

School inspection report

14 to 16 October 2025

St Margaret's School

Merry Hill Road

Bushey

Hertfordshire

WD23 1DT

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 have established a clear strategic vision that is ambitious and responsive to pupils' needs and aptitudes. They secure ongoing improvement across the school's academic and co-curricular provision. As a result, pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop the skills, knowledge and understanding needed for success in school and in preparation for adult life, higher education and future employment.
2. Governors provide effective oversight, holding leaders to account so that improvements to the school continue. They offer effective support and challenge for leaders so that the Standards are met consistently. Leaders and governors implement robust systems to manage risk, supported by a comprehensive range of risk assessments that are regularly reviewed and acted on. These arrangements contribute positively to pupils' safety and wellbeing. A few administrative errors in the single central record of checks on contracted staff were found during the inspection. These were quickly rectified.
3. Leaders check that policies align with statutory guidance. While policies are consistently implemented effectively in most areas, the behaviour policy is not consistently well implemented across the school. This means that occasionally, pupils disrupt others' learning. Parents are well informed about their children's progress. The school's statutory responsibilities, including, for example, safeguarding and admissions, are fulfilled. The school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
4. Leaders have developed a curriculum that is aspirational, broad and responsive to pupils' needs and interests across all phases of the school. In the early years, provision is carefully tailored to children's individual development needs, with a clear focus on communication, literacy, numeracy and early independence.
5. Teaching is typically well planned, so pupils engage successfully with their learning. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. They use appropriate strategies to support pupils' progress. Leaders ensure that assessment information is used effectively to track pupils' achievement and to identify those who may need additional support, including for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The co-curricular programme is extensive and contributes positively to pupils' personal development.
6. Leaders promote a deep culture of kindness, respect and inclusion. This is evident in pupils' conduct and in their interactions with others. Pupils benefit from a wide range of opportunities to develop their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding. Their physical and emotional wellbeing are supported effectively. Pupils, for example, access structured exercise programmes, healthy eating initiatives and a thoughtfully resourced wellbeing centre.
7. Pupils' behaviour is typically positive. Relationships between pupils and staff are generally warm and constructive. Teachers' responses to some behaviour issues are not consistent. Boarding provision meets the Standards. Overall, pupils feel safe and well cared for, although a few boarders feel that their views are not always listened to.
8. Health and safety, fire safety, supervision and site security arrangements are effective, and pupils' attendance is well managed. Consequently, pupils benefit from a secure and supportive environment.

9. Pupils' social and cultural development is promoted effectively through a rich programme of enrichment activities. This fosters their sense of responsibility and awareness of societal needs.
10. Pupils develop economic understanding appropriate to their age. Careers education is well planned. It provides pupils with impartial guidance and informed advice, so they make appropriate choices about further study and careers.
11. Pupils reflect on moral and ethical issues. They understand the principles of democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty. Pupils are encouraged to participate in decision-making and leadership activities. These opportunities foster respect for diverse viewpoints and prepare them well for life in modern British society.
12. Leaders promote a strong safeguarding culture. Policies and procedures are appropriate, reflecting current statutory guidance. Staff receive suitable training, which ensures that pupils are safeguarded effectively.

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 systems are in place to verify that the employment history of contractors is appropriately checked and recorded accurately to avoid administrative errors occurring
- ensure that teachers apply the behaviour policy consistently to ensure that any low-level disruptive behaviour is managed effectively.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Leaders have implemented a vision for the school, which meets pupils' needs and aptitudes through a wide-ranging curriculum. Pupils access a variety of opportunities to inspire and engage them in learning. Leaders reflect on the views of pupils, parents and staff to make decisions about the school's academic and co-curricular provision. They identify areas for further development and implement effective strategies, which lead to improved provision and pupils' outcomes. Opportunities for pupils to develop a range of skills, knowledge and understanding beyond the needs of the classroom ensure that they are prepared appropriately for higher education, adult life and the world of work.
14. Governors make effective use of a range of information to evaluate leaders' work. They receive and scrutinise detailed reports on all aspects of the school's provision, undertake regular visits to the school and meet frequently with senior leaders. Through these activities, governors provide informed support and appropriate challenge towards ongoing improvement. They ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills necessary so that the school meets the requirements of the Standards consistently.
15. Leaders and governors implement an effective approach to risk management. A comprehensive range of risk assessments is in place, covering all aspects of school life, including the site, the curriculum, educational visits, the boarding house and off-site activities. Leaders review these assessments regularly. They take proportionate action to ensure that identified risks are mitigated appropriately. Arrangements to support pupils who require additional care are well considered. As a result, the management of risk across the school is typically thorough, contributing effectively to pupils' safety and wellbeing.
16. Leaders ensure that policies and procedures are well developed and implemented in accordance with current statutory guidance. Policies are readily accessible to parents through the school's website. Leaders promote consistent practice so that policies are understood and applied effectively by staff and pupils. The school's three-stage complaints policy, for example, is clear and available to parents. Staff respond promptly and effectively to informal concerns. Leaders manage formal complaints appropriately, in line with the school's complaints policy. However, the policy on pupils' behaviour is not consistently implemented, so occasionally, pupils' behaviour falls short of the school's high expectations.
17. Leaders provide parents and external agencies with timely and appropriate information about pupils' attainment and progress. Parents receive regular written reports about their children's learning. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. They share all required information for pupils who have education, health and care plans (EHC plans), including that relating to funding and finance. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners, to secure specialist support for pupils when required.
18. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan in place to ensure no pupils are discriminated against. The school fully meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.

