

School inspection report

1 to 3 October 2024

St Margaret's Preparatory School

Gosfield Hall Park

Gosfield

Halstead

Essex

CO9 1SE

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. The governance team and leaders work closely and effectively together. They ensure that the school's aims and values are effectively communicated and understood by the school community. Leaders have the knowledge and skills to ensure the Standards are consistently met and promote pupils' wellbeing effectively.
2. Leaders utilise clear policies to support consistent teaching standards and maintain established routines. Leaders regularly monitor the effectiveness of teaching to ensure that it enables pupils to make good progress from their starting points.
3. The curriculum covers all required areas of learning. Staff plan their subjects well and in conjunction with each other so that lessons enable pupils to make purposeful links between topics and successfully relate and apply knowledge and skills from one area to another.
4. Teachers make effective use of a wide variety of resources and incorporate an effective range of activities into planning. As a result, pupils are engaged and enjoy learning. Teachers challenge pupils to think and reason in high quality discussions based on good subject knowledge. Systematic use of assessment systems ensures pupils understand how they can make progress, teachers plan lessons effectively for individual needs of pupils.
5. Personal, social and health education (PSHE), including relationships and sex education (RSE), are designed effectively and are age-appropriate to meet pupils' needs. Themes are taught both within discrete PSHE lessons and planned to be included where relevant across the curriculum. This programme helps pupils develop positive personal and social skills and be respectful and supportive of others.
6. Leaders and staff communicate high expectations for positive behaviour and how different types of behaviour will be responded to with rewards or sanctions. Teachers consistently apply the behaviour management strategy. Leaders ensure that any rewards given are related to the five school values to develop pupils' understanding of these. Pupils behave well across the school.
7. Planning within subjects and across the curriculum ensures that pupils learn about life in modern and ancient world cultures. This embeds respect for different cultural heritages and an understanding of their impact on the world. However, teaching about the different cultures that are represented in modern Britain is not as developed as possible, limiting pupils' understanding of these.
8. Leaders identify and act swiftly in response to any safeguarding concerns that may arise. The school's safeguarding arrangements are in line with current statutory guidance.

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:

- Strengthen pupil's knowledge of the different cultures that are represented in modern Britain to better prepare them for life in British society.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders are successful in creating an ethos which prioritises pupils' wellbeing. They have appropriate skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the Standards are met.
10. Leaders clearly communicate the schools aims and values through policies and their implementation, such as the behaviour management strategy.
11. Teaching is effectively and regularly monitored to ensure that it reflects the expectations of the school. Leaders encourage teaching staff to share and discuss effective practice so that teaching is consistently effective in developing pupils' learning across the school. Leaders liaise with a large group of schools in order to support their development of teaching, including by sharing resources and ideas about best practice.
12. Governance members monitor, challenge and evaluate leaders' actions and hold them to account. Governance members have specific responsibility for monitoring the effectiveness of the school in areas such as safeguarding, school improvement and health and safety. Members regularly visit the school. Annual audits of safeguarding and health and safety are carried out to support the school in meeting the Standards and complying with current legislation and guidance.
13. The school leadership and governance representatives carry out an annual self-evaluation of school practice that results in the development of a school improvement plan. For example, leaders' analysis of pupils' attainment results in the previous academic year led to their identification of pupils' mathematics knowledge as a focus for further improvement. Actions taken, such as the adoption of a different scheme of work, have been successful in further developing pupils' mathematical understanding. Leaders assess any proposed actions designed to improve the school to check that there are not likely to be any unintended risks or consequences in what has been proposed.
14. Leaders in the early years provide suitable guidance to staff that helps enable their professional development and promotes reflective practice. This ensures that staff apply a consistent approach to teaching that enables children to make good progress.
15. School policies utilise templates common to the schools across the proprietary group. Leaders adapt these effectively to meet the needs of the school. Leaders ensure that policies comply with up-to-date legislation or guidance and are provided or made available as required on the school's website. Parents are also provided with suitable information in reports about their child's progress and attainment. The local authority is provided with the required information about pupils who receive funding, including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
16. Leaders work effectively with external agencies in supporting pupils affected by any safeguarding and welfare concerns.
17. Governance ensures a suitable policy is effectively supported by risk assessments relevant to the school premises, trips and activities. The risk assessments contain suitable measures to mitigate against foreseeable risks. Risk assessments are regularly monitored, reviewed and updated as required to reduce risk as much as possible.

