



Progress Monitoring Inspection Report

St Helen's School Northwood

November 2023

School's details

School name	St Helen's School			
DfE number	312/6004			
Registered charity number	312762			
Address	St Helen's School Eastbury Road Northwood Middlesex HA6 3AS			
Telephone number	01923 843210			
Email address	enquiries@sthelens.london			
Interim headmistress	Mrs Tracy Pollard			
Chair of governors	Mr Philip Young			
Proprietor	St Helen's School Northwood			
Age Range	3 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	1227			
	EYFS	100	Juniors	369
	Seniors	569	Sixth Form	189
Date of inspection	29 to 30 November 2023			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 St Helen's School is an independent day school registered as a single sex school for female pupils. It is situated in Northwood, north-west London. The senior and prep schools occupy separate buildings. The prep school includes an early years setting. The school is a registered charity governed by a council of trustees. The school has 126 pupils who require support for their special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are 400 pupils who speak English as an additional language. The school's previous inspection was a non-routine inspection in December 2022. Since then, an interim head has been appointed.

Purpose of the inspection

- 1.2 This was an unannounced progress monitoring inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) to check that the school has fully implemented the action plan submitted following the non-routine inspection on 12 December 2022. The inspection focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs) and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework. Action points from the previous inspection were in the areas of safeguarding and leadership and management.
- 1.3 As a result of concerns raised following the commissioning of this inspection, it focused additionally on pupils' spiritual, moral and social development. The inspection concentrated almost exclusively on the senior school.

Regulations which were the focus of the inspection	Team judgements
Part 2, paragraph 5 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils)	Met
Part 3, paragraph 7 (safeguarding)	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management)	Met

2. Inspection findings

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [ISSR Part 2, paragraph 5]

- 2.1 The school meets the standard.
- 2.2 Governors and school leaders actively promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. The school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme successfully promotes further tolerance and harmony between different cultural traditions by enabling pupils to acquire an appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures. The school's ethos encourages respect for other people, paying particular regard to those of, *inter alia*, different gender, sexual orientation, national background or religion. Pupils say that in this context they benefit from joint activities with male pupils at another local independent school.
- 2.3 Leaders are aware that current events in the Middle East continue to concern some of its pupils. As a consequence, leaders have taken effective strategic decisions when speaking with pupils in assemblies, tutor groups and lessons or communicating with parents. Teaching staff were briefed in detail by senior leaders on how to discuss sensitive issues with pupils, and in particular they were directed to encourage pupils to seek support. Pupils reported to inspectors that they had responded to this encouragement, and that they had found discussions reassuring and politically neutral. In this way governors and leaders have taken, and are taking, such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that where political issues are brought to the attention of pupils, they are offered a balanced presentation.
- 2.4 Pupils offered different and nuanced views when discussing the school's use of language in its guidance and statements. While some commented that on a very few occasions the school's phraseology might have been interpreted by a small minority as showing a slight imbalance, they thought that overwhelmingly the school's approach has been impartial and has focused on the human impact of current events. They welcomed the school's intention to introduce modules that analyse in more detail the historical basis for current events in the Middle East and conflicts in other parts of the world. They felt that the school's intention will give them opportunity for further discussion.
- 2.5 In line with the requirements of the standard, the school has taken sufficiently strong and clear action over the distribution of promotional material relating to current or political events. Its actions ensure that pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.6 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.7 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.8 The school meets the standard.
- 2.9 Implementation of all aspects of the school's safeguarding procedures is effective in providing appropriate support to ensure the welfare of pupils, including children in the EYFS and those pupils with SEND.

- 2.10 The action points from the previous inspection have been implemented effectively. Governors have commissioned two independent reviews of safeguarding arrangements and have acted promptly in response to the recommendations made. Governors provide suitable strategic challenge to senior leaders. Governors are now trained appropriately in safeguarding. All governors have read and understand statutory guidance and completed additional external training. A governor with appropriate expertise maintains contact with the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and annually conducts a formal annual review of the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements on behalf of the governors. This is in addition to regular update sessions and reports to each governor meeting. Since the previous inspection more governors with relevant safeguarding experience have been appointed.
- 2.11 Safeguarding procedures are implemented to safeguard children at risk and those in particular need. Staff show effective understanding of their responsibilities, including with regard to child-on-child abuse or sexual harassment, whether in or out of school. Staff show appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policy and safeguarding procedures and are confident to use them. They have a suitable knowledge of the thresholds for reporting issues or incidents. Staff are aware of who to go to if they have a concern or receive a disclosure and are confident to do so. The procedures for reporting and recording low-level concerns have been revised effectively. The record of such incidents confirm that these are used appropriately, and that staff understand the relevant thresholds. Staff understand that they can make a direct referral to children's services if necessary. They take appropriate action when appropriate.
- 2.12 Pupils receive suitable help to address risks and such help prevents issues escalating. The DSL acts on and refers to appropriate agencies the early signs of risk or need, including in relation to pupil anxiety. Since the previous inspection, the DSL has been given the independence required to make decisions in the best interests of pupils. In particular, arrangements for handling allegations against staff, senior leaders or the governors, or potential misconduct, have been revised effectively. These are included in safeguarding procedures; they include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). These are understood by staff. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant statutory bodies if circumstances require it. Discussions with school leaders and local safeguarding partners confirm an effective dialogue that further promotes the needs of pupils. Records of discussions, assessment of risk in relation to pupils or staff, and the reasons for decisions made are detailed and up to date.
- 2.13 The DSL ensures the school listens to the views of individual pupils as required by *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. This is confirmed in written evidence from safeguarding records which show that pupils receive a response if they raise a concern and that action is taken if needed. Risk to pupils is properly considered, and effective formal assessments drawn up for individual pupils where necessary. Pupils feel safe in school and the local area. They show understanding of what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety. Monitoring of the use of technology is effective. The physical and mental health of all pupils involved in any incident are given a high priority.
- 2.14 The safeguarding policy gives contact details as required for local safeguarding partners. Suitable recruitment procedures for staff are outlined within the safeguarding policy and detailed in a separate recruitment policy. Leaders responsible for recruitment are integrated into the school's safeguarding structure and meet weekly with the interim head and DSL. The training for those with specific safeguarding responsibilities is in line with local requirements and statutory advice and is up to date. Training in safeguarding for teaching and non-teaching staff is of sufficient quality and frequency.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.15 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34]

- 2.16 The school meets the standard.
- 2.17 Senior leaders and governors demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are consistently met, and the wellbeing of pupils is actively promoted. The school has fully implemented its action plan and governors monitor compliance with regulations appropriately.

3. Regulatory action points

- 3.1 For the regulations which were the focus of this inspection, the school meets all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors visited the school for two days. They held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair of governors and safeguarding governor. They visited different areas of the school and talked with groups of pupils from most year groups in the senior school. Individual pupils used opportunities provided to talk to the inspectors privately. Inspectors scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.