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. Leaders have developed a wide-ranging curriculum, which responds systematically to pupils' abilities, interests and aspirations.
21. Through ongoing reflection on their provision and practice, leaders in the early years have implemented a well-planned curriculum. Leaders plan activities and strategies which support children's individual needs and encourage independence. Teachers ensure that children's understanding of phonics to support early reading is developed from an early age. Children listen to different sounds and quickly learn to associate these with written letters. The development of children's communication skills is a priority. Early years practitioners support language acquisition, for example, with visual cues, such as picture prompts and through the addition of signing key words and actions. Leaders ensure that children's experiences are broad through, for example, interaction with specialist teaching in music, dance, movement and modern foreign languages. Children enjoy singing and counting to five in Spanish.
22. In the junior school, leaders have developed a broad and balanced curriculum which reflects the school's aims to develop confident, well-rounded learners who are equipped for senior school. The model secures the foundations of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. Schemes of work promote progression within and between year groups, drawing on specialist teaching and cross-curricular links, so that learning is purposeful and engaging. The breadth of subjects on offer is extensive, including Spanish, swimming, food technology, emotional and financial literacy. The range of clubs on offer, both academic and co-curricular, provide pupils with opportunities to extend their learning beyond the classroom and promotes collaboration, curiosity and confidence. These opportunities combine effectively with their academic programmes to underpin their good progress.
23. In the senior school, the curriculum effectively spans linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical, and aesthetic and creative education. Pupils gain speaking, listening and numeracy skills appropriate to their age, aptitude and prior attainment. Subjects such as drama and dance at GCSE ensure that pupils can follow courses suited to their strengths and interests. The sixth-form curriculum is designed to meet pupils' aspirations. It follows A-level and BTEC National Diploma routes, for example, in children's play, learning and development, and sport. Pupils broaden their understanding of a wide range of personal interests through the optional study of subjects such as astronomy, additional mathematics, public speaking, design technology, robotics and historical cinema.
24. Lessons are typically well planned, taking into account individual learners' needs. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. They use appropriate strategies, methods and resources so pupils acquire new skills and knowledge. As a result, pupils are self-motivated and interested in their work, so they achieve well. However, not all teachers consistently utilise effective strategies for managing low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons. This means that, sometimes, a few pupils' inappropriate behaviour disrupts the learning for others.
25. Senior leaders use a range of assessment information to track pupils' progress effectively. They share this information with teachers, so they adapt their planning in line with pupils' changing needs. Staff act to address underachievement and put effective support plans in place to maximise

pupils' progress. Pupils' achievement is also considered in regular 'care list' meetings in which every pupil's progress, wellbeing and support plans are discussed.

26. Pupils who have SEND are well supported in individual support sessions, as well as in class in subject lessons. Teachers, who understand pupils' needs, provide appropriately tailored support strategies. Well-directed learning support assistants offer additional help. Consequently, pupils typically achieve well, including when working independently.
27. Systems to identify pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are robust. Leaders' regular visits to observe and feedback on teaching and learning ensure that teachers are suitably supported to assist pupils with EAL to make good progress.
28. Leaders provide a varied and imaginative co-curricular programme, which includes sports sessions for all pupils. Many pupils represent the school in external fixtures. The enrichment programme provides pupils with a broad range of cultural, intellectual, sporting and recreational clubs and activities. As a result, pupils develop additional skills and knowledge, experience new areas of learning and develop self-confidence.

