

School inspection report

4 to 6 February 2025

Haberdashers' Girls' School

Aldenham Road

Elstree

Borehamwood

Hertfordshire

WD6 3BT

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders have created an environment in which pupils have a genuine joy of learning and flourish academically. They have established clear priorities for the ongoing development of the school which focus on ensuring that the wellbeing of each pupil is actively promoted. Across all areas of school life, leaders have the skills and knowledge to ensure that the Standards are met.
2. The wide-ranging curriculum provides many opportunities for pupils to develop their personal skills alongside their academic learning. A well-planned extra-curricular programme of activities combined with opportunities to volunteer in the local community and embrace a variety of leadership roles, enables pupils' self-awareness and confidence to grow rapidly. However, in the senior school leaders' oversight of pupils' involvement in activities does not check that all pupils are taking advantage of the extensive opportunities available to them.
3. Governors have a comprehensive oversight of the work of school leaders. They know the school's strengths and areas for development. They effectively monitor the school through regular reports, frequent visits, meetings with pupils and ongoing dialogue with leaders.
4. The school have put in place a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme which is successful in teaching the importance of mutual respect and treating all people as equals. The effective delivery of PSHE together with a broad range of assemblies and external speakers helps pupils to develop empathy and understanding of the views of others.
5. Leaders and governors have prioritised the development of pastoral care in their strategic planning. Across the junior school, class teachers have a detailed understanding of the needs of their pupils and this is also replicated by many senior school form tutors. However, some tutors do not use the tutoring programme as effectively to support pupils in the senior school.
6. The early years setting is a happy and safe learning environment. The curriculum supports the needs and interests of the children, enabling them to be very well equipped to move onto Year 1. They gain increasing independence and self-awareness through different learning opportunities in the classroom and when exploring in the outdoor areas.
7. Leaders maintain a detailed oversight of teaching across the school. Teachers have good subject knowledge. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subjects promotes a deep commitment to learning among pupils. Regular and bespoke feedback to pupils enables them to consistently make good progress. Attainment for most pupils at GCSE, A level and at the end of the junior school is at a consistently high level. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or who speak English as an additional language (EAL) typically learn effectively, make good progress and attain well.
8. Safeguarding procedures are implemented effectively. Staff having a clear understanding that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Appropriate training is provided for staff including a rigorous induction programme, so that they fulfil their responsibilities 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:

- improve the consistency of tutoring in the senior school to fully support pupils' personal development
- develop the monitoring of pupils' engagement in extra-curricular and leadership activities to ensure senior school pupils benefit from the range of opportunities available.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They have ensured that there are clear policies and protocols in place for the different aspects of school life. These are well understood and consistently implemented by staff. Regular reviews of practice and policy are embedded into a leadership culture which prioritises pupil wellbeing.
10. Governors have ensured that leaders have the relevant skills to carry out their roles and to ensure that the requirements of the Standards are consistently met. Individual governors with specific responsibilities regularly visit the school to scrutinise records, meet with staff and pupils and observe a range of school activities. The governing board receives reports on all aspects of school life enabling them to have detailed and effective oversight of the school.
11. Leaders have developed a well-considered set of priorities for the development of the school that staff, pupils and parents understand. Leaders have ensured that the school's values of ambition, curiosity, courage and community are a constant priority in their development of the school's provision. The strategic plan is informed by a rigorous approach to regular self-evaluation. A range of surveys, committees and other forums enable leaders to actively listen to the views of pupils, parents and staff. This enables leaders to have a detailed understanding of the impact of their decisions on pupil wellbeing.
12. Leaders maintain close oversight of teaching through a programme of direct observation, the scrutiny of academic work and listening to the views of pupils. They prioritise the need for a high level of intellectual challenge, as well as fostering a love of learning amongst the pupils. Leaders' close scrutiny of pupils' learning ensures that pupils' learning and progress are enhanced.
13. In all aspects of the school's educational provision, leaders ensure that there is equality of opportunity for pupils and that everyone is treated equally. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
14. Leaders in the early years are skilled, knowledgeable and have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of each child. Staff in the early years are supported well, including through regular supervision meetings. Safeguarding, health and safety, first aid and risk assessment policies are implemented rigorously to ensure the wellbeing of children in the early years.
15. Leaders have a clear understanding of how to mitigate potential risks to pupils' safety and wellbeing. Staff are thoroughly trained to identify and manage risks. Risk assessments are suitably detailed and regularly reviewed, including in relation to pupil welfare, educational visits and site management.
16. Leaders liaise effectively with a range of external agencies such as safeguarding partners and external professionals who regularly audit many aspects of the school's provision such as health and safety. Leaders also work closely with the local authority, including through informing them appropriately about the use of funding to support pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
17. Leaders and staff work closely with parents to follow up and resolve any concerns they may have. They communicate constructively with parents in a timely manner. Leaders keep detailed records of complaints submitted and any actions taken as a result, in line with their complaints policy.

