

School inspection report

14 to 16 November 2023

Merchant Taylors' Girls' School

Liverpool Road

Crosby

Liverpool

L23 0PQ

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. The governing body ensures that leaders and managers carry out their roles effectively and promote the wellbeing of pupils. Governors support and monitor the work of school leaders, offering effective challenge and helpful advice.
2. Leaders in both the prep and the senior schools ensure that the school's strategic development plan is closely linked to the school's aims. The school is prioritising improving the quality of teaching and is introducing a number of initiatives to achieve this goal.
3. Pupils of all ages receive an education which challenges them academically. Leaders have created a broad curriculum which meets the needs of pupils. An extensive extra-curricular programme supports pupils to develop their talents across a range of different areas. Leaders promote the wellbeing of pupils by providing effective pastoral support. This is based upon a house system, which helps to create a sense of community amongst pupils.
4. Pupils are enthusiastic and ambitious learners and they respond well to the high expectations set by their teachers. Children in the early years and pupils in the prep school make good progress. Almost all children in the early years reach a good level of development by the end of Reception. Similarly, senior pupils also make good progress and achieve results at GCSE above the predictions based upon their assessed starting points. At A level, pupils achieved results in line with predictions based upon their starting points.
5. Leaders provide specialist support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which enables them to make good progress.
6. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive targeted individual support which gives them greater confidence. They make rapid progress developing their fluency in English.
7. Children in the early years are highly engaged in their learning, stimulated by well-planned activities which challenge their thinking. Teachers encourage children to speak confidently in a range of situations using a rich array of vocabulary, developing effective communication skills.
8. Teaching is typically well planned and matched to the abilities of pupils. In some lessons, in both the prep and the senior schools, teaching is less effective because the planned activities are not as well tailored to pupils needs and abilities and do not engage and motivate pupils. As a result, pupils make less consistent progress in these lessons. The school is aware of this concern and is taking steps to improve the quality of teaching and learning in these lessons.
9. Leaders have introduced new assessment systems to track pupils' progress as they move through the school which has been implemented effectively by many departments. However, the use of this data to adapt teaching, to ensure that it builds on previous learning, is not fully embedded in all departments.
10. Pupils behave well, respect each other, and enjoy positive relationships with their peers and with staff. Leaders ensure that the school's personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum enables pupils to develop a greater awareness of their strengths and vulnerabilities. Bullying is rare and leaders take prompt and effective action when required. Pupils respect and value each other's cultural heritage and personal identity.

11. Leaders and managers ensure that children in the early years and pupils in the prep school are well prepared for their next stage of education. For senior pupils, recent initiatives to provide guidance on a wider range of careers options for senior pupils are not yet fully embedded.
12. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Staff at all levels are well trained and receive regular update training. Governors maintain an effective oversight and ensure the required recruitment checks are in place.

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:

- Ensure that assessment information is used effectively across all departments to plan teaching that matches pupils' needs and abilities, so that pupils make consistently good progress.
- Ensure that senior pupils are well informed about a wide range of possible career options.

Material change request

13. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to become co-educational.
14. At the time of the inspection, the prep school had already begun to educate male pupils.
15. In preparation for this change, governors and leaders have planned a curriculum that provides equal opportunities for both male and female pupils and provides equal opportunities. Staff have received additional training and learning resources have been reviewed to ensure their suitability for both sexes.
16. The provision for PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) has been reviewed and meets the needs of both male and female pupils.
17. There is no change planned with regard to the overall number of pupils. There are sufficient washroom and changing facilities on both the prep and senior school sites and no further additions to facilities are needed at this stage.
18. Leaders have planned appropriately for the change.
19. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

