

School inspection report

28 November 2023 to 30 November 2023

St Ambrose Preparatory School

Wicker Lane

Hale Barns

Altrincham

Cheshire

WA15 0HF

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. Leaders encourage strong relationships through an effective pastoral system which puts pupils' wellbeing at the centre of all aspects of school life.
2. Trustees and governors effectively monitor all aspects of school life. They maintain an oversight of the work of the school and provide support and challenge appropriately. As a result of regular audits, training and effective management of risk, they are able to assess and oversee situations as they arise.
3. The comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), relationships and sex education (RSE) and religious education (RE) programmes promote the school's ethos and positive values. The school educates pupils effectively about what constitutes healthy relationships.
4. The curriculum is implemented effectively to develop pupils' skills and knowledge as they progress through the school. The effective early years curriculum draws upon the interests and needs of individual children and enables them to develop their knowledge and skills across the early years curriculum.
5. The school's provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) supports their learning through carefully targeted and effective support based on well-thought-out individual plans for pupils.
6. Pupils typically make good progress throughout the school, and gain confidence in their own abilities. Opportunities for creativity, collaboration and investigation have raised outcomes successfully. However, this approach is not always consistent. Monitoring and the sharing of effective practice are being developed further by the leadership in order to ensure all pupils experience wider learning and that the quality of teaching is consistent.
7. Pupils are well prepared for their next steps. The school prepares pupils effectively for their transition to their subsequent schools with individual support for pupils.
8. Leaders implement effective safeguarding measures and provide regular training to staff to ensure that the school's processes and procedures are followed diligently.

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:

- enhance pupils' wider learning throughout the school by consistent monitoring and the sharing of effective practice.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors' regular monitoring of policies and practice ensures that they reflect current guidance and meet the Standards. Through regular contact with senior leaders, the chair of governors and the designated safeguarding governor monitor safeguarding and safer recruitment. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders, such as about the school's measures to integrate female pupils into the school. They ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge that they need to carry out their responsibilities effectively.
10. Reasonable adjustments are made for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that no pupil suffers discrimination. The school maintains suitable plans to ensure that any disabled pupils can access the facilities and the curriculum. The school complies with the Equality Act 2010.
11. Leadership of the early years is effective. Children learn well and are supported to develop their social skills and learn to manage their emotions and regulate their behaviour.
12. Parents have easy access to teachers and leaders, who manage concerns and complaints effectively and promptly. Leaders maintain appropriate records of any complaints submitted, including the actions taken in response to these.
13. Parents can access required information about the school on the school's website, including about its aims and character. The school regularly supplies parents with reports of their child's progress.
14. Leaders take a broad and comprehensive approach to the management of risk across the school. They regularly review risk assessments for buildings, activities and trips and take effective action to mitigate any risks that are identified.
15. Leaders maintain effective links with relevant external agencies, such as when safeguarding concerns arise.

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

16. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The curriculum is planned effectively taking into account the required curriculum areas including for the early years. Pupils develop secure knowledge, skills and understanding in numeracy, literacy, speaking and listening. The school also provides beyond the required curriculum with the teaching of French from the Nursery. Leaders have ensured that the curriculum includes a key focus on religious education, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) in line with the school's aims, catholic faith and vision based upon the example and teachings of Edmund Rice. Pupils speak with confidence about their faith and how it supports them in their daily lives.
18. Teaching is well resourced and planned appropriately in line with the school's schemes of work. Teachers know their pupils well as individuals. Most teachers have high expectations using their extensive subject knowledge to challenge pupils. They successfully enable pupils to learn at a high level through creativity, collaboration and investigation. This was exemplified in a geography lesson for younger juniors, where pupils discussed local land use and evaluated the impact of agricultural, commercial and residential development. Monitoring and sharing of effective practice are being developed further by the leadership in order to ensure pupils experience wider learning opportunities and that the quality of teaching is consistent. Teachers encourage pupils to reflect on their actions and to be responsible for their behaviour. Consequently, pupils behave well in lessons responding positively to their teachers and the school's reward system.
19. The school provides a small range of extra-curricular opportunities to further enhance pupils' development. Pupils who attend these sessions develop their skills playing football and chess, acting, singing and playing music. These activities contribute to pupils' achievement of sporting successes, musical grades and results in London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) examinations.
20. Children in the early years make swift progress through all the areas of learning and development as a result of teachers planning based on the interests and needs of each child. Children confidently use a wide range of words to express their thoughts and ideas. Teachers provide opportunities to enable children to develop their literacy skills through thematic play and storytelling. In Reception, children become able to relate letters to the sounds that they make. Through skilful use of questioning by teachers, children make rapid progress. Teachers ensure pupils' views about different subjects are listened to which enables further improvements to be made.
21. Leaders identify and meet pupils' additional needs effectively. They implement and regularly review carefully targeted and detailed plans to support individual pupils' learning. This support enables pupils who have SEND to make rapid progress from their starting points and to achieve in line with their peers.
22. The school implements an effective method of recording pupils' performance in standardised tests and teacher assessments. Teachers use this data effectively to track and monitor pupils' progress and attainment to ensure pupils meet their targets. Pupils appreciate the positive and helpful feedback they receive about how to improve their work.
23. The school ensures pupils are well prepared for entrance requirements to a range of senior schools. Most pupils in Year 6 gain entry to their senior schools of choice.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), relationships education (and religious education (RE) programmes promote the school's positive ethos and values. The effective PSHE programme enables pupils to develop their self-understanding and strategies to support their own mental health. Pupils learn about different forms of discrimination, such as racism and prejudice against religions. The relationships education programme supports pupils' understanding and appreciation of different types of relationships as well as what constitutes healthy relationships.
26. The school develops pupils' spiritual awareness through active participation in regular collective worship and reflection on spiritual themes. While the main emphasis is on Catholicism, the school enables pupils from diverse religions and traditions to celebrate their beliefs in an inclusive environment. Pupils learn about world faiths in religious education (RE) lessons.
27. Pupils are respectful, well behaved and polite as a result of positive relationships between pupils and staff, and effective implementation of the behaviour policy. There is an effective anti-bullying policy and pupils state strongly that if any incidences of unkindness did occur, the staff would deal with them quickly and effectively. Consequently, pupils feel safe and secure. Early years staff maintain a positive learning atmosphere which enables children to feel happy and secure. Leaders actively listen to pupils' views and opinions which enables pupils to express their views confidently.
28. Pupils are well supervised, including in the early years where suitable staff-to-child ratios are strictly adhered to. They are helped to learn how to share, take turns and cooperate with each other.
29. Leaders encourage pupils to take part in physical activities from an early age. Early years teachers enable the youngest children to develop their balance and gross and fine motor skills through a physical education programme and outdoor free play. Leaders make effective use of nearby sports facilities to enable older pupils to develop skills in a range of physical activities.
30. Suitable arrangements are in place to care for pupils who become unwell. Staff receive appropriate training in first aid. Pupils feel confident in asking for help when they have concerns. Leaders use the results of regular pupil and staff surveys to help identify any provision that might be helpful to support pupils' mental health needs.
31. The premises are secure and maintained to a high standard. Regular health and safety checks are carried out and records are suitably maintained. Effective arrangements are in place to reduce risk from fire, such as regular testing and maintenance of fire safety equipment.
32. The school maintains the attendance and admission registers well. Staff diligently monitor attendance and follow up absences to ensure high rates of attendance.