18. A suitable complaints procedure is in place and appropriately implemented, although the school has not received any formal complaints since the previous inspection. An appropriate record is kept of complaints. Leaders act promptly and in line with the published policy to address concerns.
19. The school maintains and implements a suitable accessibility plan. It fulfils its duties under the Equality Act in making reasonable adjustments for pupils when required and ensuring that staff are suitably trained to support any pupils with a disability.

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. The curriculum is well planned. Teachers plans link themes covered in subjects such as English or the humanities with other subjects so that pupils can apply knowledge from one area of learning to another. This planning supports pupils' development of understanding of how different subjects relate to each other.
22. The early years curriculum covers all seven areas of learning with the addition of religious education (RE) and French. It is planned to consider the needs and interests of the children. Planning focuses on teaching early reading and communication skills. Children are successful in learning initial letter sounds and then blending sounds together. Teachers model language and vocabulary effectively so children are confident to engage in conversation and develop secure language skills. They make effective use of carefully chosen resources to enable children to develop an understanding of number and pattern. By the end of Reception most pupils reach a good level of development.
23. Teaching takes into account pupils' prior learning and teaching methods are adapted to pupils' individual needs. Pupils, including those with high prior attainment, are enabled to explore concepts at appropriate depth and with suitable levels of support or independence. Suitable planning introduces concepts sequentially and in small steps, so building and embedding facts into pupils' understanding. Well-chosen activities are designed to support pupils' motivation and perseverance. These strategies support pupils from all starting points to make good progress and develop their knowledge and skills, with many gaining scholarships or achieving success in examinations for entry to selective senior or secondary schools. Teaching reflects and promotes the positive values of the school.
24. Teachers use resources creatively and effectively. Where there is a need, pupils' learning and understanding are secured through use of practical artefacts and resources. Appropriate specific resources such as those for science investigation or historical interpretation enable pupils to develop specific subject-related skills. Effective use of technology such as laptops and tabletop devices encourage independence and application of intellectual effort, allowing pupils to work at a level suitable for their ability. Teachers use website and application resources skilfully to support pupils' development of effective research and analytical skills.
25. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are aware of common misconceptions which may arise within the topic being covered. Teachers adapt plans promptly during lessons in response to ongoing assessment and to address any misconceptions observed. Teachers' effective questioning techniques enable pupils to answer questions thoughtfully and justify their reasoning with confidence.
26. Assessment is used effectively by teachers to plan for individual pupils' needs and abilities. Teachers consistently apply the school marking policy to provide pupils with written and verbal feedback that clarifies which aspects of their work have been most successful and where further development is needed. This feedback enables pupils to understand what is needed and improve their work further.
27. Teachers use information provided by the leader of special educational needs provision to suitably support pupils who have special educational needs (SEND) by planning activities well matched to their individual needs, so these children make good progress. Teaching assistants are also used effectively to support classes and individuals.

28. Teachers provide pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) with effective support for their English when this is required. For example, they provide additional guidance about the meaning and use of subject specific vocabulary. Such measures help pupils to access subjects and make good progress in them.
29. The school provides a wide range of activities which supplement the taught curriculum both before school, during lunch time and after school. Pupils can pursue interest in specific sports or in singing and in instrumental playing. The range of clubs and activities helps pupils develop their understanding and skills in areas such as coding and science, forest craft and table tennis.

