

School inspection report

6 to 8 February 2024

St Hilda's School

St Hilda's School

High Street

Bushey

WD23 3DA

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. St Hilda's School is a stimulating and exciting learning environment where leaders have created a safe place for children to learn and be happy, in line with the aims of the school.
2. The governing body has effective oversight of all policies and practices. They ensure leaders are focused on continuous improvement and have a targeted school development plan. Governors are well informed about the school, understand their responsibilities well and they are responsive to the needs of pupils.
3. Leaders and managers promote and support pupils' wellbeing. Pupils' developmental needs are at the heart of their thinking. The philosophy of 'kind acts, kind words, kind deeds' informs the actions of both leaders and staff.
4. Leaders and teachers in the early years have an astute awareness of children's needs and provide high levels of care. They have an informed understanding of the early years' framework and the associated requirements. Teaching is well planned and children show clear progression in all seven areas of learning.
5. Teachers are mutually supportive and there is a collaborative approach to learning. This results in pupils making good and sometimes rapid progress. However, leaders' oversight and monitoring of teaching is not fully developed. In a few cases, teaching is not as effective, and pupils' progress is not as consistent.
6. Leaders support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. A well-defined referral process is followed. Leaders' careful analysis of data identifies pupils' needs and they ensure that appropriate support is in place.
7. The personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme has a positive effect on the relationships amongst pupils and adults. It prepares them well for life in British society and as global citizens.
8. In the early years, and throughout the school, encouragement and support from teachers gives pupils resilience and develops the importance of working collaboratively.
9. The school's effective and vigilant safeguarding culture reflects leaders' thorough knowledge and carefully planned support for staff and pupils. Lessons are learned from any concerns and inform leaders' future actions.

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 the effective oversight and monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that all teaching has defined outcomes, enabling pupils to make consistent progress
- ensure all teaching strategies are effective and line with school policies so the needs of all pupils are catered for appropriately.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders place the wellbeing of pupils at the centre of their decision-making. This is reflected in their positive interactions with the pupils. The curriculum is well planned and provides a wide range of subjects and extra-curricular activities for pupils. Pupils acquire new skills and make good progress. The decision by leaders to embed the nursery as part of the whole school means that early years staff receive regular support from specialist staff and children have access to a well-planned programme of activities. These stimulate and foster enthusiasm for learning in the youngest children and ensure they feel an integrated part of the wider school community.
11. The decision by leaders to encourage creative and critical thinking ensures pupils have the opportunity to develop both these skills. Pupils self-analyse their work effectively, so they can learn from their mistakes.
12. However, leaders monitoring of teaching does not always ensure that teachers plan consistently and in line with the school's policies. This leads to variations in the quality of teaching and learning for some pupils.
13. The analysis of data is thorough and helps to ensure pupils make good and sometimes rapid progress. Leaders' diligent analysis and tracking informs the support or challenge provided for pupils. In consequence, pupils on the SEND register make good progress.
14. Leaders' development of a well-planned PSHE curriculum means all the required topics are covered. Pupils gain a clear understanding of the diverse nature of modern society.
15. Due regard is given to the Equality Act to ensure there is inclusivity, diversity and equality for all pupils. There is a detailed accessibility plan to increase the support for pupils to access the curriculum and the physical environment.
16. Leaders are reflective and evaluative and listen to the views of pupils. As a result, new extra-curricular clubs have been introduced which enable pupils to develop their interests. Leaders also seek the views of parents and staff to help them identify any areas for improvement. Leaders create positive relationships with parents so there is open communication which supports pupils' welfare and learning. They provide clear guidance for parents to assist them when they are considering the next step of their child's education. Parental concerns and complaints are handled effectively in line with the complaints policy and are recorded carefully.
17. Children achieve well in the early years. Leaders create a lively and stimulating environment with well-planned activities. Staff knowledge and expertise ensure that children access all of the seven areas of learning. Effective assessment procedures provide data that is used to help each child achieve their potential.
18. Leaders have a systematic and attentive approach to risk management across all areas of the school. Risk assessments are thorough and monitored effectively by the governing body. They identify any hazards and include the ways in which to reduce risk. They are regularly reviewed and adapted as required.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Teaching enables all pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good and sometimes rapid progress. Most teaching is well planned. Teachers review pupils' previous knowledge and use this to plan their next steps in learning. Activities are adapted to support pupil progress and teachers use questioning effectively to review prior learning. Pupils understand the success criteria they receive: what they must include, what they should aspire towards and what they could achieve through challenging themselves. Leaders actively promote cross-curricular planning and learning so that pupils can transfer skills between subjects. Teachers encourage pupils to challenge themselves and select for themselves the more difficult work on offer. When teaching provides challenge and engaging activities, pupils are enthusiastic in their learning. The vast majority of pupils are active and effective learners.
21. In a few cases, teaching is less effective as planned activities do not always build on prior learning or identify next steps for all pupils, and questioning is of limited effectiveness in testing pupils' understanding.
22. Teachers usually provide high quality and focused feedback. Pupils respond positively to advice and use this to improve their work. Teachers give pupils a clear indication of their achievement which supports pupils' progress and skills acquisition. On occasions, teachers do not follow the school policies in this respect, and pupils' progress is less consistent as a result. Leaders are not always aware of this due to their limited oversight of teaching.
23. Leaders' effective use of data allows them to monitor if pupils make progress and achieve well. High levels of achievement can be seen in successful scholarship and senior school entry results.
24. Pupils on the SEND register are quickly identified and suitable support is provided. The use of visual prompts and other resources means that pupils who have SEND can access the learning tasks. Pupils are regularly assisted by the effective use of support staff. These pupils make good progress overall.
25. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) respond well to the individual teaching they receive and so make good progress in their fluency with English.
26. Leaders provide a wide-ranging and ambitious English curriculum. Pupils write effectively for a range of different audiences and purposes. They write persuasively and creatively, using emotive language effectively to analyse pictures and posters.
27. As a result of leaders' decision to increase access to quality reading material, pupils regularly read for pleasure. Pupils read eloquently and have an advanced understanding of language and vocabulary. Owing to constant encouragement and high expectations from teachers, pupils articulate their thoughts well in lessons and discussions.
28. The curriculum for mathematics provides pupils with challenge and progression. Pupils review their work critically and know how to improve it. They apply advanced mathematical concepts and processes effectively. Teachers use critical questioning. Pupils make rapid progress in mathematics from the early years onwards.

