

# School inspection report

11 to 13 February 2025

## **Haberdashers' Boys' School**

Butterfly Lane

Elstree

Hertfordshire

WD6 3AF

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. Governors maintain a knowledgeable oversight of all areas of school life and ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including in the early years. Leaders monitor the school's implementation of its policies systematically so that the Standards are met.
2. Governors and leaders have effective strategies for gathering evidence with which to evaluate the school's fulfilment of its short- and medium-term objectives. These include assessing the impact on pupils' achievement and personal development of the closer links with the neighbouring Haberdashers' Girls' School (Habs Girls).
3. The curriculum and co-curricular programme meet the needs and interests of pupils. The taught curriculum allows pupils to choose from a broad range of subjects. The co-curricular programme provides significant variety, and many activities are initiated or organised by pupils. In a school in which pupils have high academic ambition, the programme provides balance to pupils' examination studies, and although voluntary, all pupils take part. As such it promotes pupils' wellbeing and is one of the school's significant strengths.
4. Leaders in the early years provide extensive indoor and outdoor resources which children use to make rapid progress in their education and personal development. Prep school leaders have revised the English curriculum effectively so that pupils' high levels of attainment in literacy in this phase of education is a significant strength.
5. Teachers have secure knowledge and enthusiasm for their subject. They engage pupils' interest and manage behaviour effectively. They adjust planning and teaching effectively for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
6. Teachers set ambitious expectations in lessons and allow time to confront difficult concepts in all subject areas. As a result, pupils in both the prep and senior schools make at least good progress.
7. The behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy are understood by staff and pupils and are effective. Pupils are well-behaved, and bullying is rare.
8. Buildings and grounds are well maintained. Those responsible ensure that risks to pupils are minimised through the systematic and detailed checks of health and safety and fire procedures.
9. Pupils are committed to supporting others through peer mentoring and through the schools' partnerships in the local community.
10. Pupils value and respect the cultural richness and diversity that those of different national and religious backgrounds bring to the school. The curriculum enables them to deepen their understanding in these areas as they move through the school.
11. Careers education is provided throughout the senior school. Pupils receive individualised advice, including guidance on their decisions about choice of subject. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to meet those from a variety of professions and to undertake work experience. Pupils move on to a wide range of universities after leaving school.

12. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum is enhanced by a programme of visiting speakers. It deepens pupils' self-knowledge and for many includes issues relevant to their ages. The programme includes all the requirements of relationships and sex education (RSE), but some older pupils find some of the content repetitive.
13. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in promoting the wellbeing of pupils. The house system ensures that pupils' individual needs are quickly identified. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with external agencies. Recruitment procedures are thorough.

## 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:

- review the content and delivery of the RSE programme for older pupils in the senior school to ensure that the programme is as relevant and engaging as possible.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. The school is governed by the Haberdashers' Aske's Elstree Schools Board which oversees strategic decisions and the implementation of policies. Hence the board has the responsibility to check that leaders are meeting the Standards effectively and consistently. They undertake this meticulously through regular visits, discussions with parents and pupils, and audits of documentation.
15. The board has set clear strategic aims to be at the forefront of education, which reflect the recent sharing of sixth-form teaching with Habs Girls. Leaders comprehensively and cohesively evaluate all areas of school life. They gather evidence through surveys, discussion with pupil representatives on the school council, staff and parents, and direct observation. Planning has a clear and effective objective of improving the impact for pupils in all areas. In a large school, the house and tutor system enables the opinions of all pupils to be listened to.
16. Leaders assess and mitigate potential risks to pupils effectively across the school. Leaders and staff implement comprehensive and up-to-date risk assessments for all areas, such as educational trips, the arts, science, the swimming pool and the grounds.
17. Leaders at all levels have secure knowledge in their areas of responsibility and apply it effectively. They regularly evaluate the quality of teaching, monitor pupils' work and use data to reassure themselves that at least good levels of progress are being maintained. Prep school leaders have implemented changes in the content and delivery of the English curriculum, as a result of which literacy levels at this age have substantially improved. Senior leaders carry out annual audits of the impact of the co-curricular programme and the school's approach to diversity and inclusion. However, leaders had not identified the extent of sixth form pupils' dissatisfaction about some of the content and delivery of PSHE.
18. The school's website provides clear and accessible information for pupils and parents of both current and prospective pupils. This includes all the policies and documents required, including those relating to the early years. Parents receive annual reports and other frequent information about their child's progress. Leaders provide the local authority with all required information relating to any pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan whom they fund.
19. Leaders provide pupils with a range of professionals from whom they can seek advice or with whom they can share concerns. The continuity of support through the house system, alongside scrupulous record-keeping, ensures that the needs of pupils are well known and, where appropriate, shared with teachers.
20. The school's complaints procedure is in line with requirements. It encourages parents to share concerns with academic, pastoral or senior leaders. All concerns, including at the informal stage, are recorded in detail, with an accurate chronology. The school follows exactly its published procedures if complaints move to the formal stages. Records are stored centrally, and leaders and governors review these regularly to identify any themes or patterns.
21. Leaders foster effective links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. In particular, there is an open working relationship with local safeguarding partners.
22. Leaders make appropriate arrangements for those with a disability through an accessibility plan. They implement reasonable adjustments, including to teaching methods, to enable any pupils with a

