

School inspection report

11 to 13 March 2025

St Helen and St Katharine

Faringdon Road

Abingdon

Oxfordshire

OX14 1BE

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 a clear vision for school development based on effective monitoring and self-evaluation. Leaders are well supported by governors who provide support and challenge to assure themselves that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The requirements of the Standards are consistently met.
2. Leaders have created a curriculum that is broad and meets the needs and aptitudes of pupils. Teachers are well trained, know pupils well, and use a range of activities, resources and feedback to help pupils to learn effectively. They support pupils with any additional needs, including through additional intervention and support. Leaders monitor pupils' performance, and any issues identified are addressed promptly. By the end of Year 11, pupils achieve very well in GCSE qualifications, as do pupils in Year 13 in A-level qualifications.
3. The curriculum is complemented by a well-resourced co-curricular programme, which benefits pupils of all ages and abilities. Many activities are initiated or organised by pupils. The programme provides significant variety. Pupils' participation is closely monitored, and the provision is well co-ordinated. The programme is exceptionally supportive of pupils' skills and interests. Through this provision, leaders actively promote pupils' emotional and mental wellbeing. This programme provides a rich experience for pupils. This is a significant strength of the school.
4. Pupils' physical, emotional and mental health are successfully promoted. Behaviour is typically good in lessons and at social times, such as break and lunchtimes. However, a small number of pupils who struggle to develop social skills are not as well supported to develop positive social relationships. The school's response to these pupils has been reactive and has not always been successful in helping these pupils to manage situations effectively.
5. Leaders maintain the site to an appropriate standard. There is a systematic approach to the management of health and safety at the school. Measures to mitigate risk are suitably implemented and reviewed. Fire safety protocols are well understood. First aid is readily available. Pupils are well supervised.
6. Pupils value and have a thorough understanding of the importance of tolerance and respect for others. Pupils have many opportunities to be of service to others in their school community and to contribute positively to the local community. Pupils benefit from a well-structured careers education programme that supports them to make well-considered decisions about their future careers and next steps in education, training and employment.
7. Governors review safeguarding practices rigorously at the school and staff understand the school's procedures for reporting concerns. Leaders carry out recruitment checks correctly, and these are recorded appropriately. Pupils know how to keep safe, including online.

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:

- further develop the support for the few pupils who need extra help to develop their social skills, so that they can self-regulate and have positive social interactions with their peers.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively, including actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. They have an accurate view of the strengths of the school and areas for further development. For example, leaders constantly reflect upon and adapt the co-curricular programme to respond to pupils' needs and interests. Leaders carefully consider the impact that their actions have on pupils' wellbeing and success. They are methodical and systematic in measuring their effectiveness through detailed self-evaluation.
9. Governors are knowledgeable and experienced. They visit the school regularly, meet with pupils and staff, and check on the effectiveness of leaders' actions. They provide effective scrutiny and monitoring of the school's practice and procedures. They provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders. They assure themselves that the Standards are met consistently.
10. Leaders provide appropriate information to parents and other relevant stakeholders, as required by statutory guidance and the Standards. Parents receive reports regularly about pupils' progress, attitudes and attainment. All other required information, including the school's aims and ethos, is made available to parents, largely through the school's informative website. The school reviews the provision for any pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan and provides relevant information to local authorities, including that related to additional funding.
11. Leaders have a comprehensive and robust approach to risk management. Leaders have an effective understanding of physical, welfare and safeguarding risks. They respond with urgency and diligence to areas of risk when identified. Risk assessments identify potential risks thoroughly and detail appropriate steps taken to reduce or remove these. Leaders systematically monitor risk assessments to check their continued effectiveness.
12. Leaders work closely with external agencies to ensure provision of additional timely support for pupils when required. They work effectively with local safeguarding partners and other teams who provide support for pupils' mental health and wellbeing.
13. Leaders manage any parental complaints appropriately. They keep thorough records of these events and any actions taken by the school in response. Complaints are dealt with appropriately within the timeframes stated in the school's policy and statutory guidance.
14. Leaders have developed a detailed accessibility plan. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. The curriculum is broad and is suitably academic and demanding, reflecting the needs and abilities of pupils. Careful curriculum planning ensures that what pupils learn builds sequentially year-on-year as pupils get older. Leaders have thought precisely about the content and skills that they want pupils to learn, so that they are well prepared for the next stage in their learning.
17. Lessons are well planned, effective and appropriate to pupils' abilities and needs. Teachers make judicious use of the facilities and resources so that pupils learn well and make good progress over time. Teachers are adept at identifying and supporting pupils who need extra help, or those who are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways. Pupils share their ideas and explain their reasoning frequently in lessons. Pupils express themselves clearly. Feedback from teachers allows pupils to reflect on their work, refine and improve it, and deepen their understanding.
18. Pupils of all ages are well supported to develop effective study skills across a range of subjects. They recognise and readily apply these skills across subjects, and frequently carry out research independently. As a result, pupils are highly articulate in their written and oral expression across the curriculum. They apply mature understanding of numeracy and mathematical knowledge to a range of subjects. Pupils readily apply their knowledge, skills and understanding to solve problems and draw conclusions.
19. Leaders use a range of ways to accurately identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers are well trained and are aware of the needs of pupils. They adapt learning to ensure pupils are well supported in lessons. Where needed, additional sessions outside of lessons, such as intervention groups, are provided, to support pupils' specific learning and developmental needs. Consequently, most pupils who have SEND learn and achieve well.
20. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are well supported to develop fluency in their reading, writing and oral skills in English. Teachers also support pupils with their subject-specific vocabulary as well as to understand the social and cultural context of the material that they are learning. Consequently, pupils learn well and make good progress.
21. Pupils' performance is systematically assessed and monitored. Assessments are carefully planned to provide leaders with important information about what pupils know and can do. Pupils are readily identified and effectively supported, including pupils who need additional help. Pupils learn well, make progress over time, and achieve high standards in GCSE and A-level qualifications. Detailed reports and parents' evenings ensure that parents are informed of their child's progress and attitudes.
22. Leaders provide an extensive and wide-ranging co-curricular offer. Pupils are central to the delivery and creation of this programme, through their leadership of clubs and societies and opportunities to host events and lead presentations to the wider school community. The programme is wide-ranging across sport, music, drama, and academic support and enrichment activities. The programme is well co-ordinated and encourages high levels of achievement and participation. Pupils' success is celebrated within departments, form groups, through assemblies and through opportunities for pupils to meet with the headteacher. Leaders have designed many activities to support pupils emotional and mental wellbeing as a balance to the focus of the academic curriculum. Pupils'

