



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

St Mary's School, Henley

January 2023

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School's Details

School	St Mary's School, Henley			
DfE number	931/6021			
Address	St Mary's School, Henley 13 St Andrew's Road Henley-on-Thames Oxfordshire RG9 1HS			
Telephone number	01491 573118			
Email address	info@stmarys-henley.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mr Rob Harmer			
Chair of Governors	Mr Simon Rudland			
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	126			
	EYFS	19	Juniors	107
Inspection dates	31 January to 2 February 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St Mary's School is an independent co-educational day school. The school was founded in 1926 in a residential area of Henley-on-Thames. In 2006, the school became part of the Cognita Schools group. Governance and oversight are provided by a team appointed by the proprietor, which is led by a general manager of the group, who acts as chair of governors. The current chair of governors has been in post since September 2022.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to encourage a lifelong love of learning within a broad and balanced curriculum alongside extra-curricular opportunities. It seeks to nurture pupils' self-respect and consideration for others and enable them to become well-balanced and healthy individuals, preparing them for the next stage in their education.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of professional and business families, predominantly living in and around Henley-on-Thames. Standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above the national average compared with pupils taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 32 pupils as having special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia and other conditions, 26 of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 3 pupils, who receive additional support for their English. The school has identified 46 pupils as being the most able in the school's population; the curriculum is modified for them and they receive specialist subject teaching as well as extra-curricular activities.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety;

acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils develop excellent levels of competence in information and communication technology (ICT), using this to great effect across the curriculum to enhance their learning.
- Pupils are outstanding communicators. They are attentive listeners and highly articulate. Their reading and writing skills are of a high standard.
- Pupils' numeracy skills are a great strength; their enjoyment for this subject is wholly apparent.
- Pupils' gains in attainment over time are excellent.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils respect for diversity is well-developed; they embrace others' individuality and are proud of what makes each of them unique.
- Pupils across the school are extremely socially aware.
- Pupils are well-balanced, confident individuals.
- Pupils are proactive in contributing to the lives of others within their school and the wider community.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Enhance pupils' decision-making skills by enabling them to exercise more choice in how they record their learning.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils develop excellent levels of competence in ICT. From the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) onwards, they demonstrate a growing confidence when using ICT to enhance learning across the curriculum as well as in discrete computer lessons. This was evident in their workbooks which recorded Reception children's proficient use of digital devices and applications (apps) to scan a quick response (QR) code as well as their clever programming of floor robots to follow commands. Younger pupils skilfully composed tunes digitally and demonstrated their ICT expertise when using apps to support their learning, for instance when independently extending their knowledge of number bonds.

Older pupils create high-quality computer-generated presentations on topics such as endangered species. The school's leaders have ensured pupils can develop digital skills so well because they have invested purposefully in computer technology. This includes the provision of tablets for all pupils in the EYFS and Years 1 and 2, and a laptop for every pupil in Years 3 to 6. They have also ensured teaching supports pupils' digital skill development.