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

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

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

30. The school promotes a clear culture of kindness, respect and inclusion, which reflects its values of integrity and purpose. High expectations are reinforced in assemblies, personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons and form time. Pupils demonstrate empathy, tolerance and an understanding of difference, reflecting the community's commitment to equality, cultural diversity and respect for people who are different from themselves.
31. Leaders ensure that the planning of the PSHE curriculum is accessible and age-appropriate. Detailed schemes of work, careful guidance for teachers, with appropriate and stimulating resources, ensure that the curriculum is responsive to changing circumstances and current affairs.
32. Leaders use the curriculum effectively to create a safe environment in which teachers promote mutual respect, fairness, democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law. Pupils explore these values through subjects and in discussions. They develop a clear moral understanding, appreciation of rules, and compassion towards others, including people who are protected under the Equality Act 2010.
33. Leaders ensure that relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught to all pupils, appropriate to their age, so that pupils feel safe to discuss healthy relationships and related issues such as gender and consent.
34. The school councils and the role of form captains provide valuable opportunities for pupils' views to be represented in school decision-making. Pupils reflect in assemblies and engage in service activities. These nurture the development of their moral awareness and encourage responsibility for their own actions. Leaders ensure that pupils have opportunities to be mindful and to develop their spiritual awareness and understanding. Activities such as mindfulness, woodland walks, quiet areas and gardening provide pupils with opportunities to develop their appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. As a result, pupils demonstrate mature self-awareness and self-esteem.
35. Children in the early years develop their physical skills through dance, movement and structured use of outdoor apparatus. Across the school, leaders promote pupils' physical wellbeing effectively through a wide range of exercise opportunities, including weekly games sessions and a broad programme of after-school clubs. Healthy eating is encouraged through appropriate lunch options, displays and the PSHE curriculum.
36. The school provides pupils with a suitable range of leadership opportunities. Roles such as junior and senior prefects, form captains and year-group leaders enable pupils to take responsibility within the school community. Older pupils act as subject mentors and provide pastoral support to younger pupils. This contributes positively to the development of leadership skills and peer support.
37. Positive relationships are evident throughout the early years setting. Children are encouraged to explore their environment through purposeful social interactions. From a young age, they are supported to recognise and regulate their emotions and to understand the importance of positive behaviour.

38. Throughout the school, leaders have developed a behaviour policy which outlines the school's high expectations clearly. They seek to develop an environment that promotes positive behaviour. This is rewarded in a variety of ways, so pupils recognise the value of respectful relationships. While the policy lays out clear guidelines for the use of sanctions, which are recognised and understood by pupils, these are not consistently implemented by all staff. This results in some negative behaviour around the school, including incidents related to uniform.
39. Leaders maintain clear and thorough records of incidents or concerns surrounding bullying and incidents of poor behaviour. These are monitored closely to identify any patterns or trends and, where appropriate, external agencies are referred to for support and advice.
40. Leaders ensure that all policies, documentation and records required by the National Minimum Standards (NMS) for boarding schools are maintained and monitored effectively. As a result, all Standards are met. Boarding accommodation is suitable and well maintained, providing pleasant bedrooms, hygienic bathrooms and well-equipped communal areas. Boarders are content in their surroundings.
41. Boarding is staffed by appropriately trained and skilled personnel. Leaders ensure that supervision is effective and that boarders' safety is prioritised. Boarders' whereabouts are known at all times, and appropriate arrangements are in place for them to contact staff both during the day and at night. Medical needs are met effectively. Overall, boarders are supported appropriately. However, while they appreciate the support provided, a few report less consistently positive relationships with boarding staff and lack of secure mechanisms for gaining reliable feedback from boarders relating to their experiences.
42. Fire safety arrangements are effective. Staff are suitably trained, risk assessments are current, and regular fire drills take place in both the school and the boarding house. Boarders receive clear instruction and routinely practise evacuation to ensure their safety.
43. The site is well maintained and secure. Pupils are supervised appropriately, and systems for monitoring premises, equipment and health and safety matters are robust and well organised.
44. Leaders have established a wellbeing centre (the Hub) at the heart of the school, which provides pupils with a quiet and safe space where they can access the school nurse and counsellors. Staff are suitably qualified to provide first aid, including for the youngest children in early years.
45. Leaders monitor attendance effectively and ensure that expectations are clearly communicated to parents and pupils, resulting in high levels of attendance. Admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately. The processes implemented reflect the most recent statutory guidance. Procedures for following up unexplained absences and missing pupils are robust, with appropriate involvement of the safeguarding team and the local authority when required.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