disability to take a full part in school life as far as is possible. In all ways the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Leaders provide a broad curriculum that includes all the required areas of learning. Children in the early years gain experience in all seven areas of learning. Leaders in the setting have provided an extensive variety of resources through which children can develop their own interests alongside others. As a result, they make rapid progress in their communication, language, personal and physical development.
25. Leaders in the prep school have carefully planned the curriculum so that it meets the aptitudes and needs of pupils who have a wide range of interests. Many pupils have a particular interest and ability in mathematics. As a result, schemes of work for this subject provide robust levels of challenge, and pupils successfully complete work at a level beyond national age-related expectations. Leaders identified that pupils' achievement in reading and writing in the prep school was less secure. In response, they have reviewed the curriculum and extended pupils' exposure to a wide and diverse variety of fiction and non-fiction, including through effective use of the library. As a result, Year 6 pupils read a wide variety of high-level texts from different genres with substantial understanding and enthusiasm and write fluently and accurately using a rich vocabulary more typical of that used by older pupils.
26. The curriculum enables senior school pupils to select from a broad range of subjects, including four modern foreign languages, theology and philosophy, and the performing and creative arts. Pupils study some A-level subjects alongside pupils from Habs Girls on the neighbouring site. This arrangement helps contribute to a wide range of curriculum choice in the sixth form. Leaders have introduced a school-based diploma that enables sixth-form pupils to follow elective courses and complete a research project to enhance their A-level studies.
27. Pupils commit enthusiastically to a large number and range of co-curricular opportunities. Pre-prep pupils enjoy opportunities such as speaking French alongside activities in an outside environment such as starting to swim. The prep and senior school curriculums are enriched by relevant trips to London, elsewhere in the UK, and abroad. Activities in school allow pupils to explore new interests outside the taught curriculum, or to develop their own specialisms, for example in music, drama or sport, or The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). The co-curricular programme provides a rich variety of opportunities to explore interests in more breadth or depth. Many activities are initiated or organised by pupils. In a school in which pupils exhibit high academic ambition, the programme provides balance to pupils' examination studies, and although voluntary, all pupils participate. As such it is a major influence in the promotion of pupils' wellbeing.
28. Teachers of all age groups have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons in detail, and pupils begin productive work immediately on entering the class. Teaching methods ensure that pupils are engaged in lessons. Teachers judge astutely when pupils can move quickly through straightforward concepts and when to give them more time to confront more challenging problems or ideas. Teachers promote an atmosphere in which pupils frequently ask questions. Teachers give frequent, detailed feedback to pupils in lessons and in their written work. In lessons, pupils make at least good progress in their knowledge and understanding. Pupils' skills are well developed, especially in mathematics and economics.
29. Teachers quickly identify pupils who might have SEND and evaluate the extent of the support needed. Teachers plan adjustments for these pupils carefully and implement them effectively, and



as a result very few need support outside lessons. Consequently, almost all pupils who have SEND follow a full curriculum and make good progress from their starting points. Leaders make appropriate provision for any pupils who have a physical disability. The very few pupils who are identified as speaking English as an additional language (EAL) are given effective support for their English.

