

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Merchant Taylors' Schools

Liverpool Road

Crosby

Liverpool

L23 0QP

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 provide clear and effective strategic direction, underpinned by a consistent focus on pupils' wellbeing. They ensure that policies and procedures are implemented systematically and effectively. During a period of change, including the transition to full co-education and consolidation of the senior school onto a single site, leaders have implemented developments in a phased and considered way, maintaining routines and expectations for pupils.
2. Teachers' secure subject knowledge and their appropriate use of assessment supports pupils to make good progress from their starting points. When teaching is well planned, learning activities build on pupils' prior knowledge and provide appropriate challenge. However, when teachers do not plan lessons well, this can have an impact on pupils' progress.
3. In the early years, children make a positive start to their education within a language-rich environment where adults model and extend vocabulary through discussion, questioning and storytelling. Clearly organised learning areas and well-established routines enable children to select resources independently and develop confidence in their learning. Staff use ongoing assessment and detailed tracking of development to adapt provision and address individual needs. As a result, children build confidence, communicate effectively and make good progress from their starting points.
4. Pupils benefit from a well-designed co-curricular programme that extends learning beyond the classroom and promotes independence and choice. Through structured opportunities, including participation in initiatives such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and a wide range of pupil-selected activities, they develop new skills, pursue individual interests and collaborate across year groups. Consequently, pupils engage readily in activities and demonstrate confidence and commitment beyond the classroom.
5. A well-sequenced personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, including relationships and sex education (RSE), supports pupils' age-appropriate understanding of wellbeing and relationships. The curriculum reflects relevant local and national issues. It is enriched by input from external agencies, including the police and visiting speakers. Pupils explore themes such as equality, respectful relationships and personal safety. As such, pupils develop secure knowledge and are well prepared to manage relationships and life in modern society.
6. Leaders implement and monitor a behaviour system across the school. They review behaviour information regularly to identify patterns and inform timely actions. Most pupils conduct themselves well across the school and respond positively to expectations. However, a minority of pupils do not consistently maintain these standards, particularly during less structured parts of the school day.
7. Leaders create opportunities for pupils to contribute actively to school and community life. They promote collaboration across age groups and enable pupils to participate in initiatives that support others beyond the school. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility, show awareness of others' needs and understand the importance of contributing to a shared community.
8. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are implemented systematically across the school. They establish clear procedures for identifying and responding to concerns, supported by regular training and effective partnership with external services. This ensures pupils are supported in a timely and coordinated manner.

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 behaviour systems are consistently embedded across the school so that pupils demonstrate respectful conduct in all areas of the school
- ensure that lessons are consistently well planned to promote active engagement in their learning and support all pupils' good progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have managed the transition to full co-education and the consolidation of the senior school onto one site with careful attention to pupils' wellbeing. They have implemented structured transition activities, opportunities to become familiar with the site and carefully managed teaching arrangements for current pupils in Year 11, which support continuity and stability. Leaders promote pupils' wellbeing through a central wellbeing facility integrating pastoral leadership, special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provision and counselling. This means that pupils access support readily and with confidence.
10. Leaders demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities. Leaders with responsibility for the early years demonstrate appropriate knowledge and ensure that statutory requirements are met. Governance provides effective oversight and challenge. As a result, the Standards are consistently met.
11. The school's aims and ethos are promoted by leaders and teachers. The 'ambition, character and excellence framework' is reflected across the curriculum and wider school life. In the prep school, structured programmes such as 'my happy mind' support pupils' personal development. These programmes support pupils in demonstrating a clear understanding of the school's values.
12. Leaders take a reflective and responsive approach to self-evaluation. Effective use of self-evaluation and stakeholder feedback informs development priorities. They gather views through pupil surveys, parent forums and staff consultation. They analyse this information systematically and share outcomes. They use these insights to inform clear development planning, including a one-year plan with defined milestones and a longer-term strategic plan.
13. All required policies reflect current statutory guidance and are implemented effectively. The mobile phone policy, introduced at the start of the academic year, is understood by the whole school community and is applied consistently by staff. As a result, pupils recognise the school as a mobile phone-free environment and understand the benefits for their learning and social interaction.
14. The school fulfils its responsibilities for providing information to the parents of current and prospective pupils. Required policies and key information are published on the school's website. Regular communication, including reporting, provides information about pupils' attainment, progress and wider development.
15. Well-established links with external agencies, including those supporting pupils' wellbeing, enable appropriate support. Statutory reporting to the local authority, including for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan) and those joining or leaving at non-standard transition points, takes place.
16. A clear understanding of risk underpins effective procedures across the school. Responsibilities are defined and governors maintain oversight. Risk assessments, including for visits and specialist provision, are in place and reviewed routinely. Staff follow established procedures. Potential risks are identified and managed in a timely manner.
17. A clear three-stage complaints process with appropriate timescales enables concerns to be managed systematically and supports early resolution. Where required, leaders investigate thoroughly, communicate outcomes clearly and appoint independent panel members. A detailed central log is

