



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

ALPHA PREPARATORY SCHOOL

NOVEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Alpha Preparatory School			
DfE number	310/6050			
Registered charity number	455482			
Address	Alpha Preparatory School 21 Hindes Road Harrow Middlesex HA1 1SH			
Telephone number	020 8427 1471			
Email address	sec@alpha.harrow.sch.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Christopher Trinidad			
Chair of governors	Mr Ian Nunn			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils	157			
	Boys	79	Girls	78
	EYFS	34	Juniors	123
Inspection dates	23 to 24 November 2016			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

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

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Richard Johnson	Reporting inspector
Mrs Janet Watts	Team inspector (Deputy head (academic), IAPS school)
Mr Jason Whiskerd	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Alpha Preparatory School is a co-educational day school for pupils aged between three and eleven. It was founded on its present site in 1895, and occupies two adjacent Victorian houses in a residential area of Harrow, north London. In 1950 it became a non-profit company and charitable trust. Current parents can become shareholders, who then elect a board of governors to oversee the school. The current headmaster was appointed in 2012.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has relocated its Nursery onto the main site. It has increased the provision for French, art, sport and learning support teaching, and activities for the more able pupils. The school also provides some additional extra-curricular activities and clubs.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to provide a broad and balanced curriculum, with priority given to literacy, numeracy and science. It seeks to provide a happy, stable and disciplined environment in which all children can learn and realise their full potential both academically and socially, by encouraging a sense of responsibility and mutual respect. The school strives to help children develop a pride in their work, their appearance and their environment, and to teach good manners and the need to accept responsibility for their own actions. It aspires to adhere to the school's Christian tradition but at the same time develop an understanding and respect for the beliefs of others.