30. Academic leaders oversee a suitable framework to evaluate the progress of individual pupils relative to their starting points. In the prep school, a recently introduced system has yet to produce annual data. Leaders in the senior school use data effectively to evaluate the extent of pupils' academic progress. Teachers use their awareness of pupils' starting points to inform how they encourage pupils to aim for and achieve the highest grades.
31. Typically, in cohorts well over 150, about nine--tenths of GCSE examinations are graded 9 to 7, with about one-half at grade 9. Well over three-quarters of A-level papers are graded A\* or A, and typically about one-half are A\*. Both sets of results represent statistically considerable progress from pupils' starting points.
32. The curriculum, through PSHE lessons, assemblies and the weekly visiting speaker programme, effectively promotes mutual respect between teachers and pupils of different faiths and beliefs. Lessons are typified by teachers and pupils working side-by-side with a common aim of developing their understanding, respectful of their differences in background.
33. Leaders provide a stimulating environment in which to learn. Lessons and co-curricular activities are supported by the effective use of high-quality resources and typified by teaching that provokes pupils to develop their curiosity and ambition.

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

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

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

35. The co-curricular programme contributes to the growth in pupils' self-knowledge and confidence at all ages. Pupils follow their own interests through a wide variety of voluntary activities, including sport and the creative and performing arts. Others, for example the *Lord of The Rings* society and the Rubik's Cube club, have no direct links to pupils' academic studies. Almost all pupils take part and use the opportunities to retain a balance in their lifestyle. The availability of such a wide and engaging programme makes a substantial contribution to pupils' mental wellbeing.
36. Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides opportunities for pre-prep and prep pupils to develop an awareness of people's national, racial and religious backgrounds. They achieve this through celebrations of religious festivals and national days. Leaders in the senior school ensure that this awareness develops into deeper understanding. Assemblies sensitively represent different views of current world conflicts. Teachers encourage debate in their lessons. Pupils keenly support societies and acts of worship that represent all the major world religions, and many pupils choose to visit acts of worship outside their own faith. As a result, the school successfully encourages pupils to develop profound levels of respect and extend their spiritual knowledge and understanding.
37. Teachers and those leading assemblies take opportunities to develop pupils' understanding of morality. The school's societies, Model United Nations, debating activities, and lessons in subjects such as theology and philosophy at all ages regularly address current moral issues. Pupils have a clear understanding of right and wrong.
38. Pupils belong to the same house throughout their time in the prep school, and then again throughout their time in the senior school. As a result, in a large school, pupils can identify with and gain confidence in smaller groups. They are well supported by pastoral staff and older pupils. Tutors share their detailed knowledge of pupils with teachers, senior staff and, for example, careers staff, so that the advice provided for pupils about potential next steps can be individually tailored.
39. The PSHE programme is taught weekly throughout the age groups. In addition, pupils in the senior school attend lectures given by external professionals. Pupils receive RSE as part of the programme. Parents are made aware of the content of the course. The content meets requirements. Leaders assess its effectiveness in discussion with pupils. The majority of older pupils in the senior school find some elements of the RSE course repetitive. In these age-groups the curriculum does not engage pupils at an appropriate level.
40. Pupils' physical health is promoted through regular physical education (PE) and games lessons. Leaders provide apparatus on which pupils can explore and challenge themselves. The curriculum allows prep and senior school pupils to take part in a wide variety of competitive and non-competitive sports. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to develop their physical skills through further activities such as bouldering, bicycle riding and membership of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). Many senior and prep school pupils take part in the weekly 'HabsDash', an organised two-mile run through the campus.
41. The school's written behaviour and anti-bullying policies at all ages are understood by pupils and implemented consistently by staff. Leaders promote good behaviour through assemblies and the PSHE curriculum. Incidents of poor behaviour or bullying are rare.