maintained, enabling effective oversight and identification of patterns. This informs reflection and improvement, including communication with parents.

18. Governors provide effective strategic oversight. Link governors visit regularly, observe school life and gather first-hand evidence through discussions with pupils and staff. Leaders report on key areas, including safeguarding and school development. Governors provide appropriate support whilst challenging and responding to emerging priorities.
19. Responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 are fulfilled effectively. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place and implemented through a co-ordinated approach across estates, the SEND provision and the admissions process. Facilities are adapted thoughtfully, including accessible buildings and specialist spaces such as a sensory wellbeing room. Assistive technology and tailored provision, including timetable adjustments and remote learning where appropriate, support pupils' needs. Staff receive regular training, which enables pupils to access the curriculum and wider school life fully.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders provide a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum. The curriculum is carefully planned and adapted to meet pupils' differing needs and aptitudes. Older pupils benefit from a suitably challenging and flexible curriculum which supports their academic progress and prepares them effectively for the next stage of education or training.
22. The curriculum promotes pupils' linguistic skills effectively across key stages. In English lessons, teachers use approaches to enable pupils to refine analytical writing and interpret texts with increasing confidence. In modern foreign language lessons, pupils communicate confidently in the target language. Through clear modelling, effective questioning and opportunities for extended responses, teachers enable pupils to articulate ideas with increasing accuracy. Consequently, pupils gain fluency, a secure vocabulary and confidence in speaking and writing.
23. In the early years, staff model language consistently and introduce ambitious vocabulary. Children listen effectively to their peers' contributions and respond accurately to instructions given by their teachers. This enables children to speak with confidence and express their ideas clearly.
24. Pupils secure mathematical knowledge and skills progressively. Teachers support the consolidation of core numeracy alongside the application of more complex problem-solving strategies. This enables pupils to use mathematics confidently and competently in line with their age and prior attainment. They use clear modelling, effective questioning and appropriate resources to underpin learning. For example, pupils in Year 4 use manipulatives to increase recall and application of times tables.
25. Across the curriculum, teachers enable pupils to apply scientific understanding effectively. Pupils draw on prior knowledge with confidence, for example when distinguishing between variables and expressing uncertainty in measurements accurately. Well-planned practical work promotes enquiry, prediction and collaboration. Pupils demonstrate secure numerical skills through accurate data handling, including the use of appropriate scales and units. They work co-operatively and engage purposefully in practical tasks, resulting in well-developed investigative, analytical and quantitative skills.
26. Teachers provide frequent opportunities for pupils to build aesthetic and creative skills across art, music, drama and performance. In drama lessons, structured tasks, modelling and feedback deepen pupils' exploration of character and narrative. In art lessons, pupils draw on the work of artists to inform their own pieces, applying techniques with increasing independence. Performance skills are extended through assemblies and a broad co-curricular programme. Pupils demonstrate creativity, confidence and imagination across a range of contexts.
27. In the early years, baseline assessment and ongoing evaluation of data identify areas of need. Teachers analyse progress towards early learning goals carefully and use this to inform targeted strategies. Detailed tracking of the characteristics of effective learning, alongside regular phonics assessment, allows provision to be adapted responsively. Children make good progress from their starting points, and needs are identified and supported promptly.