18. The school regularly provides parents with information on the progress of pupils throughout their time at the school. Other required information such as policies and details of school events are provided on the school website or otherwise made available to parents.

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. The school has created an invigorating and enriching curriculum which is systematically planned and regularly reviewed. Pupils develop high levels of knowledge and skills across a range of subjects. Pupils quickly develop a range of technological skills which are evident in their extensive internet research work and in, for example, developing their own programme coding. Pupils consistently show high levels of numeracy across a range of subjects. Similarly, their linguistic and literary skills are well developed, often beyond what might be expected from pupils of their age. Well-planned academic opportunities are built into the curriculum, such as creative writing and debating which enhance pupils' already well-developed oracy skills.
21. The wide-ranging curriculum provides extensive opportunities for the development of pupils in all aspects of their learning. For example, the innovative 'Habs diploma' in the sixth form combines academic research with voluntary work in the local community. This is typical of the school's ambition to ensure that pupils develop their personal skills alongside their academic progress. Many pupils are actively involved in a range of activities and initiatives which have a positive effect on their self-esteem and self-confidence. However, leaders are not collating and reviewing information on older pupils effectively and therefore staff do not have complete oversight of pupils' engagement and progress. Consequently, some pupils miss out on opportunities to enhance their development.
22. Leaders have put in place an effective framework for assessment. Leaders and teachers use assessment data to measure pupils' progress from their different starting points. Leaders identify and provide appropriate support where pupils need it, and enhanced challenge or extension for pupils as needed. Academic and pastoral leaders work collaboratively to monitor the effectiveness of the support for pupils on regular basis. This ensures that pupils have appropriate opportunities to enhance their learning skills considerably. This results in pupils' high attainment at GCSE and A level, but also in younger pupils' achievement in nationally standardised tests at the end of Year 6.
23. Subject teachers and specialists who work in the individual needs department collaborate effectively to put in place appropriate support, both inside and outside lessons, for pupils who have SEND. Pupils respond positively to this targeted support and consequently make rapid progress from their starting points.
24. When occasionally needed, pupils who speak EAL are supported effectively to develop their understanding and use of English. This support is provided in lessons and in additional sessions where needed. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress over time.
25. In the early years setting, leaders have developed a curriculum which challenges children beyond the statutory requirements. There are many opportunities for child initiated explorative play and more structured tasks. The children enjoy challenges which stimulate their curiosity, as typically illustrated by experimenting with numbers that add up to twenty or gaining an understanding of different spelling patterns for phonemes. Children make good progress from their starting points and are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
26. Teaching is effective across the school. Teachers have a high level of knowledge and enthusiasm for their subjects. Teaching regularly feeds an insatiable appetite for learning which is characteristic of many pupils. Lessons are planned to build on pupils' prior knowledge and teachers adapt their teaching to respond to pupils' questions. This enables pupils' misconceptions to be addressed while

others are supported to develop their understanding in more complex ways. This is consistently evident in language lessons, where younger pupils successfully use alternative verbs in their descriptive writing. Pupils' progress is consistently enhanced by detailed verbal and written feedback from their teachers.

27. A rich and extensive programme of extra-curricular activities complements the academic curriculum. Provision of a plethora of clubs, societies, sport, performing arts and outdoor education is well integrated into the school day. Engagement in academic enrichment activities such as astrophysics, poetry reading and Mandarin enriches pupils' critical thinking and problem solving skills. Participation in the Combined Cadet Force and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme enables pupils to develop their resilience and teamwork skills.

