



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

MERCHANT TAYLORS' GIRLS' SCHOOL

NOVEMBER 2016



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Merchant Taylors' Girls' School			
DfE number	343/6130			
Registered charity number	1125485			
Address	Merchant Taylors' Girls' School Crosby Liverpool Merseyside L23 5SP			
Telephone number	0151 924 3140			
Email address	infomtgs@merchanttaylors.com			
Headmistress	Mrs Louise Robinson			
Chair of governors	Mrs Beverley Bell			
Age range	4 to 18			
Number of pupils	773			
	Boys	80	Girls	693
	Reception	47	Juniors	236
	Seniors	360	Sixth Form	130
Inspection dates	9 Nov 2016 to 10 Nov 2016			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair and vice chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Colette Culligan	Reporting inspector
Mrs Penny Austin	Team inspector (Headmistress, IAPS school)
Mrs Angela Clancy	Team inspector (Head of learning skills, HMC school)
Miss Eleni Conidaris	Team inspector (Head of lower school, HMC school)
Mr Michael Evans	Team inspector (Senior master, HMC school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Merchant Taylors' Girls' School is a girls' independent day school located in Crosby, North Liverpool. It incorporates a junior school, Merchant Taylors' Primary School, and caters for pupils aged between 4 and 18. The junior school is co-educational from Reception to Year 2, and is for girls alone from Year 3. Pupils come from a wide area extending beyond the centre of Liverpool to Warrington, Widnes, Southport and other regions.
- 1.2 The school is a registered charity, owned by the governors of Merchant Taylors'. It has a close relationship with Merchant Taylors' Boys' School Crosby, with whom it shares a governing body. The schools also share some administrative staff. Governors are supported by the work of a number of sub-committees, all of which operate across the girls' and boys' schools.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection, the senior management structure has been reorganised and a number of new appointments to senior roles made. The junior school has been extended and refurbished, technology facilities have been developed, and academic screening of pupils in Years 5, 7 and 9 has been introduced to help identify any emerging learning difficulties.
- 1.4 The school was founded in 1888 at the instigation of the then Master of the Merchant Taylors' Company as a sister school to the boys' school. The senior school is on the school's original site and has been extended by the purchase of an adjacent property. The proximity of the boys' school enables joint ventures such as musical productions and some shared lessons in the sixth form. The junior school is on a separate site which is a short walk from the senior school. This includes the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) class which has its own separate learning and play areas, but also uses some of the school facilities including the music rooms and hall.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.5 The school aims to create a happy, caring environment within which pupils are educated in the fullest sense so as to realise their full potential. It seeks to promote a clear understanding of what is right and wrong, respect for others, self-discipline, initiative, independence and confidence, so that pupils are well equipped to face the challenges of life.

About the pupils

- 1.6 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds and nationalities, reflecting the social mix of the city and its surrounding areas. The ability profile of the school is above the national average. A total of 23 pupils have English as an additional language (EAL). Almost all of these are fluent in English and 5 require extra support from the school. This is provided by the learning support department or informally by other members of staff. The school has identified 57 pupils as having special learning needs or disabilities (SEND), mostly mild dyslexia or dyscalculia. These pupils are supported by the learning support department and their curriculum is adapted as appropriate. No pupil has an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs. The school's data has identified 199 pupils as particularly able or talented. The curriculum is adapted to provide for their needs, and extension programmes and extra-curricular opportunities develop their sporting or musical talents.
- 1.7 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.8 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in March 2011. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Raise the quality of marking to the standard of the best and include guidance on ways in which pupils can improve their work.
 - Reflect the good progress made in providing for able, gifted and talented pupils by including suitable work for all ability needs in all lesson planning.
 - Further develop assessment procedures in the EYFS by including the next steps in learning.
 - Further develop links with feeder Nurseries.
- 1.9 The school has fully met all but one of the recommendations, and has partially addressed the recommendation to reflect the good progress made in providing for able, gifted and talented pupils by including suitable work for all ability needs in all lesson planning.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- The high quality, aspirational teaching ensures that the school is highly successful in meeting its aim of educating pupils in the fullest sense.
- Academic attainment is above the national average and pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent.
- Good specialist support is provided for pupils with SEND, but class teaching does not consistently make use of strategies identified to help them.
- The more able pupils are provided with extra challenge in class and in wider activities.
- Pupils achieve significant success in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.

