

School inspection report

24 to 26 September 2024

St Helen's School

Eastbury Road

Northwood

Middlesex

HA6 3AS

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	5
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	8
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	10
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	11
SAFEGUARDING	12
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	12
SCHOOL DETAILS	13
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	14
INSPECTION DETAILS	15

Summary of inspection findings

1. School leaders, supported by governors who know the school well, promote a supportive and inclusive environment where pupils feel valued and well cared for. Since the previous inspection there have been changes in the senior leadership team. Newly appointed leaders have self-evaluated and identified areas for development. Governors maintain a thorough oversight of the school's provision, including of the areas for development identified by leaders.
2. Pupils, in all sections of the school, follow a broad and balanced curriculum, suited to their ages and abilities. Schemes of work provide appropriate challenge and content for pupils who enjoy their learning.
3. Typically, teachers set high expectations of learning and behaviour in lessons. In response, pupils develop effective learning habits and make good progress. However, in the prep school some teachers do not always adapt the pace and content of their lessons to the needs and prior attainment of pupils as effectively as elsewhere in the school. In these atypical cases, progress is more limited.
4. Leaders and teachers in the prep and senior school assess pupils regularly and track their progress but there is some inconsistency in how effectively different departments use assessment data to improve pupils' progress.
5. The requirements of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are suitably identified and effective provision is in place to support them in their classes. The school effectively supports the small number of pupils who enter the school with limited English so that they improve their language skills.
6. An extensive programme of co-curricular activities across the whole school allows pupils to find and pursue new interests, develop their skills and achieve success. In addition, pupils engage positively with the local community and make valuable contributions to local charities, whether as part of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) or through their own initiatives.
7. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are highly positive and pupils exhibit consistently high standards of behaviour. Pastoral leaders and tutors know pupils well and care for them with diligence. The culture in the school is one of kindness and there is a calm and purposeful atmosphere. Pupils respect people's diversity and are tolerant and accepting of each other.
8. The comprehensive and suitable programme for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is successful in helping pupils understand more about themselves and the society in which they live. It includes age-appropriate careers guidance for senior and sixth-form pupils.
9. School leaders ensure that the school environment is suitably maintained and that all practices to ensure the health and safety of pupils are robust and effective.
10. Leaders ensure that safeguarding procedures reflect current statutory guidance and are robust. They are well understood by staff who actively care for the pupils and report any safeguarding concerns promptly and effectively.

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:

- develop a more consistent school-wide approach to the use of assessment data and tracking to improve pupils' progress
- ensure that, in the prep school, all teaching matches the needs and prior attainment of pupils effectively.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Senior leaders carefully evaluate the school's effectiveness and areas for development and consider the views of pupils, parents and teachers before implementing planned changes. Throughout, they consistently prioritise pupils' wellbeing. In this they are well supported by governors who are vigilant in their oversight and check that leaders fulfil their responsibilities. Governors' careful monitoring ensures that leaders apply their skills effectively so that the Standards are met.
12. Leaders, supported by governors, assess risks in the school effectively, including contextual risks such as those posed by mobile devices and social media. They take appropriate measures to mitigate against risks that they have identified. For example, leaders have recently introduced mobile phone pouches for pupils so that such devices are not accessible during the school day. Suitable risk assessments for all aspects of school life are in place, including for premises, trips and visits and for the wellbeing of any pupils about whom concerns have been raised.
13. Leaders regularly review and monitor the curriculum in both prep and senior schools and take appropriate action when they determine that there is a need to do so. For example, they commissioned an external review of SEND provision and, as a result, are putting into place further training of teaching staff to ensure that support in the classroom for pupils who have SEND remains effective. Leaders ensure that a suitable programme of PSHE, which includes relationships and sex education (RSE), is in place. They regularly seek pupils' views so that the scheme of work can be adapted when necessary.
14. Academic leaders monitor teaching and learning effectively through lesson observations and discussions with subject leaders and teachers. They identify examples of best practice which are then shared across the school and provide support for teachers' professional development.
15. Through self-evaluation leaders have identified that the current assessment systems and the tracking of pupils' progress are areas for development. They are working to make sure that practice in these areas is consistent across the school and relates to clear benchmarks. This work is currently at an early stage.
16. Leaders provide parents with regular written reports on their child's progress and share information with them via the school's website. There is an appropriate complaints policy and formal complaints are handled in line with the policy and in a timely fashion. Leaders maintain appropriate links with external agencies and share information as required, including with regard to safeguarding concerns.
17. Leaders ensure that they meet their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and that there is no discrimination against pupils in the school. They have a suitable plan in place which considers accessibility to school accommodation and the curriculum.