20. Governors and leaders share a clear vision for the school's development based on an effective assessment of the school's current strengths and areas for improvement. Development plans in both the prep and senior schools identify the need to improve outcomes for pupils by enhancing the quality of teaching and making more consistent use of data to track pupils' progress. These initiatives are not fully embedded.
21. Leaders and governors provide a challenging academic curriculum and a rich extra-curricular programme throughout the school.
22. A well-considered disability access plan ensures the school improves access to the curriculum and the school buildings. The school has recently enhanced its provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to ensure that they are better supported in their learning.
23. Leaders and managers demonstrate relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles. Policies and procedures are understood by staff through a programme of regular training that gives them confidence to report any concerns about a pupil's welfare. Pupils also have a clear understanding of relevant policies, such as those to promote good behaviour.
24. Governors are careful to ensure that leaders identify and mitigate any possible risk to pupils' wellbeing. There are effective procedures in place to identify and reduce risk, and staff are appropriately trained, and follow these in practice. For example, risk assessments for school visits are extremely detailed and anticipate possible hazards.
25. Individual governors are linked to early years, the prep and the senior schools and meet regularly with school leaders. This supports the governing board in providing informed oversight. Governors understand their strategic role and are also skilled in offering incisive challenge so that pastoral leaders feel supported in their work.
26. Leaders respond to any complaints in an effective manner. Governors and leaders communicate extensively with parents to establish the precise details of any complaint in order to ensure that the concern is fully understood and can be addressed properly.
27. Governors and leaders have successfully created welcoming and well-resourced facilities for children in the early years so that they thrive in their setting. A diverse programme of learning activities in the early years, tailored to individual children's needs, enables children to develop at their own pace supported by staff, who liaise closely with parents about their children's progress.
28. Leaders make sure that all the required information is made available to parents either on the school's website or by request. Reports to parents are informative and indicate areas of strength as well as offering constructive advice for improvement.

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

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

30. Leaders plan a curriculum that enables pupils to experience a broad range of subjects and activities, appropriate to pupils' ages and needs. This supports pupils' linguistic, mathematical, scientific and technological learning as well as providing creative activities. The curriculum is implemented effectively through appropriate schemes of work. Leaders also provide an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities in both the prep and the senior schools. As a result, pupils of all ages make good academic progress as they move up the school and develop their individual talents in sport, music, drama or other areas.
31. In the early years, leaders create a wide range of opportunities and experiences that enable children to make rapid progress from their starting points. Children are highly engaged in their learning, challenged by well-planned and activities matched to their interests and needs. For example, children participated enthusiastically in a singing exercise designed to stimulate their physical development as they modelled the actions of teachers. Teachers use role play and a rich variety of stimulating resources to challenge the children's thinking. They encourage children to speak confidently and to use a wide array of vocabulary by helping them to recall and retell stories. Almost all children achieve a good level of development for their age.
32. Pupils of all ages are generally enthusiastic learners. They are eager to explore new topics and to develop their skills. In many lessons, pupils are encouraged to share ideas and to present their work to their peers. As a result, pupils are highly articulate and communicate easily with one another and their teachers. They listen to others respectfully and are not afraid to take risks in order to deepen their understanding of a topic.
33. Leaders throughout the school have introduced new initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and to enhance the learning experience of pupils. As a result, teaching is typically engaging and challenges pupils' thinking. However, in both the prep and the senior schools, activities in a few lessons are not matched effectively to the needs and abilities of the pupils. In these lessons, tasks are less challenging and pupils are not as engaged, and therefore make less consistent progress.
34. Throughout the school, teachers know their subject matter well. Pupils appreciate how teachers are willing to offer additional help out of lessons to help them understand or improve.
35. Leaders have introduced a highly detailed assessment framework to track pupils' progress and to monitor the outcomes for pupils. This tracking system helps pupils to identify where they need to improve. The use of this data to inform planning is developing but not yet fully embedded as a regular and effective practice in all departments.
36. In the prep school, data indicates that pupils make good progress which exceeds that predicted from their assessed starting points. Pupils typically attain grades at GCSE above those predicted from their starting points, indicating that pupils make good progress. Results in geography and religious studies are particularly strong.
37. At A level, pupils achieve grades in line with their predications. Leaders recognise that pupils could potentially achieve even higher results and are determined to raise standards through improved teaching and more effective learning.

