning is good and schemes of work provide continuity to enable pupils to increase their knowledge, skills and understanding in an orderly and progressive way. The school goes to considerable lengths to ensure the curriculum is designed around the needs of the pupils and virtually all options are accommodated at GCSE and A level. Provision for any pupil with a statement of SEN matches the requirements of the statement. Preparation for the next stage of education is well managed. Guidance on entry to higher education is supported by a well-stocked careers library.
- 3.9 Pupils' educational experience is greatly enhanced by the diverse range of extra-curricular activities. Clubs and activities flourish around drama, music, sport and numerous recreational interests, as well as subject clinics to supplement academic subjects. Sixth-form pupils have many opportunities to organise their own activities through which they develop leadership skills, for example managing the Christian Union and organising the junior drama productions. In discussion, girls enthused about the annual variety show, which is staged by pupils. The D of E, in which a large number of pupils participate, is highly successful and creates situations where team working and personal responsibility are central, and where self-confidence and support for others are developed.
- 3.10 Links with the community are a strong feature of the school. Business and charity ventures are encouraged and contacts with local schools are well developed. For example, Saturday workshops are organised for Year 4 children from local schools. Topics have included 'Slimy Science', 'Travelling Victorians' and 'Roman Britain'. Sixth-form pupils engage in community service by helping in primary schools and care homes, and by helping pupils with LDD to participate in the D of E. Through these opportunities pupils begin to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of others in circumstances different from their own. The school's international links, for example the developing initiative with Ghana and school exchanges, all enhance language learning and increase cultural understanding.

### **3.(c) The contribution of teaching**

- 3.11 Teaching is good overall, with some that is of excellent quality. It contributes effectively to pupils' learning and achievements, in line with the school's aims. It plays a significant part in the progress pupils make by enabling them to achieve their potential.
- 3.12 Teaching is effective in providing a secure foundation for pupils to acquire new knowledge, increase their understanding and develop their skills. It places emphasis on acquiring the basic skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT. Pupils' successes in so many areas of endeavour are strongly promoted by teaching that focuses on responding to the needs of individual pupils throughout the school. Support for pupils with LDD is of high quality.
- 3.13 Teachers possess strong subject knowledge and they have high expectations for pupils' success. Praise and encouragement are used effectively and this adds to pupils' enjoyment. Teachers' questioning skills are good and encourage girls to think critically and to use academic vocabulary with maturity. The best lessons were conducted at a well-planned pace providing intellectual challenge, in which pupils were encouraged to take responsibility for their work. However, in some lessons observed, as the school is aware, whilst teaching was purposeful it lacked variety in approach and did not allow pupils sufficient opportunity to be independent or investigative in their response.
- 3.14 The teachers make use of a variety of excellent resources, including ICT, to support teaching. The library is spacious and stocked with a wide range of reference books as well as fiction. Computer provision is good in the library and pupils said it is a place where they can research course work and begin homework after school. The sports centre, with the grounds and pitches, provides high quality facilities for teaching and learning.
- 3.15 Teachers expect pupils to behave responsibly and to work hard, and they are given every encouragement so to do. Relationships between pupils and teachers are cordial and this creates a pleasant atmosphere for learning.
- 3.16 The quality and style of marking are variable, both between and within departments. It is generally thorough and helps pupils' understanding, making frequent use of praise. Pupils said they are often given useful verbal feedback in lessons, which they find helpful. However, in a number of books and files scrutinised, marking was less thorough, with sparse comments, and little advice on how to improve.
- 3.17 The school's system for monitoring pupils' progress is robust and able to identify readily those pupils whose achievement or approach to work falters. Through standardised assessments, teachers know the capabilities of pupils and build on their prior learning to guide planning. However, insufficient use is made of this information to set individual subject targets for improvement.

