

School inspection report

7 November 2023 to 9 November 2023

St Edmund's College and Prep

Old Hall Green
Ware
Hertfordshire
SG11 1DS

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. Governors and senior leaders provide a clear vision for delivering the aims of the school, reinforced through the Catholic, and inclusive, ethos.
2. Leaders ensure that the school is highly successful in actively encouraging pupils to explore the spiritual and moral aspects of their lives. As a result, pupils appreciate a sense of history and embrace the deeply rooted values of the school.
3. Children make good progress in the vibrant early years setting. Leaders' planning ensures that activities are adapted to take account of children's emerging needs and levels of development. As a result, children are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
4. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum is suitable and broad, and that teaching is effective. As a result, pupils make good progress in the prep school and achieve well. In the senior school, pupils of all abilities, including those with higher prior attainment, make good progress. They achieve success in external examinations that often exceeds expectations in relation to their starting points.
5. The numerous enrichment activities that have been set up to support the curriculum, in both the prep and senior school, actively promote pupils' personal and social development. Leaders have successfully initiated a review of the enrichment programmes and routines in the sixth form in order to promote further the development of pupils' independence. Pupils are keen to engage further with this process.
6. School leaders are committed to broadening pupils' interests and experiences by providing a very wide range of activities for pupils of all ages. As a result, pupils achieve highly in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), the Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme, music, performing arts and sport. The wealth of opportunity and the appeal of these programmes is such that pupils would benefit from more support to map the skills acquired and ensure a balance in their choice of activities over time.
7. Governors and leaders, including the chaplaincy, embrace every opportunity to emphasise the value of service to others. The extended senior leadership team shows a deep understanding of the importance of volunteering as a means of promoting pupils' social awareness and development. Leaders' decision-making and planning ensure that pupils of all ages have numerous opportunities to take part in service activities or charitable work. Pupils show great initiative, responsibility and empathy for those less fortunate when selflessly committing to the wide range of voluntary activity and charitable work evident both within and beyond the school community.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards:

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- review the management of the co-curricular programme to enable the tracking of pupils' involvement over time
- build on recent initiatives to increase opportunities for sixth form pupils to develop their independence.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors and leaders at all levels in the school are successful in promoting the school's aims. Governors work closely with school leaders and provide appropriate challenge to ensure that they create an environment in which pupils' wellbeing is always prioritised.
9. Leadership roles and responsibilities are well defined. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities well across all areas of school life and ensure that staff training is frequent and well-planned. As a result, policies are implemented effectively across the school. Governors and leaders undertake comprehensive self-evaluation to develop a clear vision for the school's future development.
10. Leaders have developed a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the need of pupils of all ages. A well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme includes all required elements of relationships and sex education (RSE). Senior leaders have rigorous oversight of academic areas. This has allowed strategies to provide challenge for higher prior attainers to be successfully implemented. Initiatives to promote consistency in the quality of teaching and learning are being shared across the curriculum. As a result, pupils make consistently good, and often rapid, progress across all subject areas and in all phases of the school.
11. Leaders, from the early years to the sixth form, are extremely successful in actively promoting respect for diversity within the school community and in wider society. Governors and leaders are successful in ensuring that teaching encourages pupils to celebrate their own cultures, beliefs and identities.
12. The active promotion of wellbeing and positive outcomes for pupils has been enhanced by additional staffing within the wider safeguarding team. This has provided a strong focus on mental health and wellbeing that is much valued by parents and pupils.
13. Leaders take a thorough and proportionate approach to the identification of risk and its management. This includes the successful management of contextual risks, including any unintended consequences such as those arising from adjustments to the curriculum. A robust approach to the mitigation of risk allows the school to offer an extremely wide range of stimulating on-site activities, as well as trips and residential visits locally, within the UK and overseas. Pupils successfully and safely take part in potentially high-risk activities, such as ski trips and DofE expeditions. On-site facilities such as the swimming pool are managed well.
14. Leaders engage effectively with pupils and parents through website portals, virtual team rooms, student committees, seminars and regular surveys. Academic and residential staff are readily available to parents and any concerns are addressed promptly. Complaints from parents are responded to appropriately and within the stated time frames. Parents receive helpful and informative reports on their child's progress and leaders ensure that other relevant information is made available via the school's website. The requirements of the Equalities Act are met by the provisions outlined in a suitable accessibility plan.
15. Governors and leaders ensure that the boarding houses have a central role in the life of the school and that boarders take part in the wealth of activities offered, alongside day pupils. Boarding leaders give clear direction to residential staff. Leaders provide staff with regular training to ensure that they have the necessary skills and knowledge to actively promote the welfare of boarding pupils.