2.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils are exceptionally self-confident, self-assured and responsible.
- They are strongly aware of the impact of their own behaviour and effort on their progress.
- Relationships across the school are excellent, underpinned by outstanding levels of mutual respect.
- Pupils are extremely well prepared for the challenges of the next stage of their education.

Recommendations

2.3 The school might wish to consider further enhancing these excellent outcomes by taking steps to:

- Ensure that teaching particularly for younger learners consistently draws on identified strategies to support pupils identified with SEND.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The school is highly successful in meeting its aim of encouraging pupils to start achieving to their full potential, academically and in other spheres. This is strongly supported by excellent teaching and the ethos of high aspiration that permeates the whole school. Pupils' basic skills are well developed, nurtured by a curriculum which covers all the requisite areas of learning: linguistic; mathematical; scientific; technological; human and social; aesthetic and creative. Pupils confidently apply these skills across the curriculum. Excellent creativity is evident in the displays of creative writing and artwork around the schools and the high quality of music. Pupils in the senior school use information and communication technology (ICT) with assurance to research and produce work. The junior school pupils are confident using ICT when provided the opportunity to do so, although lesson planning allows them little opportunity for this outside formal ICT lessons.
- 3.3 Pupils' academic attainment is above the national average. The junior school does not take part in national curriculum tests but uses its own testing systems. From the available evidence including data from those tests, attainment is shown to be good in relation to national age-expected norms. The majority of the junior school pupils achieve success in the entrance examinations for the senior school, with a number awarded scholarships. The following analysis uses the national data for 2013 to 2015, the most recent 3 years for which comparative statistics are available. Results both at GCSE and A level have been above the national average for maintained schools. Almost all of those who sat GCSE examinations in 2016 achieved grades C or above, and consistently between 80 to 90% of GCSE results are A* to B. At A level, the percentage of pupils achieving grades A* to B is consistently over 70% and in 2016 the overall pass rate was 100%. The majority of pupils leaving the school at the end of Year 13 go on to pursue a degree course at their first choice university.
- 3.4 Pupils make good progress from their first days in the junior school. Links with feeder Nurseries have been strengthened so that the EYFS children's needs are clearly understood before they arrive at the school. Data on their progress is now formally recorded in a computerised system, supported by careful observation of progress in individual activities. The Early Years Profiles demonstrate the children's good progress across all required areas such as handwriting, developing from 'My First Marks' to clear writing of simple words. Children swiftly develop their grasp of basic mathematical concepts, creativity, physical skills and understanding of the world around them. By the end of Reception, almost all children have either reached or exceeded the Early Learning Goals.

- 3.5 In the junior and senior schools, lessons and written work provide further evidence of the pupils' good progress. In their questionnaire responses and in interview, pupils were virtually unanimous in expressing their pleasure and pride in the progress they have made since joining the school. Parental responses to the questionnaire similarly confirmed high levels of satisfaction with the education provided and its impact on the pupils' rate of learning. This rapid rate of progress is evident across the school, with no significant difference between the progress and attainment of pupils identified with EAL or SEND and that of others. Pupils with SEND or EAL are appropriately identified and well supported by the learning support department. Some progress has been made in response to the recommendations of the previous inspection, but lesson planning does not always ensure that teaching makes full use of the strategies identified to help SEND pupils learn most effectively. This is especially the case for younger pupils.
- 3.6 The more able pupils make good progress in line with their ability, encouraged by challenging activities in lesson. In the senior school, pupils are invited to join the specialist 'Harrison Groups'. These enable academically able pupils to extend their learning further by involvement in a range of activities such as study groups or attendance of lectures at local universities.
- 3.7 Careful monitoring and tracking of data on pupils' progress at all stages ensures pupils feel confident that they are helped by the school to achieve their academic ambitions. Teachers have the information they need to provide appropriate extra support or challenge. This is reflected in much of the marking of pupils' work, in which clear targets for improvement are set. The school has responded effectively to the recommendation made in the previous inspection about marking, and pupils in interview expressed that they find the marking useful in improving their work.
- 3.8 Pupils throughout the school participate enthusiastically in the wide programme of extra-curricular activities and achieve considerable success, notably in music, drama, art and sport. Many represent the school in a range of sports, achieving success at local and regional level for example in hockey, cross-country and netball. Elite athletes aspiring for national success in swimming, rowing and rugby, and those with special talents in creative arts and music are supported by the school through an adapted curriculum if necessary. Large numbers of senior pupils are successful in working towards a Duke of Edinburgh Award with some achieving gold level, and in their involvement with the large Combined Cadet Force (CCF) contingent. In all of these activities, the pupils demonstrate enthusiasm and a cheerful willingness to face challenges.