## **4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT**

### **4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils**

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent. This is central to the school's aim and reflected in the happy, caring, respectful relationships and strong sense of community awareness that are prevalent throughout the school.
- 4.2 The pupils demonstrate strong spiritual awareness. They have a keen sense of identity, both as individuals and as members of the school community, and they grow in self-esteem and self-awareness, not only through the ethos of the school, but also the aesthetic experiences they enjoy in the creative elements of the curriculum. Pupils are kind and considerate, and value the support of others in the school community. They take full advantage of opportunities, which are often included in assemblies, to explore beliefs and values. Pupils learn about faiths other than their own in religious studies lessons and they visit local places of worship to see for themselves the traditions of others. In lively discussions in the Christian Union, pupils explore how religious beliefs have an impact on people's experiences, enabling them to search for meaning and purpose in their own lives.
- 4.3 Pupils' moral development is excellent. The mutual respect between staff and pupils creates an environment where rules are respected and pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong. They understand and support the high standards of behaviour expected of them and recognise their actions may have consequences for others. An appreciation of the value of truth and honesty is central to the school's culture. Pupils acknowledge a moral responsibility for others and they enter enthusiastically into charity work and fund-raising initiatives for the local and wider community, for example through the 'eco' club and form charities. In debates and presentations, pupils argue issues such as the media's portrayal of the perfect body image, showing a mature understanding of how opinions might be changed by discussion.
- 4.4 Pupils demonstrate excellent social awareness and they grow up to be poised, confident and articulate young women. Sixth-form pupils play an important part in setting the tone for other pupils. They seize opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and for others, for example through prefect and leadership roles in houses, sports teams and organising activities for other pupils. The community cohesion policy provides a secure foundation for pupils to learn acceptance and appreciation of differences within the community. Through the school council, pupils become aware that their views matter and their decisions can make a difference. By representing their form, pupils learn the skills of collaboration and negotiation. In the wider context, pupils show a good understanding of public institutions and services in England.
- 4.5 The cultural development of pupils is excellent. They have a strong appreciation of the origins and practices of their own and other cultures, and they acknowledge cultural diversity. Pupils of all faiths know how to work and live together, and they understand how life may be enriched through religion.

#### **4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety**

- 4.6 Through its policies and practice, the school provides excellent care for the welfare, health and safety of its pupils. The pastoral care arrangements ensure that pupils feel confident, valued and encouraged to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by the school in accordance with its aims.
- 4.7 Form tutors, supported by heads of year and section heads, are at the heart of providing strong support for pupils' achievements and their personal development. Pastoral care is excellent, and effective systems are in place to identify and respond to individual needs. Staff go out of their way to provide appropriate support in a friendly and approachable manner. Any pastoral concerns are given a high priority and are followed up promptly by teachers. The matron, appointed since the last inspection, provides additional counselling and medical support in the medical centre. The 'listening room' offers a welcoming place where a pupil can go to talk through a concern with a member of the sixth form.
- 4.8 Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent, resulting in a high level of trust that encourages pupils to seek help when they need it. Pupils themselves are mutually supportive and look after one another.
- 4.9 Good behaviour and considerate action are evident everywhere. The pupils consider the school rules to be fair and sanctions are used sparingly. The procedures to guard against harassment and bullying operate effectively because they are clear and well known to staff, pupils and parents. Pupils say that unacceptable behaviour, if it should occur, would be dealt with swiftly and constructively.
- 4.10 The safeguarding policy contains all the necessary requirements and is appropriately publicised. Staff have been trained according to their level of responsibility. The attendance and admission registers are properly maintained and are backed up electronically as required.
- 4.11 Arrangements for health and safety are suitably supervised by the health and safety committee. Risk assessments covering all aspects of school life, including off-site visits, are thorough, and measures to reduce risk from fire and other hazards are robust. Fire drills are properly recorded, electrical testing is appropriately carried out and safety documentation is comprehensive. Medical and first aid provision is good, including care for those who are unwell while at school. A satisfactory number of staff have up-to-date first aid qualifications and support the work of the matron. Accidents and all treatments are carefully recorded. The accessibility plan demonstrates how the school will improve educational provision and access for pupils with disabilities. Pupils adopt healthy lifestyles and show an understanding of the importance of diet and regular exercise. The school meals are nutritious and offer plenty of choice.

## **5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

### **5.(a) The quality of governance**

- 5.1 Governors make an excellent contribution to the success of the school and ensure its aims are central to its work.
- 5.2 In all respects, governors strongly oversee the work of the school and support the pupils' standards, achievements and personal development. Through the well-organised committee structure governors gather the information they need to support planning and to monitor and evaluate the work of the school.
- 5.3 Governors have a strong strategic vision for the school's future. Financial management is prudent, and ensures high quality facilities and a good range of resources for teaching and learning. Regular reporting, together with presentations from staff and regular meetings with representatives of the staff common room, ensures that governors have a good insight into the present provision and the future needs of the school, enabling them to give suitable support, advice and encouragement to the school's leadership and management. Attention is given to ensuring that governors have an appropriate range of skills and specialist knowledge. Governors give generously of their time and expertise. They attend training courses for governors in independent schools to keep up-to-date with their responsibilities. The arrangements for the induction of new governors are currently being strengthened.
- 5.4 Governors discharge effectively their responsibilities for child protection and the welfare, health and safety of pupils. Designated governors have responsibility for liaising with the school about child protection and compliance with the regulatory requirements.