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

16. The broad curriculum, alongside the extensive co-curriculum and wide range of extra-curricular activities, ensure that the school is highly successful in its aim to recognise each pupil's unique combination of talents and to educate the whole person.
17. Children's learning is well-supported in the stimulating early years setting. As a result of effective curriculum planning and skilled teaching, children make good progress in their learning and build a secure foundation for their future. Children can spell words, read short sentences by blending sounds together and write correctly formed letters with confidence. Teachers make highly effective use of outside spaces and the woodland area. As a result, children in the Nursery and Reception develop their self-confidence and physical skills as they explore the natural environment safely.
18. Throughout the prep school, stimulating teaching provides appropriate challenge and support for pupils. Teachers use assessment effectively to help them plan what they will teach next to build on pupils' prior knowledge. Appropriate individual and class targets are agreed and acted upon. Pupils reflect on their learning and this helps them to make at least good progress from their starting points. By the time they leave the prep school, most pupils attain above the average in English and mathematics.
19. In the senior school, pupils make good progress in their learning. The large majority achieve grades at GCSE and A level that are at least in line with, and often above, those predicted from their starting points. Teachers plan lessons well and support pupils' learning using a variety of resources and the application of an appropriate assessment framework. Recent initiatives across the curriculum instil a 'everyone can' attitude amongst pupils.
20. The needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified promptly. Pupils are supported in lessons by well-trained teaching assistants in the prep school and by the well-informed support of teachers in the senior school. Staff working with pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) provide appropriate levels of support to ensure that pupils can quickly access the full curriculum. As a result, pupils who have SEND and those who speak EAL make good progress.
21. Leaders have developed an extensive enrichment and extra-curricular programme that includes the popular 'period 7' that offers a choice of activities including, for example, drumming, astronomy, Model United Nations and 'Faith in Action'. In the prep school, pupils engage in debating, performing arts and sports clubs as well as a combined activity programme that includes choices such as arts, crafts and swimming. The large number of day trips and residential visits allow pupils of all ages to develop social skills when living and working together. In the last year, pupils have developed their self-confidence on adventure trips to France and in the Atlas Mountains of Morocco. Sports teams have competed successfully abroad. However, pupils require greater monitoring and guidance to ensure that they benefit fully from their commitment to the extensive co-curricular programme.
22. Leaders have created many opportunities for pupils to pursue excellence, or simply participate for enjoyment, in a range of sports, music and performing arts activities. Pupils achieve highly in choral and classical music and in the performing arts, including recent acclaimed production of Rutter's *Requiem*. Leaders engage professional companies to support musical theatre productions, which enhances the quality of performances.

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

23. The well-planned PSHE programme is responsive to the needs of pupils at different ages, from Reception to the sixth form, and incorporates relationship and sex education. Staff regularly review the programme to incorporate topical issues and take account of the views of pupils and parents. For example, recent sessions have focused on vaping, misogyny and, in the prep school, on internet safety. Topics are revisited throughout the year to build on pupils' prior understanding. Pupils develop a strong understanding of a wide range of issues and they remember key messages well.
24. Pupils of all faiths or none appreciate the focus on spirituality nurtured by the chaplaincy and rooted in the day-to-day life of the school. Pupils receive sympathetic guidance, whether seeking a more formal involvement with the life of the church or support for an aspect of their personal lives.
25. Staff implement the school's behaviour policies consistently. As a result, pupils are very well-behaved, showing great respect for each other and for adults. Appropriate supervision ensures that, if problems arise, they are dealt with swiftly. Instances of bullying are rare and the school takes appropriate action if they do occur. The school actively promotes tolerance and mutual respect for all and, as a result, pupils are accepting of each other's differences and celebrate the diversity of the community.
26. The broad physical education programme nurtures pupils' physical fitness effectively. The programme successfully promotes sporting excellence for the most talented, as well as involvement and enjoyment for all pupils. The school's aspiring athletes programme has supported pupils to compete at the highest levels in a range of sports, including golf, football, hockey, rugby, equestrianism and Gaelic football. Pupils participate with enjoyment in a wide range of sports, helping them to develop self-esteem and confidence as well as teamwork and social skills.
27. Governors and leaders ensure that the school premises and accommodation, including for boarders, are well maintained and that health and safety practices are implemented and monitored effectively. External agencies are engaged to ensure that effective precautions are taken to mitigate against the risk from fire. Evacuation drills are held termly both during the school day and in boarding time. Attendance and admissions registers are maintained well. Staff carefully check the destinations of pupils who leave the school before they are removed from the register.
28. Well-qualified staff in the medical centre and prep school infirmary are available throughout the week. They provide care for day pupils and boarders who become unwell or have specific health needs. Effective liaison between residential staff, teachers and the medical centre ensures that boarders' health needs are met. Boarders receive a comprehensive induction programme when they arrive, including information about the arrangements for laundry, meals, the preparation of snacks and the security of personal possessions.
29. The school places a high priority on supporting good mental health and emotional wellbeing. In the prep school, pupils have access to a quiet area where they can come to talk as well as a more formal programme run by well-qualified mental health professionals, to encourage pupils to discuss any issues that arise. Lola, the prep school therapy dog, is a highly valued member of the wellbeing team. In the senior school, the newly developed 'virtual well-being hub' supports tutors, boarding staff and the safeguarding team to actively promote the emotional wellbeing of pupils. Pupils are

very well cared for and supported by staff in all aspects of their development, which they appreciate. Boarders can contact the school's independent listener, if required.