3.9 Pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning and activities as they are encouraged from their earliest days in the school to take pride in their work and its presentation. They personify the independence, self-discipline, confidence and determination to learn which are expressed in the school's aims and consistently underpinned by the positive approach to teaching. Pupils have high expectations of themselves and express a thirst for knowledge. They settle quickly to work in lessons, concentrating throughout and asking probing questions to ensure their full understanding. Pupils work with focus whether independently or in discussions with peers. They display considerable self-assurance, and enjoy opportunities to take the initiative in their learning and to work collaboratively with their peers. Pupils studying at A level expand their knowledge by reading widely around their subjects. The study skills of pupils are highly developed; they research work for themselves and are adept at synthesising information drawn from a range of sources including data. Examples of this were observed in the independent learning tasks set in Year 9. Junior school pupils were able to differentiate between primary and secondary historical sources, and to draw on recent visits and a television programme in their discussions of the Victorian period. Independent learning tasks undertaken by Year 9 pupils also drew on a range of resources and presentational approaches. All pupils are highly articulate and confident in expressing their thinking, both orally and in writing. Even the youngest are welcoming and enthusiastically explain what they are doing to visitors. The pupils' vocabulary and sentence structuring becomes increasingly sophisticated; by the time they reach the top of the school their discussions and written work reach high standards. Pupils can argue and explain their thinking cogently, applying highly developed reasoning skills to deal with complex material. Their competence in scientific, mathematical and numeracy matters is strong, as observed through their responses in mathematics and physics lessons. Their self-confidence further supports their learning in a range of other subjects and is a significant factor in the overall excellent levels of their achievements.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 Pupils have well-developed personalities for their ages, with self-esteem and confidence in their personal worth. They have high levels of self-assurance, free from any hint of arrogance. In their questionnaire responses and in interview, pupils expressed deep appreciation of their teachers' supportiveness and of the effect this has on them. Pupils are not afraid to ask questions or to risk making mistakes, they can instead think for themselves and try out their ideas in discussion. This is evident at all levels. In lessons, junior school pupils' eager responses demonstrate trust in their teachers' assurance that in their school 'it's all right to make mistakes' as that's how they learn. As they mature, pupils develop considerable self-knowledge. An understanding of their own preferred learning styles as identified through personal, social and health education lessons helps senior school pupils know how to learn most effectively. Pupils studying at A level are able to identify their own strengths and the strategies they find useful to manage their demanding workload and improve their achievement. Frequently pupils spoke of the way in which their academic and personal confidence has grown while they have been in the school.
- 4.3 Pupils display an instinctive understanding regarding the significance of the decisions they make in affecting their own success and well-being. They are encouraged to take personal responsibility for this throughout the school by their teachers, who consistently encourage them to work hard and apply themselves to achieve their goals. Children in Reception end the day by expressing what they would like to do tomorrow and reflecting on the day's activities, in order to foster additional learning about something they have done that day. Pupils in the junior school can make sensible decisions for themselves, for example in mathematics lessons when planning allowed them to select which method to use in a calculation. The older pupils benefit from numerous opportunities to take responsibility for themselves and their work. They demonstrated independence and imagination in responding to a task involving individual research, with results presented through posters, board games or internet memes. Pupils persevere, determined to complete tasks to the best of their ability. They are adaptable, rising to and actively enjoying new academic challenges. Older pupils in the junior and senior schools are acutely aware that the amount of effort they put into their work is directly related to their results and their chances of achieving their ambitions. They have a clear understanding of how to improve their future learning and achievement.
- 4.4 The pupils' well-developed spiritual awareness is displayed by their appreciation of non-material aspects of life such as beauty and the natural world. Displays in the junior school of excellent three-dimensional pieces, some produced with the support of visiting artists, are evidence of the pupils' creativity. Artwork in the senior school is similarly highly expressive. Many pupils enjoy learning instruments and singing in choirs, reaching excellent musical standards. Pupils' awareness of their responsibility to conserve natural resources results in committed action through 'Eco-committees'. In assemblies as well as in lessons, pupils are provided the opportunity to think about such issues so that they develop an understanding of their good fortune and consequent responsibilities. Sixth form pupils prepared and led a thoughtful assembly in 'Multi-Faith Week', which encouraged their peers to consider the roles played by religions and faith in constructing the self, the school and wider society.