38. Leaders have recently increased the provision for pupils who have SEND by increasing staffing to facilitate more specialised support. These pupils make good progress in line with their peers and often exceed predictions in public examinations.
39. Pupils who have EAL are provided with specialist individual support by staff, who help pupils to access areas of the curriculum that they find linguistically challenging. This gives them greater confidence in their learning and helps them to make rapid progress in their understanding and use of English.
40. Leaders provide an extensive extra-curricular programme. This offers a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. The programme enables pupils to develop new skills which increase their self-esteem and self-confidence. For example, senior pupils' involvement in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme has helped them to develop leadership skills and empathy for others.

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

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

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

42. Leaders provide a well-planned programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) that meets the needs of pupils in both the prep and senior schools. The programme helps pupils to understand the impact of the choices they make on their wellbeing. It is supplemented by appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE), which covers topics such as what constitutes proper consent. The positive impact of the PSHE curriculum is demonstrated by how well pupils of all ages and backgrounds mix easily and get along with one another.
43. Support for pupils' mental health is provided by counsellors who work across both the prep and senior schools. Leaders also encourage sixth-form pupils to train as mental health mentors to support younger pupils. Pupils, particularly in the senior school, recognise the academic pressures they face and feel the school's provision has a positive impact in helping them to manage any concerns.
44. A wide and varied programme of physical education ensures that sporting opportunities are available for all pupils both within the curriculum and as optional activities. Pupils enjoy opportunities to play a range of sports and appreciate the importance of physical activity in developing a healthy lifestyle. Participation rates in voluntary activities are high and pupils say that these opportunities help them to develop their confidence and self-esteem. In the same way, leaders enable and encourage pupils to become involved in drama or music, and in a wide range of other clubs and societies. Pupils who have particular talents are supported to perform at a high level, for example the school's *Amabile* choir, representing Great Britain, recently won a gold medal at the European Choir Games in Sweden.
45. Pupils of all ages grow in confidence when given positions of responsibility and are keen to become school, house or form leaders. Senior pupils volunteer to support pupils in the prep school, which enables them to develop empathy and strengthens the sense of community within the school. Pupils help to run clubs and societies, developing teamwork and their self-confidence. Leaders hear the views of pupils through the school council or in conversation with teachers or leaders. Pupils' ideas for changes to uniform and lunches have been adopted.
46. Throughout the school, pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons is of a high standard. Children in the early years display considerate manners and staff help them to understand the importance of sharing and taking turns when using learning resources. At mealtimes, staff ensure they understand the importance of a healthy diet and encourage them to try new foods and provide numerous activities to support their physical development.
47. Older pupils respond positively to the high expectations of behaviour set by leaders, and behave well. The school responds effectively to the few cases of bullying or serious misbehaviour that occur and keeps appropriate records. In both the prep and senior schools, older pupils act as positive role models, and senior school pupils act as helpful mentors to younger ones.
48. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is supported through both curricular activities and assemblies. Children in the early years develop a sense of self-confidence and discovery as they explore new areas of learning. For example, children enjoyed learning about Diwali through listening to a story and discussing the actions of the characters involved. Similarly, in the senior school,

through assemblies, in art and music lessons, pupils can appreciate the value of the non-material aspects of life. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to discuss moral and ethical issues by inviting visiting speakers and through the debating society. In lessons, such as history and religious studies, pupils are often challenged to consider moral issues and, as a result, learn to respect the views of others even if they disagree with them.

49. Both the prep and senior school sites are secure and well supervised by staff. Pupils feel safe in school. The premises are generally well maintained. The school is aware that a few areas of the school site are in need of repair and redecoration and has plans to address these concerns. At the time of the inspection, these issues did not represent a risk to the health or safety of pupils.
50. Arrangements for first aid and medical support in school are effective. Staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid. Leaders ensure that all relevant health and safety laws, including those relating to fire safety and evacuation, are understood, and the relevant policies and procedures are implemented effectively. A practice lockdown drill during the inspection was conducted in an orderly manner.
51. The school's admission and attendance registers are maintained and kept appropriately. Staff make the required reports when pupils join and leave the school and check their destination schools.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