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

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

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

29. In their planning leaders have prioritised the development of pastoral care. Leaders have reorganised pastoral leadership responsibilities and provided staff with a detailed programme of training. This has increased leaders' oversight of the work of tutors in supporting pupils to develop their personal skills. Class teachers in the junior school and many senior school tutors know their pupils well and this has a positive effect on pupils' self-esteem and growth in resilience. However, some senior school tutors are less confident and effective in supporting pupils through the tutor programme, especially in supporting pupils' wider personal development at school. As a result, the personal development of some pupils is hindered.
30. The school has an extensive age-appropriate programme for PSHE which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE). Teachers are trained to deliver PSHE effectively through open discussions which enable pupils to, for example, consider how they would approach different real life scenarios. Pupils make good progress in understanding important issues such as managing their mental health, how to build positive relationships and the threat of radicalisation. Teachers assess pupils understanding on a lesson-by-lesson basis which also allows ongoing review and modification of the PSHE content to meet the needs of pupils.
31. Pupils learn about respect for different faiths and develop their moral understanding through the tutorial programme, PSHE, religion and philosophy lessons, and assemblies. Each faith group represented at the school presents an assembly at least once per term, which enables increased understanding of both the distinctiveness and the similarity of different perspectives. Pupils demonstrate their moral maturity by, for example, leading assemblies on the effects of prejudice and discrimination. The spiritual growth of many pupils is enhanced by opportunities for reflection, such as in the inclusive multi-faith prayer room which is found in the heart of the school.
32. The school actively promotes a healthy lifestyle across the curriculum particularly through a well-planned programme of physical education (PE). Younger pupils are exposed to many different sports enabling them to develop a range of physical skills. Pupils learn about the importance of working collaboratively in teams. The participation of older pupils in elective sports options is very high, with choices including major team and individual sports, such as trampolining, as well as physical activities and exercise like a 'wellbeing walk'. Pupils understand the importance of maintaining their physical health and its positive effect on their overall wellbeing.
33. Leaders in the early years have established a calm setting in which positive relationships and kindness between children is prioritised. Children's understanding that everyone is different but all are equally respected grows rapidly from the moment that they arrive at the school. Children learn how to self-regulate and express their feelings in a supportive and caring environment. Well-planned physical activities enable children to develop team skills as well learning how to support each other.
34. The school's behaviour policy is well understood and implemented consistently. Staff effectively encourage pupils to behave positively. Younger pupils are regularly praised for showing kindness which builds a culture of politeness and consideration for other people. Throughout the school pupil behaviour is exemplary.

35. Leaders have put in place an effective anti-bullying strategy. Detailed records are maintained which are monitored regularly and show that leaders respond swiftly to the rare instances of bullying that do occur. Staff are trained to support all pupils involved. The school's focus on restorative justice allows time for reflection and for lessons to be learnt.
36. The school has developed a well-defined system of pupil leadership opportunities for pupils of all ages. The many leaderships roles include form captains, peer mentors, leaders of clubs and societies and senior prefects. Pupils' social awareness and sense of responsibility is positively enhanced by these roles. Pupils are supported by staff with specific leadership training. This enables pupils to recognise the positive contribution they make to supporting others and helping them to have their voices heard.
37. Health and safety policies and procedures are robust and implemented effectively. Appropriate precautions are taken to minimise the risk of fire, with frequently updated staff training, systematic checks on fire equipment and regular fire drills. The school site is well maintained with high levels of security to ensure a suitable environment for pupils.
38. The medical centre is staffed through the school day by a caring and well-trained medical team. Across the school, first aid provision is appropriate and effective. Suitable numbers of staff are appropriately trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid for those who work in the early years.
39. Leaders ensure supervision levels throughout the school, including the management of pupils arriving and leaving school at the start and end of the school day, are appropriate. Leaders maintain suitable staff to child ratios in the early years.
40. The school's attendance and admission registers are accurately maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points, or where there are concerns about pupils' absence.

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

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

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

42. The importance of mutual respect and inclusivity is embedded in the school community. Pupils and staff talk with genuine pride about the diversity of the community. Pupils relish the opportunity to work collaboratively with their peers. This is typically seen in activities and lessons such as drama and debating. Pupils respectfully listen to different views that challenge their thinking. The school's vertical house system further enhances opportunities for pupils to work with and learn from each other. A co-ordinated programme of assemblies and clubs, such as the African and Caribbean society, LGBTQ+ society and neurodiversity society ensures that pupils are able to understand and support different cultures and the protected characteristics of individuals, increasing the levels of respect throughout the school.
43. The promotion of British values is interwoven into the school curriculum. The school teaches pupils about the importance of individual liberty and that no individual is more or less worthy than another. These values are constantly evidenced in the attitudes and actions of the community. Pupils are regularly taught about respect for the democratic process and the rule of law through assemblies, PSHE lessons and the academic curriculum. Senior school lessons in history, for example, consider how Parliament developed in a constitutional monarchy. Junior pupils are regularly given awards when they display British values in their actions, such as representing others in their roles as elected members of the school council.
44. Teachers and tutors facilitate discussions on citizenship which enhance pupils' social and political understanding. Assemblies and follow-up discussions on world-wide issues such as the situation in the Middle East are handled sensitively and impartially by teachers. Pupils of different cultural and political perspectives often work together to lead assemblies which model the importance of empathy and understanding.
45. The economic competence of pupils grows as they move through the school. From an early age, pupils are challenged to run a charity fair on a budget, while older pupils respond enthusiastically to the 'grow a pound' challenge. Through the PSHE programme pupils are taught about a range of financial issues such as using bank accounts, how credit cards contrast to debit cards, mortgages and how investments work. Sixth form pupils gain an understanding of the importance of financial planning as they prepare for life beyond school.
46. Through play and a comprehensive programme of activities, children in the early years develop socially and increasingly accept responsibility when they make mistakes. They learn to listen carefully to each other's views and support each other when, for example, clearing up the outdoor play area. The children begin to understand the importance of rules and democracy in their lives by, for example, voting for their choice of stories or which play area they would like to use.
47. A series of well-planned partnership activities enables pupils to contribute to the local community. Many pupils volunteer to teach and mentor pupils in a number of local schools. Older pupils are effectively trained to help younger children with their reading, teaching subjects such as mathematics and assisting in imparting outdoor education skills. Pupils are very conscious of the importance of supporting others and recognise the importance of using their skills for the good of society. As a consequence of the partnerships programme, pupils' social awareness, leadership skills and sense of responsibility grow rapidly.