29. In the early years, staff adapt the curriculum in response to children's learning needs. A happy, productive environment enables the children in the setting to make good progress. Almost all children meet the early learning goals.
30. Reception children form their letters correctly and are adept at writing opening sentences for stories independently. Nursery children engage enthusiastically and benefit from the lively and interactive nature of the planned sessions. Children move freely around the activities and show the ability to choose sensibly and direct their own learning from an early age. Adults encourage children to make their own decisions and to express their thoughts. This continual encouragement means children have well-developed language skills and high levels of confidence. Leaders make effective use of high-quality resources for both child-initiated activities and outdoor learning.
31. Leaders provide a varied recreational extra-curricular programme, including activities such as drama, dance, tennis and an orchestra. Pupils, including children in the early years, enjoy a variety of activities and visits and thus develop both recreational and life skills.

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

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

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

33. Leaders put the physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing of all pupils at the forefront of their decision-making and planning. Pupils enjoy positive and mutually respectful relationships based on trust. They feel they can approach a trusted adult to talk to. They consistently display their happiness at being at the school and value the opportunities leaders provide.
34. Leaders and staff are consistent in their enthusiasm and belief in pupils. Pupils grow in self-esteem and confidence in a supportive environment. They have a sense of purpose, understanding of others and opportunities for creativity through music, art and dance. In their many performance opportunities, pupils show self-discipline and pride, and grow in confidence.
35. Pupils of all ages learn to understand healthy relationships and the diversity within the modern world through an effective PHSE programme. Decisions by leaders to develop the young mindfulness workshops, empathy week and a comprehensive PSHE programme means pupils have well-developed understanding of others' feelings and emotions. Pupils show high levels of empathy for all people. They express clearly the importance of respect and know how important it is to treat other people well. Pupils express the view that it is about 'stepping into other people's shoes and knowing how they feel, like characters in books or in real life'. Passion, confidence and empowerment for the pupils form part of the school's own 'values of the month' programme.
36. Pupils understand how to build firm friendships and the qualities that make a 'good friend'. They discuss knowledgeably the importance of kindness and understanding, which they can then relate to their daily lives.
37. Leaders are diligent regarding all matters of health and safety. A sufficient number of staff are well trained in first aid. Suitable arrangements are in place to care for pupils' medical needs and if they become unwell. The site is well maintained, and any issues are quickly identified and addressed. Measures are in place so that pupils, staff and visitors are kept safe and protected. Precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Fire evacuation drills take place regularly. Attendance and admissions registers are maintained properly. Absences and pupil transfers are followed up diligently and leaders make the required reports to local authorities. Leaders have effective systems in place for the supervision of pupils.
38. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on their own behaviour, so that pupils know the effect their behaviour has on others. In lessons and when moving around the school, pupils' behaviour is good. They are orderly and show high levels of self-control. Pupils have a clear understanding of what bullying is and its negative effect on other pupils. They are emphatic that there is no bullying in the school but feel confident that were it to happen the staff would deal with it immediately and effectively.
39. In the early years leaders' decision to follow the whole school code of conduct provides a clear framework for the positive reinforcement of good behaviour from an early age. Children are kind to each other, modelling the behaviour of adults in the setting.
40. Leaders' use of wellbeing surveys provides informative data about pupils' attitudes and feelings. The effective tracking of this information ensures areas of concern are identified promptly. Child-based

targets means pupils can see their own progress. Pupils are usually highly positive about their learning.

