

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

St. John's Preparatory and Senior School

The Ridgeway

Potters Bar

EN6 5QT

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 foster a nurturing and supportive environment that promotes pupils' wellbeing. Positive relationships between staff and pupils contribute to a calm and purposeful atmosphere across the school. Pupils develop independence and resilience alongside their academic knowledge, enabling them to engage positively with learning and wider school life.
2. Leaders provide effective scrutiny of the school's provision and maintain oversight of pupils' progress and development. Leaders implement appropriate procedures that support safeguarding, pastoral care and the delivery of the curriculum. The advisory board provides support and challenge through regular monitoring, review meetings and visits.
3. Leaders promote pupils' sense of environmental and social responsibility and awareness of the wider world. Participation in the sports programme, alongside opportunities such as overseas exchanges, educational visits and charitable initiatives, supports pupils in developing teamwork, leadership and resilience.
4. Leaders promote high academic standards through a balanced curriculum that supports pupils' academic progress and personal development across all phases of the school. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and create opportunities for pupils to develop confidence and critical thinking. Children in the early years benefit from a balance of adult-guided and independent activities that promote communication, numeracy and physical development. A range of extra-curricular opportunities, including public speaking, aviation society and drama, further enrich pupils' experience.
5. Pupils engage positively with their learning and demonstrate a willingness to participate in lessons. Assessment information is used effectively to monitor progress, identify gaps in understanding, and provide targeted support. In lessons teachers adapt activities and use questioning to develop pupils' understanding, however, in some lessons teaching is not always sufficiently matched to pupils' prior attainment and needs. Consequently, pupils do not progress as well in some lessons.
6. Leaders place emphasis on promoting pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing through a nurturing and therapeutic approach to behaviour that supports pupils to be safe, respected and valued. The curriculum, assemblies and form time promote pupils' understanding of healthy relationships, wellbeing and the importance of respecting others. As a result, pupils are confident in expressing their views and will seek support when needed.
7. Leaders implement a systematic approach to health and safety arrangements across the school. Effective procedures for first aid, attendance, behaviour and anti-bullying support pupils' wellbeing and ensure that pupils are cared for in a suitable environment. However, during the inspection, the science laboratories were not consistently secured when not in use, as required by the school's health and safety policy. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
8. Leaders promote pupils' social, moral, cultural and economic understanding effectively. Through charitable initiatives, leadership opportunities and educational visits, pupils develop respect for others, an understanding of democracy and the rule of law, and an appreciation of different cultures

and perspectives. Careers education, enterprise activities and financial learning help pupils to develop independence before they progress to the next stage of their education.

9. Leaders prioritise safeguarding across the school. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively, and staff receive regular safeguarding training. Pupils know who to approach if they have concerns. Effective links with external agencies, alongside secure recruitment procedures and effective internet filtering and monitoring systems, help to ensure that pupils are safeguarded and supported appropriately.

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

The proprietor should:

- ensure that all teaching is matched well to pupils' needs and prior attainment, so that pupils make good progress in all lessons
- ensure that the science laboratories are consistently secured when not in use, as required by the health and safety policy.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders provide clear strategic direction, underpinned by the school's ethos of promoting confidence, curiosity and resilience. Leaders' promotion of pupils' wellbeing is central to the school's work, supported through a therapeutic approach to behaviour management and a nurturing culture.
11. The proprietor, through the advisory board, provides effective and systematic oversight of leaders' work, including through scrutiny of their regular reports. Advisory board members ensure that policies, procedures and practice are implemented effectively to promote the wellbeing, safety and progress of pupils. They ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and ensure that all the Standards are consistently met.
12. Leaders provide parents of current and prospective pupils with relevant and required information, including about the school's aims, through the school's website. Parents receive detailed written reports and attend parents' meetings that keep them informed about their child's progress, attainment and personal development. Weekly newsletters share information about events, activities and pupils' achievements, helping to develop the partnership between home and school.
13. Leaders implement appropriate systems to identify, assess and mitigate risk. A suitable risk assessment policy outlines responsibilities clearly. Staff complete risk assessments which are reviewed and regularly updated. As a result, appropriate oversight of risk is maintained, and pupils benefit from a well-managed environment.
14. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies to support pupils' welfare, safeguarding and educational needs. They work closely with the local authority in relation to attendance and safeguarding and inform them whenever pupils leave or join the school at non-standard times of transition. Leaders liaise effectively with children's services, safeguarding partners and other external professionals to help ensure that pupils and families receive appropriate support.
15. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders demonstrate a commitment to ensuring that all pupils are able to participate in school life. They implement and keep under review an appropriate accessibility plan that identifies strategies to improve pupils' access to the curriculum and the physical environment. Leaders also provide the local authority with all required information regarding the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
16. The school implements a clear and appropriate complaints policy. Leaders respond to concerns raised by parents and ensure that complaints are managed within published timescales. Records of complaints are maintained and reviewed regularly by leaders to identify any recurring themes or patterns. Where appropriate, leaders take action to address issues and maintain a record of these.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders implement a balanced curriculum that is effectively designed to enable pupils to develop their knowledge and skills and make progress across a range of subjects. The curriculum offers a range of subject options at GCSE and A level. In addition, a programme of international educational visits, cultural expeditions and exchange opportunities adds to pupils' knowledge and understanding of subjects such as history and languages. Collaboration between preparatory and senior school staff, including through specialist teaching in subjects such as English, mathematics and science, supports pupils' transition between phases.
19. Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge and pupils are motivated and develop as independent learners. Pupils benefit from structured after-school study which supports their knowledge and understanding. However, in some lessons, teaching is not sufficiently well planned to meet pupils' needs and build on their prior attainment. In these lessons, knowledge and skills are not as successfully embedded and pupils do not progress as well as they do typically.
20. In the early years, teachers deliver an engaging curriculum that supports children to make progress in communication, numeracy and early literacy. For example, children develop their understanding of phonics and apply this in reading and writing, which enables them to begin constructing sentences. In mathematics, children develop their understanding of numbers through practical, play-based activities which involve sequencing numbers and counting objects. Children develop fine motor skills through activities such as using tweezers to sort objects and shapes by size and colour. A balance of guided and self-directed activities ensures that children remain actively engaged and develop independent thinking and learning skills.
21. In the preparatory school, teachers encourage pupils to think critically. For example, in Year 3 English lessons, pupils explore myths and monsters while identifying rhyming couplets and refrains. Pupils analyse poetic structure effectively and apply this in their own work, resulting in focused engagement and the development of literacy skills. Similarly, in mathematics, pupils use ratio to adapt a cupcake recipe, compare supermarket prices and calculate costs. Such practical application of mathematical knowledge helps deepen pupils' problem-solving skills and mathematical understanding.
22. In the sixth form, teachers encourage pupils to be intellectually curious. In Year 12 economics, pupils demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of unemployment modelling, articulating their ideas clearly both orally and in writing. This depth of understanding enables pupils to think critically and apply their knowledge to real-world contexts. In mathematics, pupils in Year 12 confidently apply the laws of logarithms to simplify expressions and solve equations, and in Year 13 computer science, pupils tackle complex recursive functions, demonstrating resilience when solving challenging problems. Teachers' subject expertise enables them to provide guidance and targeted feedback, which sustains pupils' engagement and supports progress.
23. Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. Leaders identify and assess pupils' individual needs, working with parents and maintaining detailed records. Teachers collaborate with learning support staff, who provide them with practical strategies that they can use to advance pupils' learning. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress and develop confidence in their learning.

24. Leaders implement a suitable assessment framework, including termly subject assessments. Assessment information is tracked and analysed, enabling leaders to maintain an overview of progress across the school. Teachers typically use this information to refine their teaching and provide additional support where required. In the early years, progress is reviewed frequently and discussed collaboratively between staff and parents, ensuring that the provision remains closely matched to children's developmental needs.
25. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported by specialist English language teachers as needed. These specialists provide targeted support for International English Language Testing System (IELTS) preparation, which focuses on developing pupils' speaking, listening, reading and writing skills. Staff use strategies such as subject-specific vocabulary lists, glossaries and online translation tools to promote pupils' English skills and comprehension.
26. The school provides an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities. In the early years, children explore the outdoor environment, including the flower garden and sensory play areas, while developing co-ordination and gross motor skills through multisport activities. Across the preparatory and senior school, all pupils benefit from participation in London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) activities, which develop their communication skills. In the senior school, pupils compete at national level in football and netball and participate in activities such as tennis, rounders and cricket. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) develops pupils' resilience, independence and teamwork through training and expeditions in the Chiltern Hills.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. Leaders nurture pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing effectively. For example, they enable pupils to access specialist counsellors, when required, who provide support in designated wellbeing spaces. Pupils are encouraged to discuss any concerns openly and staff maintain supportive relationships with them at all times. Positive relationships between staff and pupils create an environment in which pupils are encouraged to regulate their emotions, develop self-confidence and engage positively with learning. As a result, pupils develop the personal and social skills needed to make progress both academically and socially.
29. The curriculum provides opportunities that help pupils develop self-confidence and self-awareness. For example, all pupils participate in public speaking lessons, which encourage them to present to others and overcome apprehension when speaking in front of an audience. Through these experiences, pupils become increasingly self-assured, resilient and willing to contribute openly in a range of contexts.
30. Assemblies and collective worship provide opportunities for spiritual reflection and personal contemplation. Pupils develop their understanding of world religions and beliefs through the wider curriculum, fostering respect for diversity and encouraging thoughtful consideration of spiritual issues. This is complemented by initiatives such as 'wellbeing Wednesday', during which pupils participate in mindfulness activities. As a result, pupils develop a greater understanding of different beliefs and explore spiritual values and feelings.
31. Leaders set high expectations for behaviour and implement an effective therapeutic approach to behaviour management. Teachers guide pupils to support their ability to create and maintain respectful relationships in school. Behaviour is managed through purposeful dialogue that helps pupils understand the causes and consequences of their actions. Across the school, consistent routines and expectations enable pupils to develop self-regulation and make responsible choices.
32. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils are provided with the space and time to share any concerns in a designated area in the library. Pupils are advised how to report issues and staff act swiftly and appropriately in response to any concerns that are raised. Bullying incidents are rare and, when they occur, are carefully recorded, monitored and addressed through an approach that involves pupils reflecting on their actions.
33. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum equips pupils with the knowledge to make informed decisions about their health, wellbeing and future lives. From an early age, pupils learn to establish healthy routines, including with regard to exercise and sleep. This develops, as pupils move into senior school, into a deeper understanding of risks such as vaping, alcohol and drugs. Pupils engage with issues such as respect, morality and social justice. Pupils in the senior school explore healthy lifestyles through links to professional sport and learn about appropriate nutrition.
34. Teachers plan the delivery of relationships and sex education (RSE) to meet pupils' developmental needs. In the preparatory school, pupils explore friendships and respectful relationships. As they progress into the senior school, pupils engage with more complex issues, including harassment,