participation is closely monitored, and pupils are able to access a programme of additional activity that best supports them.

23. Pupils in the sixth form are provided with a range of curriculum and recreational activities that support their progression to adulthood. The life skills programme in the sixth form continues to evolve and develop in response to students' needs and interests. For example, in response to pupils' views, leaders provide visiting speakers and specialist sessions in areas such as women's health, first aid and car maintenance.

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

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

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

25. The relationships and sex education (RSE) and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculums aim to create capable young people with a sense of community who provide effective role models for younger pupils. Teachers deliver the curriculums well. They include a range of topics, including safety, risks, bullying, mental health, consent and healthy relationships, taught in an age-appropriate way. Pupils say that they value the approach taken by teachers to the delivery of sensitive topics and are confident that they can ask questions in lessons, in person and through the worry boxes.
26. The school actively promotes pupils' personal fitness and health by encouraging pupils of all ages to develop and maintain personal fitness logs. Staff train pupils to manage their own fitness goals with the aim of equipping pupils for life beyond school. There are appropriate opportunities for all pupils to take part in sport. Pupils have many opportunities to engage in a wide variety of sports and activities to develop their physical and mental health, both within and outside the curriculum.
27. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual and moral knowledge and understanding. Pupils reflect maturely on their responsibility to respect and care for others, particularly the most vulnerable. For example, in a lesson on Holocaust bystanders, pupils considered how their learning could be applied to their lives today. Pupils of all faiths understand and appreciate the role of the chapel within the school. It is valued as a place of reflection and spirituality, and pupils understand that the Chaplain is there as a source of pastoral support.
28. Leaders systematically monitor and record pupils' behaviour so that patterns can be identified and addressed. Sanctions are issued fairly by staff and in line with the pupil code of conduct, which is updated annually by pupils. Consequently, pupils' behaviour is overwhelmingly positive. However, a small number of pupils with specific needs sometimes struggle to maintain positive social relationships. The school has dealt with incidents appropriately but has not supported these pupils well enough over time to self-regulate.
29. An appropriate anti-bullying policy and process is in place. Any reported issues of bullying are dealt with in a timely, proportionate and effective manner. Education related to positive values, social relationships and anti-bullying is provided to all pupils. Appropriate action is taken when staff become aware of incidents of bullying. The school liaises with pupils and parents appropriately.
30. The premises are maintained to a high standard by a suitably qualified facilities team who have a clear understanding of their responsibilities under health and safety law, including those for fire safety. They carry out appropriate checks and audits. Fire safety equipment is well maintained, and pupils and staff are well versed in evacuation procedures. Supervision of pupils is effective. Consequently, pupils feel safe and well cared for.
31. The registers of admission and attendance are maintained in accordance with the statutory requirements. Attendance is carefully monitored. The local authority is notified when there are concerns about pupils' attendance and when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

32. Leaders ensure that an appropriate first aid facility is available and accessible to all pupils. It has appropriate storage facilities and clear protocols for medicines and their administration, areas of privacy and access to amenities. Secure storage of individual care plans and medical updates are overseen by qualified staff.