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

- 18. All the relevant Standards are met.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The curriculum covers a suitably wide range of subjects which are planned effectively for the age and abilities of the pupils. In the prep school, a thematic approach to the curriculum develops pupils' ability to make links between different subjects and deepens their knowledge of them. For instance, in Year 6, the theme of World War II is utilised to enable pupils to link work on wartime menus in design and technology with historical events such as rationing. Staff make effective use of a skills-based curriculum in Years 7 to 9 to develop pupils' acquisition of subject-specific language and approaches to learning designed to prepare them for external examinations at a later stage. For instance, in the English department, the curriculum is planned to develop pupils' skills in reading, essay writing, oracy and non-fiction writing. Assessments are linked to these skills so that progress can be monitored, and support put in place when required.
20. In the early years children are exposed to a language-rich curriculum and a stimulating indoor and outdoor environment. Skilled early years teachers and assistant teachers question the youngest children sensitively and encourage them to elaborate on their initial responses so that their linguistic and observational skills develop well, along with their knowledge and understanding of the world around them. Children develop fine and gross motor skills well and they explore playground equipment and learn effectively through play in the woodland area. Almost all children achieve a good level of development.
21. Teaching is typically effective. Staff communicate their subject knowledge clearly so that pupils learn well. Teachers typically challenge pupils to think deeply, such as when problem-solving in advanced mathematics classes. However, in some prep school lessons, the pace set by teachers is slow and they do not always adapt their teaching to the needs and abilities of different groups of pupils effectively. This limits progress, particularly for pupils with high prior attainment.
22. Teachers provide detailed and well-targeted verbal and written feedback. Positive and professional relationships between teachers and pupils mean that pupils seek help promptly when necessary. Pupils make good or better progress and achieve high levels of success in examinations at GCSE and A Level, where the majority typically attain high grades.
23. Across the school pupils who have SEND have their needs identified effectively through regular screening assessments. Teachers use pupil profiles to make appropriate adjustments to their teaching.
24. A large majority of pupils who speak EAL do not require extra support for their English. Those who do receive additional and effective support that helps them develop their English language skills, including the acquisition and use of subject-specific terminology used in different curriculum areas.
25. The prep and senior schools have assessment frameworks in place. In many cases departments use different ways of assessing and recording their pupils' progress. However, the use of data to track progress is not consistently effective across the whole school. Leaders are acting to address this, but their work to do so is still at an early stage.
26. A wide variety of extra-curricular provision is available to all pupils which includes sporting, recreational and academic activities. In the prep school almost all pupils participate successfully in the extensive programme. Through these activities pupils of all ages pursue new interests and become more skilled in those familiar to them.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 3: Pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing

28. Pastoral leaders and all staff promote the development of pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and confidence effectively. As they move through the school, pupils are taught a range of strategies to navigate their own wellbeing. Pastoral care is well delivered by tutors, heads of year and pastoral leaders who know pupils well and support them effectively. In the prep school pupils can access a pastoral support worker to discuss any worries they have. Each pupil in the senior school has a personal coach who provides advice and support to help them set their goals and regular meetings to monitor progress towards them.
29. Leaders have provided a PSHE programme where form teachers, form tutors and specialist staff deliver effective personal education for pupils of all age groups. RSE, which is an integral part of the programme, includes sessions on sexual harassment and healthy relationships, tackling homophobia, gender stereotypes and consent. Pupils in the prep and the senior school find this programme useful and relevant.
30. Throughout the school, teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour which are consistently met by pupils. On the rare occasions where behaviour falls below the expected standards, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their actions and the consequence of these. Should sanctions be deemed necessary they are used fairly and appropriately. Bullying is extremely rare but, should it happen, it is responded to promptly and effectively.
31. The school curriculum includes a wide variety of world faiths in religious education and in PSHE so pupils develop an understanding of their differences and similarities. Pupils experience a sense of the importance of the non-material through engaging in and learning about music, art and drama. Teachers explore spiritual ideas with pupils and encourage them to think deeply in their religion, philosophy and ethics lessons.
32. Pupils develop their physical health in physical education (PE) lessons, sporting and recreational activities and sporting fixtures against other schools. The youngest children develop their physical strength and agility in PE lessons and exploration of their outdoor environment. PSHE lessons inform pupils about how to look after their mental and physical health and the importance of doing so. Pupils access a wide variety of nutritious food and make use of facilities such as the gym and the swimming pool to support their fitness.
33. Leaders have a strong commitment to supporting pupils' health needs, both physical and mental. They have provided well equipped medical facilities which are appropriately staffed by qualified nurses. Visiting counsellors are also available should pupils require further support.
34. Pupils are effectively supervised during break and lunchtimes by vigilant staff. They are respectful of each other and of their surroundings. In the early years suitable staff-to-child ratios are always maintained.
35. School leaders and governors ensure that school buildings are well maintained, and all health and safety checks, including those on equipment and water, are carried out regularly. Fire safety arrangements are appropriate. These include regular fire drills and suitable responses to any requirements from the fire risk assessment. Effective security systems are in place.

36. Admissions and attendance policies and procedures are suitable. The school informs the local authority whenever any pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.

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

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

38. Leaders utilise the curriculum and teaching to actively promote the values of a democratic and diverse society and prepare pupils for life beyond school. The PSHE programme, supplemented by talks from visiting speakers on topics such as populism and radical feminism, is instrumental in helping pupils to formulate their own views. They participate enthusiastically in Parliament Day which explores the roles of elected leaders in society. The school ensures that a balanced approach is always presented to pupils by teachers and any visiting speakers whenever any political themes are explored.
39. Curriculum content, such as themes that explore human rights, global inequality and poverty, enables pupils to investigate life experiences which may be very different from their own. In addition, staff and pupil leaders across the school model the values of respect and tolerance effectively. Consequently, pupils of all ages display kindness, and are highly respectful of each other. Through their school council, pupils have recently suggested changes to the curriculum to make its content more diverse. Science now includes more study about diverse historical scientific role-models, while English explores a more diverse range of texts and music teaches about more non-European composers.
40. Skilled teachers and tutors help pupils to develop an understanding of right and wrong by exploring the need for rules and the consequences of making wrong choices. Character attributes of resilience, integrity, courage and kindness are taught to all pupils and reinforced through personal coaching. Work in PSHE reinforces pupils' understanding and challenges their thinking, such as through the delivery of anti-bullying days in the prep school and Year 7 and the delivery of workshops on hate crime in Year 8.
41. Pupils are active participants in a wide range of societies and activities which expand their horizons and develop their social skills. Senior pupils participate in music and drama performances with a local school for male pupils and in the joint Combined Cadet Force, where they take an equal part and achieve success. Many pupils volunteer in local primary schools, care homes and with charities such as local food banks and soup kitchens. These activities help them to engage with wider society beyond school and raise their awareness of the challenges which people face.
42. Leaders in the early years help children to develop their understanding of the world. They receive visits from members of the local community such as dentists and doctors. Well designed and engaging role play areas allow them to explore different roles in society and to develop social skills through play. Children develop an understanding of economic matters by buying and selling in their classroom shop.
43. There is an effective 'Futures' programme designed to support pupils in determining appropriate choices. Careers provision begins in the prep school where pupils cover topics such as 'dream jobs' and continues into the senior school with topics such as 'countering career stereotypes'. Work then progresses to include visiting speakers from different careers, work experience, enterprise challenges and advice about subject choices. Advice for sixth-form pupils is well targeted and comprehensive. Experienced staff give helpful and individual advice about university courses and other possible next steps, including apprenticeships.