misogyny and sexual health. Pupils learn how to set boundaries and recognise unhealthy behaviours, developing the knowledge they need to make informed decisions about relationships.

35. Leaders in the early years promote children’s physical, social, emotional and developmental needs through a well-planned curriculum. Children regularly engage in activities such as gardening, sensory play and woodland discovery, which deepens their understanding of the natural world. Children take part in activities such as climbing and well-managed fire-lighting, building perseverance and self-belief.
36. Leaders implement a systematic approach to health and safety. Detailed record-keeping and external audits ensure that all required checks and servicing are in place so that the premises are well maintained. Fire safety arrangements are suitable. Pupils are well prepared for emergencies through regular fire drills and clear routines. However, during the inspection, the science laboratories were not secured when unoccupied, in contravention of the school’s health and safety policy. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
37. First aid provision is effective. Staff are appropriately trained in first aid, with early years staff holding paediatric first aid qualifications. Clear procedures for managing medical needs, including secure storage of medication and effective communication of allergies, ensure that pupils’ needs are met safely. Staff provide calm reassurance and support when required.
38. Supervision arrangements throughout the school are appropriate and effective. Pupils are supervised during lunch and playtimes, both indoors and outdoors, with staff maintaining suitable oversight while allowing pupils to interact and play, knowing that support is available if required. In the early years, supervision is particularly attentive, including when children are eating.
39. Admission and attendance procedures are effective and securely implemented. Registers are accurately maintained as required by current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor attendance and promote its importance so that attendance is high.

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

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

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

41. Pupils engage in a range of charitable initiatives and take the lead in shaping these opportunities. For example, pupils propose charitable activities through the pupil council, including collections for local homeless centres and hospices. Whole-school events, including harvest festival collections in the preparatory school and foodbank donations in the senior school, further develop pupils' sense of social responsibility. Pupils demonstrate compassion and initiative and understand the importance of contributing to their local community.
42. Pupils develop their social and cultural knowledge through the curriculum and wider school experiences as well as their understanding of the importance of tolerance and respect for all people. For example, in English and history lessons, pupils explore themes of culture, migration and identity, listening attentively to different perspectives. Pupils demonstrate confidence in discussing topics such as neurodiversity and contribute to an inclusive environment where individual differences are understood and respected.
43. In the early years, activities are structured to promote children's social development through shared experiences and guided interaction. For example, in nursery classes children sit together in a circle and engage in calm breathing exercises, which encourages them to listen, reflect and become aware of their own feelings. The supportive presence of adults enables children to participate confidently, while the group setting encourages turn-taking, co-operation and a sense of belonging.
44. Pupils develop their understanding of democracy through active participation in school life. The election of heads of school and pupil council representatives enables pupils to understand fairness, representation and the importance of having a voice. In lessons, pupils explore political systems and democratic principles, engaging in balanced discussions in which they are encouraged to justify their own views. As a result, pupils contribute confidently, listen respectfully and develop the skills to participate thoughtfully in democratic society.
45. Pupils develop their understanding of the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect through trips to the Houses of Parliament in the preparatory school and to the Royal Courts of Justice in the senior school. Pupils observe legal processes, such as criminal appeals, bringing their learning to life. Pupils also gain insight into civic responsibility through visits to local government offices and engagement with external speakers such as the police, who lead workshops on safety in the preparatory school. As a result, pupils understand how laws and systems support a fair and orderly society.
46. Leaders provide extensive opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. The pupil council, led by senior prefects, meets regularly to discuss issues and present solutions to senior leaders. Pupils are involved in shaping the school community through initiatives such as planning a culture day and developing an alumni programme.
47. Leaders provide a structured careers programme that enables pupils to make informed decisions about their future pathways. In the early years, children begin to develop an awareness of the world of work through visits from local professionals, including dentists and police officers. As pupils move through the school, they receive guidance about how different subject choices relate to future