28. Leaders implement and monitor assessment frameworks and departmental processes to secure the timely collection of pupils' progress data. They analyse information to identify trends and inform appropriate strategies. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.
29. Lessons are generally well planned and are informed by teachers' secure subject knowledge and understanding of pupils' needs. Where teaching is planned effectively, pupils engage well, work independently and make good progress through effective questioning, modelling and appropriate support. However, this is not consistent across lessons. Where lesson planning is less well matched to pupils' needs, this can have an impact on pupils' learning and progress within lessons.
30. A clear and structured approach to reporting ensures that parents receive regular and relevant information about their child's attainment and progress. Reports are issued at appropriate intervals and include guidance to support further development. Parent-teacher meetings and ongoing informal communication complement this process. Parents are well informed and able to support their child's learning effectively.
31. Pupils who have SEND receive effective support. Leaders ensure that a well-qualified and appropriately resourced team, including specialist assessment expertise, is in place. Regular training ensures that staff understand pupils' needs and apply suitable teaching strategies. Needs are identified promptly through screening, assessment and staff referral, and clear pupil profiles guide teaching. Staff implement appropriate adaptations, including structured tasks and assistive technology. Progress is monitored closely and provision adjusted where needed, enabling pupils who have SEND to make good progress.
32. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate and responsive support. Leaders ensure that needs are identified at admission and through ongoing assessment. Teachers provide targeted provision through a graduated approach, including in-class strategies, small-group work and individual support where required. Progress is monitored carefully, with language development considered alongside academic outcomes and wellbeing. Pupils gain proficiency and access the full curriculum.
33. A broad and well-structured co-curricular programme enriches pupils' experience. Leaders ensure that the programme reflects pupils' interests and encourages initiative through pupil-led activities. Pupils engage positively and speak confidently about their involvement. In aquarium club, pupils collaborate across year groups, taking responsibility for maintaining the environment and researching suitable species. Opportunities such as DofE and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) sit alongside a wide range of clubs. Pupils develop confidence, leadership skills and sustained engagement beyond the classroom.

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

34. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

35. Leaders foster a culture of mutual trust and respect across the school community. A well-embedded PSHE programme, alongside the 'character' curriculum, equips pupils with the language and understanding to engage respectfully with difference, and supports their sense of identity and belonging. Consequently, pupils interact respectfully, value diversity and demonstrate a mature understanding of equality.
36. Children develop self-knowledge and self-confidence through 'thinking Thursday' in the early years. They discuss ideas in whole-group settings, listening to others and expressing their own views with increasing assurance. Regular self-portraits enable children to reflect on how they are growing, changing and developing as learners over time, supporting their awareness of themselves as individuals.
37. Leaders provide a broad and inclusive physical education (PE) programme that encourages high levels of participation. Pupils engage positively in a wide range of activities, including team sports, individual disciplines and fitness-based programmes. Staff use their subject knowledge effectively to support skill development and ensure activities are well organised and purposeful. Pupils demonstrate clear enjoyment, encourage one another and celebrate success. They develop a range of physical skills, from co-ordination to tactical awareness, alongside an understanding of teamwork and fair play. The programme offers opportunities beyond elite teams and supports increasing participation. Appropriate adaptations are made to meet individual needs. As a result, all pupils develop confidence, physical competence and an appreciation of the value of being physically healthy.
38. Teachers implement a well-sequenced PSHE curriculum effectively. Teachers use tracking tools and pupil self-assessment to monitor understanding and inform future learning. The curriculum is responsive to pupils' needs. Content is adapted to reflect emerging issues and statutory guidance. Regular evaluation, lesson visits and pupil feedback are used to refine provision. Consequently, pupils develop self-awareness, resilience and an appropriate understanding of their wellbeing.
39. Leaders plan and implement a comprehensive RSE curriculum that reflects statutory requirements and is taught in age-appropriate stages. Clear awareness of emerging themes, including misogyny and the impact of artificial intelligence, informs planning. Staff receive appropriate training and deliver sensitive content with confidence. External specialists enrich the programme and deepen pupils' understanding of relationships and sexual health. Communication with parents is effective and their views are considered. Through this curriculum, pupils develop secure knowledge and are increasingly well prepared for relationships and life in modern society.
40. Leaders implement a behaviour policy across the prep and senior schools. Leaders have revised the approach to managing poor behaviour this year in response to pupils' and parents' feedback. Behaviour information is reviewed to identify patterns. Leaders use this to guide actions, including increased supervision, staff training and targeted support. However, leaders' revised behaviour structures are not yet embedded consistently across all parts of the school day, particularly during less structured times.