53. Through the PSHE curriculum and other activities, leaders ensure that pupils are prepared for the next stage in their lives. For example, sixth form pupils learn about financial management in preparation for life beyond school. Senior pupils have a clear understanding of the role of political institutions at both a local and a national level gained through discussion of current affairs in PSHE lessons. Pupils understand the importance of democracy and learn from opportunities to vote for their peers to undertake positions of responsibility.
54. Pupils enhance their awareness of current political and economic issues through debates in lessons and in discussion with visiting speakers. They understand that the importance of moral and economic choices, which may conflict. As a consequence of leaders' planning, pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of current affairs, respect the view of other and can offer a balanced opinion on topical issues.
55. Pupils are prepared well for their next stage in their education within the school. Leaders in the early years ensure that well-planned arrangements are in place to enable children to move confidently into the prep school. Similarly, prep school children feel well prepared for their next step.
56. Sixth-form pupils receive suitable support when they apply for places at university. They have adequate information and opportunities to learn about future careers. Leaders have recently increased provision for careers education in both the prep and the senior schools to include information on a wider range of options, but this is not fully embedded in the curriculum.
57. Leaders also encourage pupils to volunteer in the local community. Pupils respond enthusiastically and comment how working in a food bank or care home helps them to develop a wider perspective on life. Similarly, in the prep school, pupils' initiatives to raise money for charitable causes, such as Children in Need and Cancer Research, demonstrates their concern for others.
58. Governors and leaders in the senior school provide opportunities for pupils to work closely with pupils from the nearby school for male pupils. Pupils commented how such opportunities enable them to develop self-confidence and feel better prepared for life beyond school. In the prep school, the transition to full co-education has been managed successfully, so that children mix naturally and easily.
59. Older pupils learn business and financial skills through the PSHE curriculum and by inviting visiting speakers. Younger pupils understand the value of money and the role it plays in society. As a result, they understand the importance of supporting charitable causes and know how their generosity can benefit others.

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

60. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

61. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are effective. There is a positive culture of safeguarding throughout the school.
62. Governors with specific responsibility for safeguarding meet with pastoral leaders to review the safeguarding policy and the implementation of procedures, as well as to consider any lessons learned from recent concerns. Governors check the school's recruitment procedures regularly to ensure that leaders undertake appropriate checks and record these accurately.
63. Leaders liaise promptly with external agencies such as the police and children's services if concerns arise. They keep detailed and secure records of their actions.
64. Leaders provide appropriate safeguarding training for all staff and volunteers which is updated regularly. Staff know how to recognise and respond to a safeguarding concern, including any concerns about adults who work with pupils.
65. Leaders and managers ensure that pupils know how to stay safe online. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about the dangers as well as the advantages of social media and can identify any potential threats to their wellbeing. Effective filtering and monitoring systems are in place for the school's internet systems.
66. Those with designated safeguarding lead responsibilities receive appropriate training and are aware of the contextual risks for pupils in the school and ensure that pupils are alert to the possibility of being drawn into illegal activities and to the prevalence of extremist views.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Merchant Taylors' Girls' School
Department for Education number	343/6130
Registered charity number	1125485
Address	Liverpool Road Crosby Liverpool L23 0QP
Phone number	0151 924 3140
Email address	infomtgs@merchanttaylor.com
Website	merchanttaylor.com
Proprietor	The Governors of Merchant Taylors'
Chair	Mr Philip Marshall
Headteacher	Mrs Bridget Ward
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	657
Date of previous inspection	13 to 14 November 2019

Information about the school

68. Merchant Taylors' Girls' School is located in Crosby, Liverpool. It consists of a senior school for female pupils, which includes a sixth form, and incorporates Stanfield Preparatory School located nearby, which is co-educational from Reception to Year 6. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher was appointed in 2022 and a new chair of governors in 2021.
69. The school has identified 47 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
70. English is an additional language for 72 pupils.
71. The school states that its aims are to encourage pupils to be ambitious, develop a strong character and to strive for excellence in all they do.

Inspection details

72. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

73. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons and activities
- learning walks with senior leaders
- discussions with the chair of the governing body and other governors
- discussions with school leaders, managers and staff
- discussions with pupils
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- examination and discussion of pupils' work with staff and pupils
- examination of a range of policies and documentation provided by the school

74. 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

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