About the pupils

- 1.4 The school had 157 pupils on roll at the time of the inspection; 79 boys and 78 girls. Of these, 34 are in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Pupils come from families with a range of professional and business backgrounds in the local area, and are predominately of Asian heritage.
- 1.5 The ability profile of the school is above the national average, with a wide spread of abilities represented. No pupils have an education, health and care plan or a statement of special educational needs. The school has identified 27 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexic tendencies and speech and language concerns, 1 of whom receives additional specialist help. English is an additional language (EAL) for 18 pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. Also, 1 pupil receives additional specialist EAL support for this aspect of their learning. The school has identified 12 pupils as the more able in the its population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for 5 other pupils as the result of their special talents in sport, drama, music and art.
- 1.6 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.7 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in November 2010. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Continue to develop the use of information and communication technology (ICT) across the school, including the EYFS.
 - Consider ways in which pupils can take greater responsibility for the assessment of their own work.
 - Ensure that pupils have the opportunity to improve their artistic skills to match their achievements in other subjects.
- 1.8 The school has successfully met all the recommendations of the previous inspection. Further detail is given in the main text of the report.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils are notably successful in gaining entry into selective senior schools in both the independent and maintained sectors.
- Pupils are highly articulate and have excellent communication skills as a result of the school recognising that some pupils' home background can create underlying language issues and consequently affording prominence to developing their communication skills.
- Their numeracy skills are outstanding. The school recognises and nurtures pupils' talents in this area, and teachers provide frequent opportunities to use and apply these in other subjects.
- Pupils apply themselves well to their learning, maintain their concentration and undertake almost all activities with enthusiasm.
- In line with the recommendations of the previous inspection, pupils display a strong ability to assess their own work, and their artistic and ICT skills are stronger.
- Pupils' independent learning and research skills are not as well developed as their numeracy and communication skills, as opportunities to practise these are more limited.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils understand their own strengths, and display confidence in themselves and pride in their accomplishments. This is the result of the school making effective use of praise to develop pupils' self-esteem and enabling them to share their successes.
- Pupils generally have strong sense of perseverance and enjoy taking on challenges. They respond positively if they make mistakes and endeavour to apply any advice that they are given.
- Pupils have a strong moral outlook and a respect for both the rules of their school and the laws of the country.
- The school's multicultural nature is valued by pupils. They display no prejudice, are genuinely interested in each other's traditions and enjoy sharing their different celebrations.
- Pupils feel that they are extremely well prepared for their next stage of education, and senior pupils have notably positive attitudes to their forthcoming challenges.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- Ensuring that leaders have sufficient time to monitor and support teaching staff, in order to maintain and develop these high standards.
- Providing greater opportunities for independent learning in lessons.
- Providing additional opportunities for extra-curricular activities to allow pupils, particularly the younger ones, to develop their skills and interests.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils develop high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all of their key areas of learning. The school as a result is successful in meeting its aim of providing a broad and balanced curriculum, with priority given to literacy, numeracy and science. Older pupils are notably successful in gaining entry into selective senior schools in both the independent and maintained sectors, and regularly gain scholarships. This success is due to the staff's understanding of and a curriculum tailored to the entry requirements. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire felt that the range of subjects is suitable for their children.
- 3.3 Pupils are highly articulate and have strong communication skills developed through, for example, role-playing or writing in role during a humanities topic, and their written work demonstrates an improving fluency and use of appropriate vocabulary. Younger pupils in an English lesson synthesised information, using highlighters to pick out key features of correspondence. Those pupils with EAL make rapid progress in this aspect of their learning, which can be seen in their reading and drama activities, and in public speaking examination results. The school recognises that some pupils' home backgrounds can create underlying language issues and it consequently affords prominence to developing their communication skills. Children in the EYFS also make strong progress; the setting has a considerable focus on communication as staff recognise this is key to learning in other areas. They have a strong grounding in the sounds which make up words, and use these effectively to tackle unfamiliar vocabulary.
- 3.4 Numeracy skills across the school are highly developed due to the school recognising and nurturing pupils' talents in this area. Numeracy has a high prominence in the school and teachers provide frequent opportunities to use and apply this in other subjects, as observed in a science lesson when pupils measured relative distances and the size of objects representing the solar system. Children in the EYFS have an excellent knowledge of shapes such as triangles and rectangles, can use mathematical vocabulary such as 'angle' and know that squares have four sides of equal length.
- 3.5 Pupils apply themselves well to almost all areas of their learning, maintain their concentration and undertake almost all activities with great enthusiasm. They are happy to work either independently or co-operatively due to the highly encouraging staff, who enjoy an excellent rapport with pupils. Pupils take leadership in their own learning which is encouraged by staff, and the older pupils have a mature recognition of the significance of their forthcoming examinations and apply themselves diligently in preparation.
- 3.6 Pupils develop excellent ICT skills as a result of the challenging curriculum. They can apply these in other subjects to support and enhance their learning, meeting a recommendation of the previous inspection. Younger pupils can draw and manipulate mathematical shapes confidently using a computer programme. Nursery children display strong fine motor skills as they confidently manipulate the computer mouse to complete a task and print their own work. Pupils' linguistic skills are good, and enhanced by a language exchange with a French school. Standards in art are now stronger, as the school has implemented another recommendation of the previous inspection by providing specialist workshops with visiting artists. Vibrant and colourful displays of pupils' art can be found throughout all parts of the school.