48. The school has developed an age-appropriate programme of careers education based on the Gatsby principles. Using PSHE lessons, tutor time, external talks and 'career days', pupils gain an understanding of the consequences of their subject choices at GCSE and A level. In the junior school, careers guidance is threaded into the curriculum and supported by, for example, parents giving talks on their jobs. Older pupils benefit from bespoke guidance from specialist teachers, careers breakfasts and a range of networking and higher education events. The effective careers guidance prepares pupils well for the next stages of their education or employment.

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. The school has a clear and appropriate safeguarding policy and related procedures which are in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders implement the policy effectively promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Leaders identify and mitigate risks that may affect the safety and welfare of pupils. They have established a transparent safeguarding culture in which staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Pupils of all ages feel safe and reassured by the many contact points with trusted adults to whom they can turn if concerns arise.
51. Governors have comprehensive oversight of safeguarding arrangements. They conduct a thorough annual review of the safeguarding policy and monitor its implementation through regular reports from safeguarding leaders. The safeguarding governor regularly visits the school to scrutinise safeguarding records and meet with the safeguarding team. Governors are well trained.
52. Staff are trained effectively in safeguarding procedures and are confident in knowing how to report concerns, no matter how small, to ensure the wellbeing of pupils. Training for staff is updated regularly. There is extensive induction in place for new staff so that they are clear about the school's safeguarding arrangements as soon as they join the school. Staff understand the procedures for ensuring online safety and can recognise the possible risks to pupils from radicalisation and extremism. Leaders maintain comprehensive records of training, enabling them to quickly identify staff who need their training updated.
53. Safeguarding concerns are suitably recorded and referrals, when needed, are made promptly to the relevant external agencies. All child protection records are stored appropriately and securely. The safeguarding and pastoral teams work closely together to provide timely and effective support to individual pupils which is regularly reviewed.
54. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, including online. From an early age they have a clear understanding of what is inappropriate online behaviour. Suitable filtering and monitoring systems are in place and the system is thoroughly tested on a regular basis. The safeguarding team respond quickly to any reports about possible inappropriate online activity.
55. In the early years, leaders ensure that appropriate safeguarding procedures are in place. Staff ensure that they are implemented effectively to mitigate risk and promote the wellbeing of the children. There are suitable procedures in place for the handover of children from parents to staff and vice versa at the start and end of each school day.
56. The school carries out all required safer recruitment checks in a timely manner for all adults who work with pupils, including children in the early years. This includes for supply staff, governors and contractors who are working in the same environment. A suitable central record of appointments is in place and staff files include the information required by current statutory guidance.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Haberdashers' Girls' School
Department for Education number	919/6222
Registered charity number	313996
Address	Haberdashers' Girls' School Aldenham Rd Elstree Borehamwood Hertfordshire WD6 3BT
Phone number	020 8266 2300
Email address	hmgirls@habselstree.org.uk
Website	https://www.habselstree.org.uk/girls/
Proprietor	The Haberdashers' Company
Chair	Mr Simon Cartmell
Headteacher	Dr Hazel Bagworth-Mann
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	1133
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 March 2022

Information about the school

58. Haberdashers' Girls' School is an independent day school for female pupils. It is located in Elstree, Hertfordshire. The school consists of a junior school for pupils aged 4 to 11, a senior school for pupils aged 11 to 18 which includes a sixth form for pupils aged 16 to 18. The whole school operates on the same campus. The school is governed by the Harberdashers' Aske's Elstree Schools' Board, which also oversees the Harberdashers' Boys' School. The current head took up her post in September 2023.
59. There are 39 children in the early years setting, comprising two Reception classes.
60. The school has identified 166 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
61. The school has identified English as an additional language for 535 pupils.
62. The school states its aim is to empower pupils to make a profound impact in the world by offering an education which is stimulating, intellectual challenging, develops resilience and independence to build a moral compass which will create positive change.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

4 to 6 February 2025

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

64. 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 headmistress, 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.

65. 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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