42. Leaders have developed the use of buildings effectively to provide suitable accommodation in which pupils study and enjoy recreation. They include large common areas which provide pupils with space to mix and converse. Those responsible maintain buildings and grounds to a high standard. Fire drills are carried out regularly. As result, the school meet the requirements of health and safety and fire legislation, and provides a well-maintained, secure environment for pupils.
43. The medical centre meets the needs of pupils who are sick or need first aid. It provides a place where pupils can seek physical or emotional support. Qualified staff administer medication appropriately. Other staff have up-to-date training, including in paediatric first aid in the early years.
44. The school maintains appropriate and accurate attendance registers. Leaders have updated their policies and procedures relating to attendance in line with the latest statutory guidance. They understand their responsibilities should pupils have a prolonged absence. Leaders inform the appropriate local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points in the school year.

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

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

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

46. School leaders provide a curriculum that supports the growth of pupils' social and economic knowledge. Leaders encourage pupils to respect other people by promoting discussion and debate at every opportunity.
47. The school's co-curricular programme is influential in its contribution to pupils' social development. Its wide-ranging opportunities allow pupils to work alongside others of different ages, and through partnerships with Habs Girls, in some activities with those of different gender. Pupils support and show consideration for pupils who have physical disabilities.
48. Leaders encourage respect for and promote the understanding of race, religion and different sexual orientations through assemblies, the PSHE curriculum and support of the pupil-led LGBT+ society. The school hosts an annual 'Pride party'. School lunches include non-beef, halal and kosher options. Pupils use the multi-faith room daily and support events arranged by various religious groups including the African, Caribbean and South Asian societies. Leaders have integrated literature from across the world in the revision of the English curriculum in the prep school. This enables pupils to learn about human rights and how different groups have been or are treated by others in history and across the world.
49. Pupils act as mentors for younger pupils in the same house, including the prep school. They provide help with academic studies or advice on friendship issues. Senior pupils frequently lead assemblies on, for example, the risks associated with social media or unconscious misogyny.
50. Leaders develop pupils' understanding of the different forms of democracy effectively when opportunities arise, for example in the history curriculum, in assemblies and in the debating societies that are well-supported at all ages. The visiting speaker programme provides pupils with insight into the governance of the country, as well as civil and criminal law.
51. The pupil-led student councils in the prep and senior schools consider all aspects of pupils' lives at school. They successfully gather opinion and ideas from across the school. Alongside the results of regular surveys, leaders routinely use the councils as a conduit for information about pupils' views, as they look to improve the experience for pupils. Governors frequently meet pupil representatives.
52. Leaders promote pupils' cultural awareness through the extensive opportunities in art, music and drama provided by the taught and co-curricular programmes. A large number of different musical ensembles perform regularly. Societies in, for example, poetry and philosophy allow pupils to deepen their explorations of culture.
53. Leaders provide a well-planned careers programme. The PSHE curriculum in the senior school encourages pupils to reflect on their own skills and aptitudes and how these relate to a range of possible professions. House tutors direct pupils to specific subject advisors. Careers leaders provide specialist and impartial and detailed advice, such as on university applications to read medicine, law, to study in the USA, or to secure degree apprenticeships. Pupils attend an extensive careers convention, and sixth formers take part in networking breakfasts with representatives from industry. Leaders make effective use of former pupils and parents to provide pupils with work experience.

54. Prep school pupils start their economic education by costing suggestions from their own school council and raising money for charities. The senior school PSHE curriculum develops skills in budgeting and provides an outline knowledge of economic principles. Year 10 and 11 pupils take part in an annual competition based on a popular television series about finding backers for business ideas. Teachers prepare pupils for the financial decisions they will need to make after leaving school, for example by discussing how student loans work. By the time they leave, pupils have received a comprehensive economic education.
55. The curriculum emphasises that pupils have a responsibility towards society. Pupils engage in a wide range of service to both the school and outside community. Children in the early years learn quickly about taking turns. They share some playtimes and musical workshops with children from Habs Girls and hence learn to work alongside others of a different sex. Younger pupils select charities and cooperate in the planning of fundraising events. Senior pupils volunteer in care homes and foodbanks, and a large number of pupils each week give support to children in local schools in academic and co-curricular activities.