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

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

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

34. Leaders foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and inclusivity for those of different faiths, beliefs, lifestyles and cultures. Societal issues are discussed in lessons and linked to current affairs. Pupils learn about ways to combat hate, discrimination and prejudice through discussion and participation in pupil-led groups. Leaders encourage pupils to talk about their views. Pupils listen sensitively to each other's views and responses. For example, sixth formers lead assemblies about confident and inspirational women to mark International Women's Day. Younger pupils in the junior school talk articulately about how to avoid stereotyping and the importance of respect for all.
35. Careers advice forms an integral part of the curriculum. Leaders provide unbiased, individualised advice that is in the best interests of pupils. The careers education programme works closely with the academic departments in preparing older pupils for their next steps, including application for university, apprenticeship or employment. Leaders organise large careers fairs with other schools, with an array of careers represented. Recent former pupils contribute to the advice given. Pupils are given relevant, appropriate and timely advice that helps them to make appropriate choices on next-step destinations.
36. Leaders ensure that, over time, pupils are taught about important British values, such as the rule of law and democracy. In lessons, teachers encourage discussions that promote respect for the law, public services such as the police and courts, democracy and political views. Pupils are encouraged to balance political perspectives, to empathise with other views and to apply reasoning to their opinions and arguments. The oldest pupils in the sixth form, for example, are invited to engage with pupils at a local boys' school about issues of harmful behaviours and ways in which to address these. Consequently, pupils develop a keen sense of right and wrong.
37. Leaders encourage pupils to take responsibility and contribute to the school and wider community. In school, older pupils act as positive role models for those who are younger than them, including by taking on the role of buddies to younger pupils. The work of the school and pupils in the wider local community is far-reaching. Pupils undertake a range of activities such as volunteering with local primary schools and wider community programmes such as care homes and environmental projects. Pupils value the important role that they play in the wider community and the importance of helping others.
38. Economic education is embedded in the school's curriculum. Pupils learn in an age-appropriate way. For example, younger pupils learn about banking and taxation while older pupils are prepared for independent living through learning about student finances and how to eat healthily on a budget.

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

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

Safeguarding

40. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are well trained and knowledgeable, including in their approaches to contextual risks and the challenges facing pupils beyond the school, such as risks relating to radicalisation and extremism. They ensure that safeguarding policies and procedures are effective and reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.
41. Leaders respond promptly and appropriately to any safeguarding concerns that arise. They consult with external safeguarding partners and refer safeguarding concerns to them when appropriate. Suitable arrangements for the handling of allegations against adults are in place. Leaders keep suitable records of safeguarding concerns and the decisions and actions taken in response to these.
42. Governors maintain an effective overview of the safeguarding policy and procedures. Governors are well trained. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding visits the school regularly, talks to pupils and staff and reviews information to ensure that measures in place are secure and carried out effectively.
43. Safeguarding training for staff is thorough, regular and in line with the most up-to-date guidance. Leaders provide safeguarding updates and scenario-based training for all staff, followed by quizzes to review understanding. A suitable induction process is in place to ensure that new staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities, are vigilant to the wellbeing and safety of pupils and escalate concerns appropriately, when required.
44. Leaders provide pupils with regular and precise information about how to raise any concerns that they might have. Pupils are confident that there is an array of staff to whom they can go to should they have any concerns.
45. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Suitable internet filtering and monitoring procedures are in place. These systems are tested regularly by the school and any alerts are immediately reviewed by members of the safeguarding team, who act as required.
46. Leaders ensure that all appropriate safer recruitment checks on adults are made in a timely manner and are accurately recorded in a suitable single central record (SCR) of appointments. Staff files are well organised and monitored.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Helen and St Katharine
Department for Education number	931/6096
Registered charity number	286892
Address	Faringdon Road Abingdon Oxfordshire OX14 1BE
Phone number	01235 520173
Email address	info@shsk.org.uk
Website	www.shsk.org.uk
Proprietor	The School of St Helen and St Katharine Trust
Chair	Miss Sara Benbow
Headteacher	Mrs Rebecca Dougall
Age range	9 to 18
Number of pupils	709
Date of previous inspection	15 to 18 February 2022

Information about the school

48. St Helen and St Katharine is an independent day school in Abingdon, Oxfordshire. It is registered as a single-sex school for female pupils. The school operates in four sections: a junior school for Years 5 and 6, a lower school for pupils in Years 7 and 8, a middle school for pupils in Years 9 to 11, and a sixth form for pupils in Years 12 and 13. The school is a registered charity and is overseen by a board of trustees who constitute the governing body of the school.
49. The school has identified 141 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Very few pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
50. The school has identified English as an additional language for 37 pupils.
51. The school states its aims are to enable every pupil to discover and develop their own strengths, to develop the aspiration to achieve academically and beyond the classroom, and to gain the self-belief and confidence to equip them for life.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

11 to 13 March 2025

52. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

53. 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 a governor
- 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.

54. 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

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