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

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

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

31. Leaders communicate the school's behaviour code and values and its rejection of bullying effectively. They promote positive behaviour and respond appropriately to any incidents where pupils make poorer behavioural choices. Rewards are awarded when pupils exhibit behaviour in line with the school's value of being 'kind, caring friends', so encouraging pupils to develop positive social interactions and demonstrate mutual respect for their peers. Poor behavioural choices or bullying incidents are rare and are swiftly dealt with. Pupils behave well and are polite and kind.
32. PSHE lessons include themes taught in cycles through the year groups. This allows pupils to build their understanding year on year. Children in the early years explore their identity and family dynamics. Storytelling sessions encourage children to openly articulate emotions like sadness, anger, happiness, and excitement. Teachers foster coping strategies such as breathing techniques to help pupils learn how to manage their feelings and emotional responses. Pupils develop understanding of the importance of treating people fairly and equally and knowledge about how race, religion, appearance or disability should not be a cause for discrimination.
33. RSE is taught in age-appropriate themes through the PSHE programme. Pupils learn about different types of families, how to form positive friendships and the potential consequences of peer pressure, the impact of puberty and the concept of consent. The RSE programme complies with current statutory guidance.
34. Teachers through the school ensure pupils have many opportunities to contribute to class discussion or perform in front of others, such as through giving presentations in assembly. Through these, pupils develop self-confidence and self-esteem. Staff and pupils utilise the school saying, 'It's cool to be me!', to affirm the value of pupils' right to have their individual identity respected. Teachers, including those in the early years provide structured opportunities for pupils to take initiative, fostering their sense of independence and confidence.
35. Religious education (RE) lessons teach pupils about major world faiths. Pupils gain knowledge of and respect for different religions – through comparison of the similarities and differences between their customs and values.
36. The physical education (PE) curriculum promotes physical health and an understanding of the importance of exercise. In the early years, PE lessons and outdoor play with bicycles develops gross motor skills. These activities together with climbing and regular walks around the site enable children to extend their balance and co-ordination skills. Older pupils experience a programme that enables them to develop skills in a variety of sports. Pupils develop their team sports skills in competing against other schools.
37. School premises and accommodation are suitably maintained, and any required remedial action is implemented swiftly. Health and safety procedures are effective. Health and safety and fire safety equipment is regularly serviced, and appropriate staff training is in place. The fire safety policy is implemented effectively, including through up-to-date fire risk assessments and regular fire evacuation drills.

38. Staff are deployed effectively to ensure that pupils are adequately supervised in lessons and during breaks, as well as on trips and during activities. Early years children are always in sight and hearing of staff and staff to child ratios are maintained in line with statutory requirements.
39. Suitable provision is in place for pupils who feel unwell or who need first aid. Any medicines are stored and administered appropriately, with parents suitably informed. Appropriate numbers of trained staff, including those trained in paediatric first aid, are available as required. The school meets the needs of pupils with specific medical or dietary requirements through careful procedures, such as when food is served.
40. Admission and attendance registers are appropriately maintained. Leaders monitor levels of absence and attendance patterns and take action as needed. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at nonstandard transition points. There is an appropriate attendance policy which is effectively implemented in line with statutory requirements.

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

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

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

42. The PSHE programme builds pupils knowledge of concepts such as democracy, personal freedom, and the rule of law. Lesson plans identify when these values are covered in other areas of the curriculum, so that these values are constantly reinforced. Pupils have a thorough appreciation of the values which underpin British society and how they are applied to their everyday lives.
43. Democracy is a theme within lessons on British values, where pupils are taught about the principles of democratic representation and how this applies to the election of members of Parliament. Further planning by teachers to enable pupils to begin to understand and exercise their democratic rights starts from the early years as children vote daily to choose the end of day story. Teachers incorporate democratic choice into as many school routines as possible, so pupils are enabled to have their voices included in decision-making within the school. In this way they become familiar with the democratic process in action.
44. Teachers plan visits and trips to further pupils' knowledge of British institutions, the legal system and the role of police and Parliament. School assemblies reinforce themes of respect and adherence to social values.
45. Economic considerations such as budgeting and managing savings are explored through PSHE themes for all year groups. Children in the early years learn about the use of money in their play. Teachers plan further activities to enable pupils to put their developing economic knowledge into practice in making and selling items for school fairs, or carrying out mathematical investigations based on cost analysis.
46. PSHE lessons often feature scenarios exploring specific moral dilemmas and encourage pupils to reflect upon the possible consequences of different choices relating to these. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of the benefits of positive moral choices, and the potential consequences of poor ones.
47. The geography curriculum, topic themes and cross-curricular work in art and performing arts, enable pupils to gain knowledge and understanding about different global cultures, as well as a knowledge and associated skills of human and social activities. They learn about important figures who represent diverse backgrounds and are encouraged to reflect on the impact of prejudice. Pupils understanding is further reinforced through work linked to one of the school's five values, 'to be respectful global citizens'. However, pupils' learning about the cultures that make up modern Britain is more limited and does not prepare them for life in British society as effectively as possible.
48. The school develops pupils' sense of social responsibility well. Children in the early years learn that they have a responsibility towards their community, such as by helping to ensure that the setting is tidy at the end of the session. Roles of responsibility are established for older pupils. These encourage pupils to contribute to their own community and develop their social and interpersonal skills as prefects and house captains, for example. The support of older peer, 'play leaders' as role models encourage younger pupils to develop positive social skills of co-operation and turn taking. Year 6 anti-bullying ambassadors are trained to help peers resolve minor conflicts and be a listening ear for small worries and concerns. Pupils also develop their understanding of social responsibility