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

33. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

34. Pupils engage in activities that develop their understanding and awareness of their community and the wider world. Pupils develop their sense of social responsibility and make contributions to the school and the wider community. For example, pupils sing at a local care home and regularly donate to local food banks. They support a shoebox appeal and a local charity that works with homeless people.
35. Pupils learn about democracy through activities such as voting for members of the school council, advocacy group and eco committee. The advocacy group contributes to local support for refugees and asylum seekers in Salford.
36. The PSHE programme develops pupils' knowledge about public institutions and their role in British society. Pupils learn about human rights and economic disadvantage.
37. The school promotes fundamental British values, such as the rule of law, mutual respect and individual liberty throughout the curriculum. For example, in an RE lesson, pupils maturely linked the topic of justice and mutual respect, referring to figures such as Martin Luther King.
38. Pupils are well prepared and ready for the next stage in their education. Older pupils are prepared effectively for transition to their next school.

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

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

Safeguarding

40. The school creates a supportive environment to safeguard pupils' wellbeing and to ensure pupils feel safe. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
41. Governors and leaders regularly review the safeguarding policy and procedures to ensure that these are in line with current statutory guidance. The nominated safeguarding governor meets regularly with the safeguarding lead to oversee procedures, monitor records and help prepare the annual report. All governors are suitably trained in safeguarding and monitor safeguarding at each board meeting.
42. All staff and volunteers receive appropriate safeguarding training when they join the school and are updated regularly. Staff understand child protection procedures, their responsibilities, including whistleblowing, and how to report any concerns.
43. Concerns and actions are carefully recorded in line with current statutory guidance. This enables leaders to monitor individual cases as well as any patterns or trends. Those with safeguarding leadership responsibilities work effectively with external agencies when concerns arise. When appropriate, referrals are made to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police in a timely manner.
44. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers and governors and recorded accurately on the single central record (SCR) of appointments.
45. Pupils speak confidently about how to keep safe online and know they can always speak to a trusted adult if they have any concerns. The school has appropriate arrangements to filter and monitor internet usage.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Ambrose Preparatory School
Department for Education number	358/6004
Registered charity number	254312
Address	St Ambrose Preparatory School Wicker Lane Hale Barns Altrincham Cheshire WA15 0HF
Phone number	0161 903 9193
Email address	secretary@stambroseprep.co.uk
Website	www.stambroseprepschool.co.uk
Proprietor	The Congregation of Christian Brothers
Chair	Mr Mark Butler
Headteacher	Ms Sara Heron
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	120
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 March 2019

Information about the school

47. St Ambrose Preparatory School is a co-educational Roman Catholic day school. It is situated in the village of Hale Barns in Cheshire. Prior to the previous inspection, the school admitted only male pupils. The current headteacher was appointed Interim Head in September 2022 and substantive Head in May 2023. The school is administered by the Congregation of Christian Brothers who are trustees of the school and are supported by a local governing body. The trustees own the school and set the vision, aims and religious ethos.
48. There are 19 children in the early years comprising the one Nursery and one Reception class.
49. The school has identified 17 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), none of whom has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
50. English is an additional language for six pupils.
51. The school states its aims are to develop happy, fulfilled, well-educated, confident and caring children who know and understand the love, joy and peace of Jesus. It seeks to encourage pupils to show their faith by the way they live, showing care and consideration for each other, those around them and for the environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 November 2023

52. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

53. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons and activities
- learning walks with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and an assembly
- 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
- looked at examples of pupils' work and discussed these with pupils and leaders
- evaluated a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

54. 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**.

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