- 3.6 Pupils are outstanding communicators. They are attentive listeners and highly articulate. From the earliest age they are typically eager to share their thoughts and ideas. Children in the EYFS concisely explained what tornadoes are. Year 3 pupils made thoughtful contributions during a discussion where they planned what would happen next in their science fiction stories. Pupils in Year 5 succinctly outlined their opinions in a letter writing activity to either oppose or support the building of a new stadium. Pupils' reading skills are well developed. In the EYFS children read menus in the role play restaurant. Year 4 pupils quickly immersed themselves in their books during independent reading time. Pupils who require additional support with their communication skills make considerable progress. They benefit hugely from the support they receive from specialists, including valuable sessions before school, where pupils work on laptops to help improve their skills in reading and spelling. Pupils display great pride and enjoyment in their written work. Year 6 pupils were delighted to show inspectors their highly creative poetry and stories.
- 3.7 Pupils' numeracy skills are extremely well developed. Pupils demonstrate an excellent understanding of numerical concepts and apply them confidently across the different areas of learning. Reception children counted ball throws with ease in a physical education lesson. Year 3 pupils ably calculated the mass of permeable rocks in grams. In mathematics lessons, pupils in Year 2 competently applied times tables skills to add in 2s, 5s or 10s to make different amounts. Pupils in Years 6 relished the challenge of solving algebraic equations and explained how their mathematical skills help them solve problems when using educationally based computer games. Pupils' confidence and interest in mathematics is extended in Years 5 and 6 when they enter national competitions designed for senior school pupils, with great success. Pupils' mathematical skills across the age range are a real strength, helped by the challenging activities that enthuse and stretch their learning.
- 3.8 Pupils' gains in attainment over time are excellent. Evidence from external and nationally standardised tests, as well as the schools' own assessment data, show how attainment is above national age-related expectations in all subjects. The individual attention paid to all pupils helps ensure they achieve their very best. Most children in the EYFS meet the expected levels of development. Pupils with SEND and pupils with EAL make good progress because they are well supported by their class teachers as well as specialists. More able pupils are challenged by being provided with more complex work in class and encouragement to develop their skills in areas that interest them. Pupils consistently receive offers from their first-choice schools, with several gaining scholarships and awards, academically and for sport and arts.
- 3.9 Pupils exhibit excellent knowledge, understanding and skills across all areas of learning, facilitated by teachers who endeavour to bring the curriculum to life, making learning fun and relevant. Children in the EYFS demonstrate an advanced awareness of facts as observed during their discussions with staff during their play. Those in Nursery explained what X-rays are for and knew the names of different construction vehicles. Pupils in Year 3 demonstrated excellent recall of facts linked to their topic on the Egyptians during a drama session where they acted out stories. They quickly got into character, embracing their roles fully. Year 4 pupils showed great ability when exploring textures in art, using the appropriate terms to describe their ideas. Pupils write assuredly whether that be in English or French, as seen in their workbooks. Pupils say they learn a lot in their lessons. In the questionnaire, all pupils responding agreed that teachers know their subjects well.
- 3.10 Pupils' highly enthusiastic approach to learning enables them to make excellent progress across the curriculum. As pupils grow older, they demonstrate increasing levels of independence and initiative. For example, older pupils started a coding group that has evolved into a highly popular club for those who are younger. Pupils exhibit an outstanding attitude to their studies and were enthusiastically

animated when explaining their learning. Nursery children freely shared and took turns. Pupils in Year 2 persevered unreservedly when trying to solve money problems in mathematics. Across the school, pupils work collaboratively, with commitment, and accept challenges undaunted. Older pupils reflected on how they felt the school has helped them develop confidence, work together and try new things.

- 3.11 Pupils demonstrate excellent study skills. They can analyse effectively, such as in science, when Year 6 pupils compared diets and calorie intake expertly, succinctly explaining their respective effects and outcomes. Pupils confidently draw their own conclusions and hypothesise from a young age. In the EYFS, children were able to recognise each other's emotions very well, while pupils in Year 1 used excellent deduction skills when trying to identify mystery objects from the past. Pupils draw on a range of sources, building on these skilfully. Year 2 pupils explained concisely how they use their reasoning skills to solve problems and persevere to reach conclusions. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school equips their child with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life.
- 3.12 Pupils enjoy great success in sport and in the performing and other arts. Teams frequently win matches in netball, football, rugby, hockey and cross country. Pupils have been finalists in national arts competitions, participate regularly in the national Young Voices Choir in London and compete successfully in a national mathematics challenge. Examination results in instrumental music are strong. Pupils succeed in these extra-curricular activities, developing their interests so well, because the school works diligently to fulfil its aim to nurture and celebrate their individual talents.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils are highly respectful of the diverse world in which they live, in line with the school's aims. This is a great strength of the school. Pupils enjoy learning about their own and others' cultures and understand the importance of appreciating backgrounds and traditions different to their own. Pupils were absolutely clear that everyone should be treated equally and that it is perfectly acceptable to be different; these sentiments were reiterated by pupils in a school display related to the pride movement. Pupils learn about and express the embedded school value of respect through a broad and rich personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, assemblies, visiting speakers, as well as posters around the school celebrating neurodiversity. Pupils demonstrate a mature understanding of equality, reinforced through school leaders' decision to adopt a gender-neutral uniform, as well as encouraging mixed gender teams for sport where appropriate.
- 3.15 Pupils of all ages are strongly socially aware, engendered by the family ethos that permeates the school. Pupils help each other and work collaboratively in class and extra-curricular activities, such as when Nursery children worked together to build a giant marble run. In a Year 2 English lesson, pupils acted out a story as animal characters, demonstrating strong teamwork. Pupils are kind and generous in attitude, as seen when Year 3 and 4 pupils attending the after-school art club praised others' designs. Pupils from different year groups play happily together during break times.
- 3.16 Pupils are proactive in contributing to the lives of others within their school and the wider community. They play an active role in making their school a better place by working together to solve problems and presenting ideas through the school council which includes representatives from Year 1 to Year 6. Pupils explained how playground equipment was increased and lunches improved as a result of their suggestions. Pupils fund-raise and support many charities, both nationally and locally. They take the lead in charity fundraising, such as by organising a sunflower sale for Ukraine. Pupils embrace community initiatives for example by litter picking. Year 1 pupils visited a local care home to sing at Christmastime. EYFS children hugely benefit from having Year 6 buddies who have developed excellent relationships with them, acting as positive role models. Buddies were observed encouraging children to complete an obstacle course which meant they completed the activity successfully and