41. Leaders implement appropriate anti-bullying procedures. Staff distinguish clearly between bullying and poor behaviour and follow established processes for investigation, recording and response. Guidance and support are provided for pupils and communication with parents takes place where required. The curriculum, assemblies and targeted strategies are used to address issues proactively. Pupils understand how to report concerns and know that staff take issues seriously.
42. Leaders maintain premises well through systematic oversight, regular review and prompt response to maintenance needs. Specialist facilities enhance provision across the school, including a dedicated space to support senior pupils' wellbeing, the prep school allotment, and well-designed early years outdoor spaces that promote exploration and play. These environments support pupils' learning, development and wellbeing.
43. Leaders ensure effective supervision throughout the school day, including arrival and departure. Clear routines, appropriate staffing and well-managed systems, including travel arrangements, support pupils' safety and wellbeing.
44. Leaders maintain accurate admission and attendance registers. Unexplained absence is followed up promptly. Attendance data is analysed to identify patterns and acted upon swiftly, including communication with parents and liaison with external agencies where appropriate. Attendance is monitored effectively and appropriate action is taken to safeguard pupils' welfare.
45. Leaders implement comprehensive health and safety arrangements across all aspects of school life. Clear procedures are maintained, regular staff training is provided and effective communication ensures that responsibilities are understood and applied consistently. Through these actions, pupils' safety and wellbeing are prioritised and potential risks are identified and managed proactively.
46. Leaders ensure well-organised first aid and medical arrangements. Leaders conduct regular checks of equipment, including first aid kits and defibrillators, to ensure readiness and reliability. This ensures that pupils receive prompt and appropriate care and participate safely in school life.
47. Leaders develop a range of opportunities, which enable pupils to develop leadership skills and take responsibility within their school community. Older pupils take on prefect roles through a structured process that includes application and interview. Those appointed undertake important duties, including supporting behaviour and supervision, and meet regularly with senior leaders. The school council is democratically elected and enables pupils to represent their peers and contribute to decision-making, including influencing changes to school practice. As a result, pupils develop confidence, social awareness and a clear understanding that their views can bring about meaningful change.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

49. Leaders foster a culture of mutual respect. Pupils take pride in their community and value opportunities to work collaboratively across year groups through the house system and co-curricular activities. For example, pupils and staff across the prep and senior schools participated collectively in a fundraising challenge for the school swimming pool, helping to develop a sense of community and shared responsibility.
50. In the early years, leaders ensure that children develop social awareness and a clear sense of responsibility. Children demonstrate tolerance, respect and care for others in their daily interactions, reflecting the school's 'character' curriculum. Consequently, they make a positive and increasingly confident contribution to the life of the school community from an early age.
51. Leaders promote British values effectively through the curriculum. In PSHE, pupils explore equality and discrimination. Across subjects, pupils engage with moral and social themes. Pupils in Year 5 research the life of Malala Yousafzai, relating the discrimination that she experienced to the rule of law and tolerance. Pupils develop a secure understanding of individual liberty and mutual respect and demonstrate inclusive attitudes as responsible citizens.
52. Pupils develop financial understanding through both curriculum and co-curricular provision. In curriculum lessons, they explore real-world concepts such as the national minimum wage, pensions and savings. This learning is extended through the 'TENDO' co-curricular programme, where pupils can undertake a personal finance course and can complete a professional level 3 qualification in investment. This enables pupils to acquire secure, practical knowledge and demonstrate confidence in managing their future economic wellbeing.
53. The careers programme is carefully sequenced so that pupils develop an increasingly informed understanding of higher education, careers and the wider world of work. It enables pupils to understand their interests and future pathways, supporting informed decision-making. Leaders provide broad and impartial advice and guidance. The school's alumni network enriches this further. Former pupils contribute to talks and share career experiences. The use of an online platform enables leaders to monitor pupils' engagement and aspirations. This ensures that pupils receive well-informed guidance that is responsive to individual needs.
54. Pupils engage confidently and purposefully with members of the wider community through sustained partnership work. They contribute to local initiatives, including community cafés in collaboration with local organisations where they lead activities and provide support, such as computer tuition for older people. Consequently, pupils demonstrate well-developed empathy, communicate effectively with a wide range of individuals and show a sense of social responsibility.
55. Leaders promote a clear understanding of right and wrong through the curriculum, behaviour systems and wider school culture. Through PSHE, assemblies and the 'character' curriculum, pupils consider moral choices, respect and responsibility. Pupils demonstrate this by supporting one another and contributing to the community, for example through buddy systems and charitable initiatives. This encourages pupils to accept responsibility for their actions and show a secure understanding of right and wrong.