- 4.5 Pupils are encouraged to work as a team from an early age. They confidently work together in lessons and collaborate in various committees and councils to solve problems, and undertake any responsibilities seriously. In sports teams, drama productions, CCF activities and in their involvement in competitions, pupils of all ages demonstrate excellent skills in collaboration. Sixth form pupils named their ability to work in a team as a significant personal strength, developed by the opportunities provided to them to mentor and work with junior pupils, such as on drama projects. Skill in working together is also nurtured in the junior school. Year 6 worked together as a team to produce a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in less than two weeks. They took responsibility for every aspect of this production, and the entire curriculum timetable during that time was focussed on the task. The pupils thoroughly enjoyed the responsibility and challenges this presented.
- 4.6 Pupils fully respect the school rules and appreciate the sanction and rewards structures. Questionnaire responses from pupils and parents alike indicate virtually unanimous approval of the school's behavioural expectations. These are regarded as highly successful in helping pupils develop a good understanding of what is right or wrong. Behaviour is almost invariably excellent. The few misdemeanours are usually of a trivial nature and are dealt with appropriately by staff. In their questionnaire responses, a few pupils and parents said that the school does not deal well with bullying. Inspection evidence shows that bullying is prevented as far as is practicable. The school leaders are conscious that bullying can occur, and step in to remedy the situation and repair relationships on the rare occasions when it does. Pupils have a strong sense of fair play and actively challenge unkind or inappropriate actions. Junior pupils were outraged when in assembly the staff pretended to issue rewards to one group but not to another, simply on the basis of hair colour. Pupils identify respect for others as a core value of the school to which they strongly adhere, and this underpins the extremely positive relationships evident across the community. At all ages, the pupils work and play together cheerfully and productively. They have a thoughtful and outstandingly respectful approach to others of different abilities, nationalities, backgrounds and beliefs. A senior school assembly incorporated a Hindu text, a Muslim prayer and a Christian hymn, demonstrating the school's tolerant and inclusive approach. The result is that the pupils have a palpable enjoyment of learning and joy in belonging to the school community.
- 4.7 Pupils have a strong commitment to helping others. Throughout the school they actively support a range of local, national and international charities in aid of those less fortunate than themselves. This includes a linked school in Sierra Leone for which the pupils' efforts have raised funds for new school buildings and to buy basic resources. Pupils also eagerly undertake responsibilities within school. Reception children value the trust afforded to take messages or lead their class line along the corridor. Older junior school and senior school pupils vote for appointments to positions of responsibility such as school council representatives, sports captains and head girls. Those elected undertake their duties very seriously. Sixth form pupils are highly conscious of their positions as role models and pride themselves on behaving with appropriate professionalism.
- 4.8 The pupils display a keen awareness of the need to keep themselves safe when using the internet and are confident in doing so. By the time they reach the top of the school, pupils know how to stay healthy both physically and mentally. Pupils know who to approach should they be experiencing a personal problem, and the school supports them well in devising strategies to help. They engage in sports enthusiastically, aware of the need for a balanced lifestyle and for healthy eating. In the junior school, pupils are not always encouraged to consider healthy eating in their food choices.

- 4.9 Pupils are confident and resilient in making choices for the next stage of their education and about their future careers. A few concerns were expressed about careers guidance in their questionnaire responses. Inspection evidence found that the pupils are initially encouraged to think in terms of employability skills and of preparing for the world of work. This is followed by copious information on the different options open to them. In interview, pupils said that the advice provided is impartial and that they are helped to follow whatever path they choose as right for themselves. The confidence, self-esteem, initiative and independence that they develop over time helps them to become mature, confident and resilient young adults who are well prepared for the challenges of their future.