- 3.7 Results in National Curriculum tests taken at the age of 11 between 2013 and 2015 are far above the national average. Results in standardised tests of attainment in English and mathematics have been above the national average. These results, supported by evidence from lesson observations, work scrutiny and interviews with pupils indicate that pupils make at least good and sometimes outstanding progress in relation to the average for pupils of similar abilities. Achievements show no variance between different ethnic groups and boys and girls.
- 3.8 The more able pupils have high levels of achievement due to the challenging work provided for them and a strong desire to succeed. They are perceptive and understand that not everything should be taken at face value. For example older pupils compared and evaluated reports on the sinking of the Mary Rose, making insightful observations about the motivation of various reporters. A very small minority of parents indicated in their questionnaire responses that their children do not make good progress and that their educational needs are not met effectively. Inspection evidence does not support this view. The inspection judged that more able pupils and those with EAL or SEND make good and sometimes rapid progress as a result of effective identification, targeted individual support, and teaching strategies and interventions well-suited to their needs.
- 3.9 In the EYFS, most children reach and a few exceed the expected level of development for their age. This represents good and often rapid progress, as they have a wide variety of starting points upon entry. Children are usually secure in all seven areas of learning as staff plan varied and interesting activities, and keep parents well informed through contact books so that they can support and share their children's learning experiences. Staff know children well, target interventions promptly and are adept at ensuring that their individual needs are met. They also make highly effective use of teaching assistants to support children's learning.
- 3.10 Pupils display a strong ability to assess their own work and constructively critique that of their peers. In line with recommendation of the previous inspection, staff provide regular opportunities for this and make effective use of learning objectives and success criteria so that pupils can be involved in their own learning. This encourages pupils to recognise their own learning styles. In their English books, one pupil wrote 'I will use the word 'said' less' and then found numerous imaginative alternatives. Pupils' independent learning and research skills are mostly good, as observed in research projects. These are not as well developed as their numeracy and communication skills as opportunities to practise these are more limited in some timetabled lessons.
- 3.11 Achievement in music is high due to enthusiastic and knowledgeable teaching, and effective use of the specialist facilities. Many pupils play musical instruments, and all enjoy and benefit from drama lessons and productions. Pupils gain outstanding individual results in graded music examinations. The school has a successful chess club and pupils have achieved excellent results in national general knowledge quizzes and mathematics challenges. The school was a finalist in a national science competition, where pupils were able to meet and talk to an astronaut.
- 3.12 Pupils' sporting achievement is good, despite the constraints of the school site and its urban location. The school encourages and supports individual talent and has some strong individual sports results, such as pupils earning places in county teams for cricket, tennis and swimming. Inspection evidence supports the view of the small minority of pupils who feel that the range of extra-curricular activities is limited, even allowing for the small size of the school, which restricts pupils' achievements in extra-curricular areas.

3.13 The pupils' high levels of achievement are supported by well-planned teaching which demonstrates a strong awareness of their individual strengths and areas for development. Teachers' diligent and informative marking allows pupils to recognise and address areas for development. The use of specialist teachers also makes a strong contribution, as is evident in pupils' outstanding scientific skills. Inspection evidence concurs with the very small minority of pupils who felt that lessons occasionally lack stimulus. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' progress through the effective use of assessment data, and ensure that steps are taken to address any relative weaknesses. They currently have limited time allocated to carry out this role and to support teachers in maintaining these high standards.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is highly successful in meeting its aim to help pupils develop a pride in their work, their appearance and their environment, and to teach good manners and the need to accept responsibility for their own actions. It has a tangible sense of community and a consideration for all its members. In a recent anti-bullying week poster, a pupil wrote that 'Bullying makes a dent in our heart'. This is reflected in the questionnaire responses; all pupils felt they are encouraged to respect other people, and a very large majority agreed that the school successfully promotes their understanding of other faiths and cultures.
- 4.3 Pupils understand their own strengths, display confidence in themselves and have pride in their accomplishments as the school makes effective use of praise to develop their self-esteem and enables them to share their successes. 'Performance Tuesdays' allow pupils to share their skill or talent at whatever level. Pupils make effective use of personal targets to reflect upon their learning. Older pupils demonstrate considerable resilience in the face of potential examination pressure, whilst Nursery children remained focused and untroubled during a play rehearsal where several key characters were absent. Pupils can converse confidently with visitors, and show a tangible pride in their school. Children in the EYFS display strong social skills; they are friendly and interested in visitors to the setting and are keen to share their knowledge.
- 4.4 Pupils generally show a clear sense of perseverance and enjoy taking on challenges as staff are quick to encourage them. They respond positively if they make mistakes and endeavour to apply any advice they receive, which can be seen in their response to marking. Pupils work well collaboratively, and support each other in completing challenges and sharing their mutual success. Teachers provide regular opportunities for them to do this and are quick to challenge occasional selfish behaviour.
- 4.5 Pupils have a strong moral outlook and respect for both the rules of their school and the laws of the country. Standards of behaviour are high, both in and around the school. Pupils are exceptionally well-mannered and readily accept responsibility for their actions. Younger pupils were quick to highlight the dangers of driving whilst using a mobile telephone, whilst older pupils had a mature debate about why laws vary between different countries and discussed hypothetical legal situations with visiting justices of the peace. Pupils display great enthusiasm for the system of rewards, such as house points and 'Alpha Shield'. Almost all parents feel the school actively promotes good behaviour.
- 4.6 Pupils' clear sense of justice is evident in their questionnaire responses; a quarter of pupils felt they are not treated fairly. Discussions with pupils and staff revealed that this largely stems from the uneven pattern of boys' and girls' sports fixtures and perceived inequalities over the appointments to positions of responsibility for older pupils. These are both areas that the school has already recognised and is taking steps to address. Children in the EYFS display equally high standards of behaviour and have positive attitudes towards their peers, which is due to staff having high expectations and modelling behaviour well, talking of kindness and the need to listen to others. Staff emphasise, praise and reward good behaviour through the 'Star of Week' and 'House Point Champions'.