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

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

57. Leaders establish a clear safeguarding culture across the school. They prioritise pupils' welfare through consistent expectations and ensure staff understand their responsibilities. Safeguarding is embedded in daily practice.
58. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities demonstrate secure knowledge and apply this effectively in their roles. Leaders maintain a clear whole-school structure for the reporting of safeguarding concerns. Regular meetings ensure that cases are reviewed and shared tracking systems maintain oversight. Leaders engage with external agencies, including local authority children's social care, child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS), the police and early help services. This ensures decisions are informed, timely and focused on pupils' needs.
59. Staff fulfil their duty to report concerns. Leaders maintain clear systems for recording and reporting, including centralised electronic records and anonymous reporting routes. Staff use these consistently, including for low-level concerns. Leaders use safeguarding information to identify trends, evaluate risk and adapt safeguarding practice where needed.
60. A planned training programme ensures staff and governors receive regular safeguarding training. This covers statutory requirements and reflects contextual risks, including mental health and online safety. Leaders draw on local authority training, specialist providers and external speakers. Regular briefings reinforce key messages. Consequently, staff understand and apply procedures consistently.
61. Leaders analyse safeguarding information to identify patterns, including trends in mental health and behaviour. They use this to implement targeted actions, such as increased supervision in identified areas and enhanced pastoral support. Dedicated wellbeing facilities and counselling support pupils with identified needs. Safeguarding practice remains responsive to individual needs as a result.
62. The single central record of appointments (SCR) is well maintained and accurately completed. All required recruitment and safeguarding checks for staff, volunteers and governors are completed in line with statutory requirements. Entries are clear, detailed and regularly reviewed. Governor oversight supports the recruitment process through termly reviews of the SCR and associated staff files. Leaders implement safer recruitment procedures effectively.
63. Leaders ensure appropriate internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place. Staff review alerts promptly, including those generated outside school hours and act without delay. Leaders provide a planned programme of education, covering online behaviour and other contextual risks. As a result, pupils develop understanding of how to keep themselves safe online.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Merchant Taylors' Schools
Department for Education number	343/6129
Registered charity number	1125485
Address	Merchant Taylors' Schools Liverpool Road Crosby Liverpool L23 0QP
Phone number	0151 928 3308
Email address	receptionmtss@merchanttaylors.com
Website	www.merchanttaylors.com
Proprietor	The Merchant Taylors' Schools, Crosby
Chair	Mr Philip Marshall KC
Headteacher	Mr Phil Dearden
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	843
Date of previous inspection	9 to 10 January 2024 (Boys' school) 14 to 16 November 2023 (Girls' school)

Information about the school

65. Merchant Taylors' Schools is a co-educational day school located in Crosby, on the outskirts of Liverpool. The school consists of a prep school and a senior school accommodated on two sites a short distance apart. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the last inspection, a new headteacher took up post in September 2025. At the same time, the former boys' and girls' schools formally merged to become a fully co-educational provision across all year groups.
66. There are 12 children in the early years comprising one Reception class.
67. The school has identified 214 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
68. The school has identified 83 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
69. The school aims to provide a high-quality education which is underpinned by the values of ambition, character and excellence. It seeks to enable pupils to make academic progress, develop confidence, resilience and integrity, and acquire a lasting love of learning. The school aims to promote a safe, inclusive and supportive community in which pupils feel valued and are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions. Through a broad curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular opportunities, the school aims to prepare pupils to be adaptable, articulate and outward-looking individuals who contribute positively to society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

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

71. 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 headteacher, 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.

72. 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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