### **5.(b) The quality of leadership and management**

- 5.5 The quality of leadership and management is good, with some excellent features. It is well suited to meeting the aims of the school in seeking to achieve excellence and high standards of personal development.
- 5.6 The senior management team (SMT) is a cohesive group with complementary skills. Members provide a clear sense of educational direction and have a shared vision for the future of the school that is shared with all teachers. They are energetic and hard working, setting a tone that benefits the whole school. A strong feature of senior management is consultation, ensuring that all staff feel involved with decision making. A wide range of whole-school policies and procedures underpins the smooth running of the school. Their implementation is systematically monitored by the SMT.
- 5.7 Long- and short-term development planning considers all aspects of improvement and is based on a secure understanding of the school's strengths and areas in need of development. It is reviewed and progress monitored regularly. Analysis of the school's needs draws on the views of governors, staff, pupils and parents, so that a wide range of perspectives is used to form a comprehensive view of the school. Departmental development plans successfully reflect the whole-school priorities.

- 5.8 Overall, heads of department manage their departments well. However, as the school is aware, through initiatives such as the group for developing effective learners and staff training on developing independent thinking skills, there is inconsistency between departments in the monitoring of teaching and learning by middle management and insufficient sharing of the good practice evaluated.
- 5.9 The systems in place for securing, inducting, supporting and developing staff ensure a good balance of high quality staff with a range of expertise and experience. Senior and middle managers evaluate staff performance regularly through the performance management arrangements. Training opportunities to keep up-to-date with curriculum changes are an important feature of staff development. Support staff make an important contribution to the pupils' achievement and personal development through their roles within the school. The administration of the school is highly efficient. The reception of visitors is friendly and welcoming.
- 5.10 All checks on the suitability of governors, staff and volunteers are scrupulously carried out before an appointment is confirmed. The central register of appointments is properly maintained. The shortcomings of the regulatory requirements identified at the time of the last inspection have been addressed. All staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding, welfare, health and safety procedures.

### **5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians**

- 5.11 The relationship between the school and parents is excellent, and strongly supports pupils' achievements and their personal development, in accordance with the school's aims.
- 5.12 The responses of parents who replied to the pre-inspection questionnaire reflected high levels of satisfaction with the education provided. They were particularly complimentary about the curriculum, the range of extra-curricular activities, the promotion of high standards of behaviour and worthwhile attitudes and values, the management of the school and the ease of communicating with it. Almost every parent acknowledged that the information about the school and its policies is readily available. The inspectors agreed with these positive comments. A small number of parents said that the school does not provide worthwhile help for pupils with LDD. The inspectors noted that the school has already put measures in place to address this.
- 5.13 Parents are actively involved with the work and progress of their children. They have numerous opportunities to attend school events; for example, they support sports teams, concerts and drama productions. An exceptionally large number of parents work with teachers to support the D of E and a significant number of others are associated with rowing and the 'eco' award. The Friends of Sir William Perkins's School group, to which all parents belong, organises successful social and fund-raising events for pupils and parents.
- 5.14 Parents of current and prospective pupils are provided with the required information about the school. Communication with parents has improved since greater use has been made of electronic communication. Parents are kept informed about the life and work of the school through the comprehensive parents' handbook, the school calendar, the informative half-termly newsletter and the high quality school magazine. The user friendly website is always accessible with up-to-date news and information, and the school is already developing parents' access to the Virtual

Learning Environment. Regular parents' meetings and two full reports each year, together with termly grade sheets, provide parents with good opportunities to be involved with their children's work and progress. The reports summarise pupils' achievement and their attitude to learning, but not all subjects give specific guidance on what pupils need to do to improve.

- 5.15 Parental concerns are given prompt attention and handled sensitively. Issues that arise are nearly always resolved informally and always treated with care. Any written complaints are dealt with in accordance with the school's complaints procedure and recorded appropriately.

**What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.**

## **INSPECTION EVIDENCE**

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with the chair of governors and one other governor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

### **Inspectors**

Mrs Margaret Banks	Reporting Inspector
Mr Adrian Aylward	Head, GSA school
Mrs Olivia Boyer	Head of International Students, HMC school
Miss Margaret Connell	Former Head, GSA school
Mrs Bridget Windley	Head, IAPS school