47. Pupils' social and cultural development is fostered through a wide range of enrichment activities, clubs and societies. Engagement in activities such as magazine editing, drama and community service enables pupils to develop confidence and cultivate respect for others. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to the wider community through structured service opportunities. Activities include volunteering in local charities, assisting with foodbanks and participating in community events. For example, musical performances for local residents and a school-wide expectation of completing 100 hours of service during their time in the school, contribute to pupils' understanding of community needs and their role in contributing positively to society.
48. The PSHE curriculum develops pupils' economic awareness effectively. In the junior years, pupils are introduced to financial literacy through enrichment activities. In the senior school, pupils learn about budgeting, taxation, saving, debt management, mortgages and student finance, enabling them to make informed decisions about their personal finances in preparation for life at university or in the world of work.
49. Careers education is well structured and supports pupils effectively in preparing for their futures. Pupils gain essential information from impartial advice, dedicated guidance events and access to an external careers advisor. As a result, they are well informed when making choices about GCSE subjects, post-16 pathways and higher education, including university and degree apprenticeships. Pupils demonstrate an understanding of choice and responsibility, reflecting the effective promotion of fundamental British values.
50. Leaders promote kindness and moral awareness through assemblies, PSHE lessons and form time. Pupils reflect on ethical issues and distinguish right from wrong. Within the history and PSHE curriculums, pupils learn about the rule of law, democracy and public institutions. Pupils take an active role in planning and presenting assemblies, particularly in the sixth form. This develops their leadership skills and promotes the celebration of diversity.
51. From an early age, children learn about social responsibility. In the early years, activities are used effectively to teach them about people who help in the community and to encourage them to take responsibility, such as tidying their classroom or planning activities for younger pupils.
52. Pupils develop an understanding of democracy and the rule of law through both curricular and co-curricular activities. Younger pupils vote for class stories and contribute to classroom rules, while older pupils participate in mock elections, Model United Nations, debating clubs and law societies. These experiences help pupils to engage respectfully with differing viewpoints and prepare them for life in British society.

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

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

Safeguarding

54. Leaders place safeguarding at the centre of the school's work. The safeguarding policy and procedures are appropriate, reflecting the requirements of current statutory guidance.
55. Governors maintain effective oversight of safeguarding through regular reporting and review. A designated safeguarding governor meets regularly with senior leaders to monitor the implementation of procedures and to ensure that systems operate effectively to protect pupils from harm.
56. Safer recruitment procedures are securely in place. Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are completed and verified before adults begin working with pupils. However, while pupils are safe overall, a few administrative anomalies regarding the checking of the employment history of contractors were noted during the inspection. These errors were rectified before the end of the inspection.
57. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained and knowledgeable in their roles as a result of regular and appropriate training. They make effective decisions when concerns arise and take prompt, proportionate action to protect pupils who may be at risk of harm. Records of safeguarding concerns, including actions taken, decisions made and the rationale for these, are maintained appropriately.
58. Leaders maintain effective liaison with external agencies. They seek advice from relevant local authorities on safeguarding matters and make referrals when required. Staff receive effective induction and regular training that enables them to identify, respond to and report safeguarding concerns promptly. They demonstrate a clear understanding of their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty, to protect pupils from risk of radicalisation and extremism, and to remain alert to any contextual risks that may affect pupils' safety and wellbeing.
59. Staff act swiftly and appropriately should an allegation be made about an adult's behaviour that may pose a risk of harm to pupils.
60. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE programme and a planned series of assemblies. Pupils know who to talk to if they have any concerns. They learn about online safety and strategies to protect themselves from potential risks. Leaders ensure that filtering and monitoring systems are effective and reviewed regularly to promote pupils' safety when online.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Margaret's School
Department for Education number	919/6012
Registered charity number	1056228
Address	St Margaret's School Merry Hill Road Bushey Hertfordshire WD23 1DT
Phone number	020 8416 4400
Email address	schooloffice@stmargarets-school.org.uk
Website	www.stmargarets-school.org.uk
Proprietor	St Margaret's School Bushey
Chair	Mr Laurence Miller
Headteacher	Mrs Lara Péchard
Age range	2 to 18
Number of pupils	803
Number of boarding pupils	17
Date of previous inspection	27 to 29 September 2022

Information about the school

62. Founded in 1749, St Margaret's School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school set in 70 acres of parkland in Bushey. The school is a registered charity, governed by a board of trustees. The school comprises nursery, junior, senior and sixth-form departments. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in September 2023.
63. Boarding accommodation is provided in a single boarding house for pupils from the age of 11.
64. The early years setting has three classes in the nursery with 45 children. There are two Reception classes for 31 children.
65. The school has identified 193 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
66. The school has identified English as an additional language for 108 pupils of whom 13 access specialist support to develop their English skills.
67. The school states its aims are to inspire and engage its pupils through a modern and relevant curriculum, support its families and wider community, and reach out to make the most of its networks while serving its many and diverse communities with integrity and purpose.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 October 2025

68. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

69. 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
- visits to the boarding house accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

70. 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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