44. As pupils progress through the school, they are taught about financial matters such as opening bank accounts, the tax system and budgeting. This develops their emerging understanding of managing money, for instance in understanding the price of key food items in a weekly shop and the likely challenges of budgeting during higher education.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Leaders ensure that suitable arrangements are in place to safeguard pupils including those in the early years.
47. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and safeguarding team, which includes staff from the senior school, prep school and early years, are appropriately and regularly trained for their role. They ensure that all staff receive suitable safeguarding training in a timely and appropriate fashion.
48. Safeguarding leaders ensure that there are effective arrangements in place to care effectively for any pupils affected by safeguarding concerns. Referrals to the relevant local authority children's services are made where appropriate and the school liaises with social care and the police when necessary. In all cases, including any relating to child-on-child abuse and harmful sexual behaviour, careful records are kept digitally in a well-organised and secure way. Where appropriate, pupils have a safety plan in place to ensure continued support and monitoring.
49. The school operates effective procedures in relation to allegations against adults. Leaders make timely and effective contacts with the local authority designated officer (LADO) to seek advice and, when necessary, make referrals. The DSL and safeguarding team attend training and working groups with the local authority and with local schools. A suitable record of concerns, including those which do not meet the harm threshold, is held confidentially by the head. Staff understand and use the school's system for reporting any such concerns.
50. Leaders ensure that there are adults that pupils can talk to if they have any concerns. A system of online anonymous reporting has recently been introduced. Pupils are well educated about the risks of online behaviour. The DSL oversees all aspects of digital safety, and the internet is appropriately filtered and monitored.
51. All required safer recruitment checks are carried out diligently and in a timely fashion. The single central record of appointments provides an accurate summary of all the checks undertaken.
52. Governors receive appropriate safeguarding training. The designated safeguarding governor oversees the work of the DSL and safeguarding team diligently and provides suitable support and challenge. Governors review practice and policies regularly, including scrutiny of the annual safeguarding report from the DSL.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 53. All the relevant Standards are met.**

School details

School	St Helen's School
Department for Education number	312/6004
Registered charity number	312762
Address	St Helen's School Eastbury Road Northwood Middlesex HA6 3AS
Phone number	01923 843210
Email address	enquiries@sthelens.london
Website	www.sthelens.london
Proprietor	St Helen's School, Northwood
Chair	Mr Philip Young
Head	Mrs Bridget Ward
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	1135
Date of previous inspection	29 to 30 November 2023

Information about the school

54. St Helen's School is an independent day school registered as a single sex school for female pupils located in Northwood, Middlesex. The senior and prep schools occupy different buildings on site. The school is a registered charity governed by a council of trustees. The current head took up her appointment in September 2024.
55. There are 95 pupils in the early years, 44 of whom are in Nursery and 51 of whom are in Reception.
56. The school has identified 147 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
57. English is an additional language for 242 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are: to know, value and respect each pupil as an individual; to provide every girl with the opportunities and resources to achieve academic excellence; to equip pupils with personal skills, emotional resilience and confidence through a diverse, enriching and challenging co-curricular programme; to ensure all pupils are ready to play a full and active role in society and in an interconnected digital world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

24 to 26 September 2024

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

60. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit isi.net