- 4.7 The school's multicultural nature is valued by pupils, who show no prejudice and are genuinely interested in each other's traditions and enjoy sharing their different celebrations. This successfully meets the school's aim to adhere to the school's Christian tradition but at the same time develop an understanding and respect for the beliefs of others. Pupils enjoy the regular visits to mosques, temples and other local places of worship as well as assemblies and themed events. Nursery children display an evident interest and respect for the Christian festival of Christmas, but also enjoy celebrating those of other faiths such as Diwali and Eid. Teachers in the EYFS plan carefully to ensure that children develop a knowledge and understanding of a wide variety of other faiths. Older pupils take great pride in laying a wreath as part of the national ceremony at the Cenotaph on Armistice Day each year. All pupils understand the values inherent in modern society, as the school plans methodically to ensure that these are assimilated and also encourages a recognition and respect for those with disabilities.
- 4.8 Pupils display a sensitive awareness of the consequences of their decisions and readily follow instructions, recognising the importance of such to their well-being and academic progress. Staff provide opportunities for them to reflect, and many decisions are taken on a democratic basis where the opinions of all are valued. In group work, younger pupils demonstrated that they understood the importance of reaching a consensus when deciding how to conduct a fair test in a science experiment on friction.
- 4.9 Pupils are highly reflective in both assemblies and religious studies lessons, considering their own religious beliefs and readily identifying the similarities between different faiths. They recognise the significance of prayer in their lives and show their respect for and participate respectfully in traditions, including those that are not part of their own faith and heritage.
- 4.10 Older pupils are very keen to take on positions of responsibility. In response, the school provides many positions of leadership and responsibility which include heads of school, monitors, librarians and digital leaders. The school council was excited by the opportunity to manage its own budget, and took great care over its spending.
- 4.11 Pupils demonstrate a strong awareness of personal safety and the importance of a healthy lifestyle. Older pupils were quick to share their knowledge of healthy eating during the inspection, and all pupils understand road safety and are confident about staying safe online. This is enhanced through the school's activities and themed weeks, including 'road safety awareness week' and 'online safety week'. Healthy lifestyle topics are a significant part of personal social, health and economic education lessons, preparing pupils for adolescence and later life. Pupils value the role of staff mentors to support them if they have concerns, and show a strong awareness of safety in sports, science and craft activities.
- 4.12 Pupils readily recognise their responsibility to contribute to wider society. Often guided and led by the school council, they raise significant amounts for national charities, respond promptly to appeals for natural disasters and recently supported schools in Cambodia and Uganda.

- 4.13 Pupils feel that they are extremely well prepared for their next stage of education, and senior pupils have notably positive attitudes to their forthcoming challenges. This is due to the school ensuring that pupils have effective personal organisation and providing specific courses to increase their personal safety and hazard awareness, as many will commute to schools across north London. Residential trips in their final year enhance pupils' teamwork skills, resilience and personal development, and their interview skills are strengthened through specific training sessions. They display high levels of general knowledge and understanding of the issues affecting wider society due to the school affording prominence to the discussion of current affairs. This is supported by a range of visits, including number 10 Downing Street. Children in the EYFS are well prepared for their next stage as staff focus on developing strong listening and social skills, and due to them having many opportunities to become familiar with their new teachers.