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

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

## Safeguarding

57. Safeguarding arrangements are clearly described in the school's safeguarding and associated policies. These include the additional expectations of adults in the early years setting.
58. Safeguarding arrangements are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of pupils is promoted. Governors robustly monitor the effectiveness of all aspects of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. They undertake this by triangulating the views of pupils and staff and analysing anonymised information from safeguarding records. The designated safeguarding governor maintains regular contact with the school's safeguarding leaders. A full and detailed report is provided to the whole governing body, who use it to decide on priorities for additional resources. Governors have received training appropriate to their role and provide professional challenge.
59. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have the necessary knowledge and training to carry out their roles effectively. Safeguarding leaders in each of the pre-prep, prep and senior schools work closely together, and share knowledge and expertise. They communicate regularly with their equivalents at HGS about any concern that involves pupils from both sites. These arrangements ensure that potential safeguarding issues across the schools are quickly communicated and addressed.
60. Teaching and support staff receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training at an appropriate level. Supplementary training for coach drivers, sports coaches and other self-employed or contracted staff is adapted to their specific roles. Staff have an effective understanding of arrangements. They are sharply alert to the potential risks faced by pupils. Staff report concerns quickly and reassure themselves that action has been taken. They unreservedly report any low-level concerns about adult behaviour to the appropriate head.
61. Pupils feel safe. They have a range of adults to speak to if they have concerns. Leaders provide methods that are appropriate for pupils of different ages to share their concerns anonymously. Pupils make use of these methods, and safeguarding or pastoral leaders follow up all communications as far as is possible. Pupils have access to a range of well-trained professionals, including nursing staff.
62. The safeguarding team makes effective use of electronic reporting systems to support safeguarding practice. Records are detailed, identifying the risks to pupils, and explaining the rationale for decisions made. Leaders review the effectiveness of actions taken. Safeguarding leaders effectively implement the school's appropriate procedures when there are safeguarding concerns about pupils, including with regard to the risk of radicalisation, and work closely with relevant external agencies.
63. Filtering and monitoring software protects pupils online and identifies any inappropriate use of the internet. Leaders test the effectiveness of the software each week. The safeguarding team, school leaders and the nominated safeguarding governor analyse records of internet use weekly. Pupils receive guidance about keeping safe online through the curriculum.
64. Leaders work closely with relevant safeguarding partners, including children's services, 'Prevent' duty teams, the police and the local authority designated officer. They act on the advice given. This includes with regard to any allegations against adults, including historic allegations about staff.

65. All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on adults before they come into contact with pupils. This includes adults who live on site and visitors engaging in regulated activity. The suitability of adults contributing to the school's visiting speaker programme is rigorously checked. Leaders are vigilant in ensuring that contractors have carried out the appropriate checks on substitute staff. Staff maintain an accurate single central record (SCR) of appointments and files relating to safer recruitment checks.

### **The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding**

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Haberdashers' Boys' School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	919/6221
<b>Registered charity number</b>	313996
<b>Address</b>	Butterfly Lane Elstree Hertfordshire WD6 3AF
<b>Phone number</b>	020 8266 1700
<b>Email address</b>	officeboys@habselstree.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.habselstree.org.uk/boys">www.habselstree.org.uk/boys</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Haberdashers' Company
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Simon Cartmell
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Robert Sykes
<b>Age range</b>	4 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	1457
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	25 to 28 January 2022



## Information about the school

67. Haberdashers' Boys' School is an independent day school for male pupils. It comprises a prep (which includes the pre-prep) and senior school on the same site. The school works closely with the neighbouring Haberdashers' Girls' School (Habs Girls), for example in shared activities at all ages and joint teaching in the sixth form. The school is overseen by a board of governors and is a charitable trust. The board also oversees Haberdashers' Girls School.
68. The school has identified 192 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
69. The school has identified English as an additional language for two pupils.
70. The school states that its aim is to offer an outstanding education that is fun, exciting and intellectually challenging, developing independence, resilience and a moral compass to create positive change. It intends to empower young people to make a profound impact in the world.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

11 to 13 February 2025

71. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

72. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of co-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, executive 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 with pupils and staff
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

73. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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