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

30. Leaders have created an environment that strongly supports pupils' social development. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to develop leadership and teamwork skills, as well as a selfless attitude to service.
31. Pupils understand and respect the rules of law in society and clearly distinguish between right and wrong. Pupils are keen to engage with democratic processes and they understand the power of collective decision-making. This is illustrated by their impactful role in devising and running events within the house system and their contribution to school improvement through the student council. Pupils develop financial awareness during their numerous fundraising initiatives as well as within the economic units of the PHSE programme.
32. From the early years to the sixth form, pupils display huge energy and commitment when engaging in voluntary activities, service or charitable enterprises. Leaders support the ethos of the school by actively promoting the importance of service within and beyond the school. Pupils develop leadership and teamwork skills when initiating and running many imaginative events to support their charities. For example, younger pupils arrange cake sales for charities and a talent show during charity week. Older pupils take part in colour runs, charity dog shows and collect Easter eggs for victims of abuse in a local refuge.
33. Children in the early years develop a knowledge of the importance of caring for the environment, such as learning how a pile of logs provides shelter for bugs. In the prep school, pupils volunteer willingly to help with jobs around the school, such as litter-picking. Music and performing arts groups visit care homes and a garden centre to perform for the local community. Pupils embrace a range of leadership responsibilities including being a prefect, house or team captain, or a mentor. Pupils willingly undertake service activities in the local area or further afield, for example, assisting with development projects in rural India. Pupils' deep commitment to service is fully supported by the work of the chaplaincy.
34. Pupils have many opportunities to develop new interests and explore their skills and talents. They are supported to make informed decisions about their subject options or higher education pathways by well-planned careers programmes. Visiting professionals and careers fairs provide impartial advice and guidance that is much appreciated by pupils, especially in the sixth form. Pupils in Year 9 develop a range of life skills, such as shopping on a budget, in the 'St Edmund's Award', that help them to face the challenges of life beyond school. Leaders have acted recently to review sixth form routines including, for example, dress codes and private study arrangements. Pupils welcome these initiatives and are keen to engage with staff in the development of the enrichment programme to further support their transition to life beyond school.
35. Pupils enjoy many opportunities to learn about other cultures and to reflect on the impact of world events, including frequent cultural diversity days. As a result, pupils develop an informed appreciation of other cultures and religions.

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

36. Arrangements to promote the welfare of pupils are effective and have been strengthened by the expansion of the wider safeguarding team. Governors and leaders have increased the time and resources available, such as the development of the virtual wellbeing hub, to ensure that safeguarding procedures are secure. Safeguarding leaders promote a watchful child protection culture and have an effective relationship with external agencies. Advice is sought and acted upon. Referrals to children's services, local area designated leads and the police are made in a timely manner.
37. Leaders ensure new staff and volunteers receive a thorough induction in safeguarding procedures and all staff receive regular update training. As a result, staff and volunteers have secure knowledge and understanding of safeguarding issues and procedures, including about online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation. Leaders have established robust procedures to monitor and filter access to the internet and the use of information technology systems.
38. Pupils feel safe at school. Staff are trained to recognise potential safeguarding issues. They report any safeguarding concerns and these are acted upon promptly. The safeguarding team maintains careful records of concerns. These are monitored to identify any patterns so that actions can be taken quickly to address them. The extended safeguarding team includes mental health leaders in both the prep school and senior school. This has a positive impact on pupils' wellbeing. Pupils, including those in boarding, have a number of responsible adults that they can speak with, including those independent of the school. Pupils know how to report any concerns, with respect to their own or others' welfare.
39. The school's safeguarding policy is updated regularly. It has regard to the most recent guidance, and is implemented effectively. The staff code of conduct and guidelines for residential staff are appropriate and are regularly reviewed to reflect the context of the school. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers and governors. A suitable record of appointments is accurately maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	St Edmund's College
Department for Education number	919/6115
Registered charity number	311073
Address	St Edmund's College Old Hall Green Ware SG11 1DS
Email address	enquiries@stedmundscollege.org
Website	stedmundscollege.org
Chair	Rev Paul Raynes
Proprietor	Roman Catholic Diocese of Westminster
Headteacher	Mr Matthew Mostyn
Age range	3 to 19
Number of pupils	870
Number of boarding pupils	104
Date of previous inspection	27 November 2019

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.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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