and how they can contribute to the lives of others in their local community by supporting fund raising activities for charities and collecting harvest goods for the local foodbank.

49. School leaders invite alumni to talk to pupils about their careers and the role of education and the impact of the school in their choices this encourages pupils to begin to think about potential careers.

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

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

Safeguarding

51. Leaders and proprietors ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. The proprietor provides comprehensive oversight of the safeguarding policy and procedures through annual audits and regular meetings with leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities.
52. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training, including at induction. They understand their responsibilities under the code of conduct, including the duty to report any safeguarding concerns about others working in the school, no matter how small. Staff understand how to use the school's reporting procedures and communicate any safeguarding concerns promptly.
53. The safeguarding team are trained to carry out their duties. They respond swiftly and effectively to any concerns raised. They monitor the welfare of pupils affected by safeguarding issues and provide them with appropriate support. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities liaise effectively with external safeguarding partners, including by referring concerns to them when appropriate. They keep detailed records of safeguarding concerns and the rationale for actions taken in response to these.
54. Governance ensures that procedures are in place to provide robust comprehensive oversight and challenge of practice through annual audits of safeguarding and regular meetings with leaders. The proprietary body's safeguarding advisor provides leaders with safeguarding advice and shares ideas about best practice from other schools in the proprietary group. This further develops leaders' and staff's understanding of safeguarding practice
55. The single central record of appointments (SCR) records all safer recruitment checks accurately. All required checks are carried out before any adults commence working at the school. The proprietor monitors the SCR to ensure that all required safer recruitment checks are completed and accurately recorded.
56. Proprietors ensure that the school has suitable filtering and monitoring systems in place to protect pupils when using the internet. These systems are tested, and any concerns swiftly acted on to review and amend practice.
57. Leaders encourage pupils to raise any concerns either to a trusted adult or through anonymous 'concern boxes' which are regularly monitored.
58. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online through PSHE and computer science lessons. Their understanding of safe internet usage is checked by staff when computers are in use in lessons.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Margaret's Preparatory School
Department for Education number	881/6022
Address	St Margaret's Preparatory School Gosfield Hall Park Gosfield Halstead, Essex CO9 1SE
Phone number	01787 472134
Email address	admin@stmargaretsprep.com
Website	www.stmargaretsprep.com
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd
Chair	Mrs Karen Gracie-Langrick
Headteacher	Mrs Carolyn Moss
Age range	2 to 11 years
Number of pupils	166
Date of previous inspection	12 to 15 October 2021

Information about the school

60. St Margaret's Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1946 in the coach house and stable block of Gosfield Hall in Essex. The school became part of the Cognita group, which is responsible for its governance, in December 2008. An advisory body supports the proprietary group in its oversight of the school.
61. There are 41 children in the early years. There are 2 Nursery classes, one for children aged 2 to 3 years and one for children ages 3 to 4 years. There is one Reception class.
62. The school has identified 11 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Very few pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for six pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to ensure that every child enjoys their learning journey, achieves their very best and becomes a responsible global citizen who can work together co-operatively and with respect for others. It seeks to promote five core values: joyful, creative and determined, proud of our learning journeys, respectful global citizens, kind, caring friends and confident communicators.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

1 to 3 October 2024

65. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. Inspection activities included:

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

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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

For more information, please visit isi.net