careers and educational pathways, alongside opportunities to explore their interests through discussions and interviews with an independent careers adviser. Older pupils receive guidance about university applications and benefit from networking events, careers fairs and engagement with university academics, which deepen their understanding of higher education and employment routes.

48. Pupils develop their understanding of economic and financial education as they progress through the school. In the early years, children engage in role-play activities using coins and transactions, introducing them to the value of money. In the preparatory school, pupils apply mathematical skills in practical contexts, including enterprise activities and budgeting for healthy meals. Older pupils explore more complex economic concepts, such as taxation, tariffs and subsidies in business studies. Pupils in the sixth form receive guidance about managing finances and living independently in preparation for university and adult life. As a result, pupils develop financial awareness and apply their understanding confidently in real-world situations.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. Safeguarding is prioritised through a culture of vigilance, underpinned by effective leadership, rigorous oversight and systematic review. Leaders ensure that safeguarding policies are detailed, regularly reviewed and aligned with current statutory guidance. Policies are implemented consistently, reflecting a clear commitment to safeguarding at all levels. Leaders maintain robust systems for analysing safeguarding information, enabling them to identify patterns and evaluate effectiveness.
51. Training for staff is comprehensive and regularly updated to reflect current guidance and emerging risks. Staff receive safeguarding training at induction, followed by annual whole-school updates and ongoing briefings. Leaders use weekly safeguarding briefings and updates to check understanding and reinforce messages. Staff demonstrate a secure understanding of safeguarding policies, know how to report concerns, including low-level concerns or allegations against adults, and understand their individual responsibilities.
52. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are appropriately trained for their roles. They receive updates from the local authority, ensuring their knowledge of local safeguarding thresholds and reporting is current. They co-ordinate early help for vulnerable pupils effectively, follow up concerns, and engage appropriately with external agencies. Safeguarding records are detailed and securely maintained and document actions taken.
53. Leaders implement an effective internet filtering and monitoring system. They analyse information to identify trends or emerging risks and take appropriate action. Pupils' understanding of online safety is developed through the PSHE curriculum, where they learn how to stay safe online and manage risks appropriately.
54. Pupils are supported to seek help when needed and can identify a trusted adult in school. The school provides multiple channels for reporting concerns, enabling pupils to share worries in ways that suit them. Staff are approachable and responsive, and teachers take concerns seriously.
55. The school ensures that all appropriate pre-employment checks are completed for staff, members of the advisory board, contractors and volunteers before they begin working at the school. These checks are accurately recorded in a single central record of appointments (SCR), which is subject to systematic oversight by leaders and the advisory board. Staff involved in recruitment receive specific safer recruitment training, ensuring that procedures are applied consistently and rigorously.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St. John's Preparatory and Senior School
Department for Education number	308/6062
Address	St. John's Preparatory and Senior School The Ridgeway Potters Bar Hertfordshire EN6 5QT
Phone number	01707 657294
Email address	admin@stjohnsprepandsenior.co.uk
Website	www.stjohnsprepandseniorschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Mrs. Calliope Tardios
Principal	Mrs. Calliope Tardios
Age range	3 to 19
Number of pupils	480
Date of previous inspection	14 to 15 June 2023

Information about the school

57. St. John's Preparatory and Senior School is an independent co-educational day school situated on two sites, with the preparatory and senior departments located on the same road, approximately a mile apart from each other. The school is overseen by a sole proprietor, supported by an advisory board. The proprietor also leads the school as its Principal.
58. There are 41 children in the early years, who are taught in one Nursery and one Reception class.
59. The school has identified 20 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
60. The school has identified English as an additional language for 102 pupils.
61. The school states its aims are to promote academic, cultural and sporting excellence with a safe, caring and nurturing approach, based on Christian values. It intends to offer a holistic education that prepares pupils effectively for successful and fulfilling futures.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 April 2026

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

63. 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 of the advisory board
- discussions with the principal, 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.

64. 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

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