41. Through the physical education curriculum, pupils learn to enjoy sport and appreciate the physical and mental benefits of exercise. Many pupils enjoy representing their school in various sports, building their confidence and teamwork skills.

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

42. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

43. Leaders have designed a curriculum that encourages pupils to work collaboratively and share ideas effectively. Pupils work sensibly in groups and allocate and discuss roles within the group maturely. They explain tasks to each other carefully and offer support when needed.
44. The PSHE scheme of work provides opportunities for pupils to develop their knowledge of British values. They speak informatively about the House of Commons and how laws are made. They understand the importance of democracy and select their own representatives on the school council. Pupils talk about the work of the local council and the rights and responsibilities of people in modern society.
45. The leaders provide support for pupils' ideas for charitable fundraising. Pupils take responsibility for organising charity events and gain an understanding of the value of money and of how money is spent. As a result, pupils develop a sense of financial awareness when supporting the local foodbank, local charities and raising money to support refugees in the Middle East.
46. Pupils contribute meaningfully to the school community, encouraged by the support of the school leaders and staff. Pupils undertake roles of the various pupil councils within the school and learn to appreciate the work they do. As a result of leaders listening to pupils' suggestions, they are able to give examples of how they are able to make changes. The pupils have been instrumental in extending the extra-curricular activities provision, purchasing new equipment for the playground and organising charitable events.
47. Leadership provides effective opportunities for pupils to work together. The system of 'buddies' in the school results in younger pupils having positive role models whilst older pupils learn how to take responsibility for a younger person.
48. The experiences provided by leaders in the early years ensure that children develop resilience. Young children know the importance of taking turns and sharing resources. Older pupils appreciate the supportive nature of their peers and the collegiate manner in which they work. Pupils at all ages show a notable sense of community spirit. Pupils are prepared well for their next stage of education.
49. Leaders establish close local community links which allow pupils to make a significant contribution and feel valued and appreciated. Leaders are fully supportive of pupils' suggestions for providing aid. They support the local care home and foodbank and raise money for refugees in the Middle East. This also promotes pupils' empathy and understanding of those who are less fortunate than themselves.
50. Leaders encourage pupils to share their talents and be proud of their achievements. Pupils voice their opinions about everyone being treated equally, regardless of differences, in an eloquent and informed manner.
51. The focus on respect and tolerance for others develops in pupils the skills for life in today's society. World faith day organised by the staff allows pupils to discuss their faith openly. Other pupils present on a family tradition or something important to them. Leaders organise for faith leaders to visit the school increasing pupils' understanding of the role of spirituality in people's lives.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

53. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are effective. A diligent approach by leaders ensures a culture of safeguarding is embedded well across the school. There is an efficient system for recording concerns, which are reviewed regularly by leaders for any emerging patterns. Thorough staff training ensures they can recognise causes for concern and know the procedures for reporting them. Staff report low-level concerns and are alert to the dangers posed by child-on-child abuse and extremism.
54. The school's written safeguarding policy reflects the most recent guidance and is implemented effectively. Leaders train staff and volunteers and provide regular safeguarding updates. The safeguarding leads have received appropriate training and are confident and knowledgeable in their duties.
55. Governors receive safeguarding training and regular updates from leaders and understand their role. Safeguarding has a high priority. Governors ensure the leaders have the knowledge and skills to effectively carry out their duties and responsibilities.
56. The school is cognisant of the pupils in their care and pupils feel safe. Behaviour and academic information is cross-referenced with safeguarding logs so leaders have an informed oversight.
57. Rigorous procedures for the appointment of new staff are in place. The single central record is maintained accurately and all the required recruitment checks are carried out to ensure the suitability of adults who come into contact with pupils.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Hilda's School
Department for Education number	919/6080
Registered charity number	298140
Address	St Hilda's School High Street Bushey WD23 3DA
Phone number	0208 9501751
Email address	secretary@sthildasbushey.co.uk
Website	www.sthildasbushey.com
Proprietor	The Aldenham Foundation
Chair	Mrs Sarah Altman
Headteacher	Mr Andy Kaye
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	152
Date of previous inspection	3 to 5 December 2019

Information about the school

59. St Hilda's School is a day school for female pupils with a co-educational nursery, situated in Bushey, Hertfordshire. The school consists of a single building housing all the classrooms and nursery. It is administered by a board of governors.
60. There are 62 children in the early years comprising the Nursery and a Reception class.
61. The school has identified 7 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. English is an additional language (EAL) for 8 pupils.
63. The school states its aims are to provide an excellent, well-balanced, academic education within a supportive, caring community. Encouraging each child to give and achieve her personal best and to develop into an independent individual with a deep respect for others, who is fully prepared for the next stage of education.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

6 to 8 February 2024

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

65. 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 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.

66. 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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