enjoyed it all the more. All pupils in Year 6 take on at least one role of responsibility, which cultivates their leadership skills at the same time as enhancing younger children's experiences. These include playground monitors, librarians and ambassadors.

- 3.17 In line with the school's aims, pupils display high levels of self-respect and are well-balanced, confident individuals. Children in the EYFS enter their classroom eagerly and take great delight in relating with their Year 6 buddies as they play. Pupils show resilience and a clear desire to keep trying when faced with challenges. In a Year 5 English lesson pupils demonstrated robust perseverance when formulating phrases and sentences using modal verbs, augmenting their initial ideas. Pupils know how to improve on their own learning, through their understanding and engagement with the school marking system. They are consistently self-disciplined, knowing and living the school values. They appreciate it is alright to make mistakes and explained that these help them learn. Pupils in Year 6 confirmed they feel well prepared for the next stage in their education. They value their meetings with the school's leaders which help them choose their senior school, as well as the opportunity to attend an exam club. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent.
- 3.18 Pupils are strongly aware of how to stay safe and the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle. In the EYFS, children understand how to stay safe, such as by learning how firefighters help us in an emergency as a result of their trip to the local fire station. Pupils are highly aware of how to stay safe online and to whom they can turn for support, if necessary, as this is reinforced regularly within the PSHE and ICT curriculum. They fully understand that regular exercise keeps them fit and that eating a balanced diet is important for their physical and mental well-being. Year 3 and 4 pupils explained that in the back of their planners there is a food guide about what you should eat. Pupils make sensible choices at mealtimes, understanding it is important to include different food groups. They know the importance of telling a trusted adult should they have any concerns and said this is made easy for them because there are worry boxes and online messaging arrangements in place. The everyday presence of Year 6 peer supporters means that younger pupils can also speak to a trusted school friend with a role of responsibility. The peer supporters were observed taking their roles seriously, helping others where required. Pupils agree that the school listens to them caringly and helps them if they are sad. The school's care for pupils is enhanced by its provision of regular opportunities to share their views via questionnaires and online surveys. Pupils understanding of well-being is further strengthened through initiatives such as the annual 'Global Be Well Day'; this is an event created by the proprietor which provides opportunities for pupils in different schools to engage with one another through a range of well-being activities.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate an excellent sense of right from wrong, instilled by school's values that are embraced by all. Throughout the school, behaviour is of a high standard. Older pupils and staff act as excellent role models to those who are younger, and a family atmosphere pervades throughout the school. Pupils recognise how taking responsibility positively impacts on their learning. They organise themselves efficiently so that they are well-prepared for lessons. EYFS children understand the concept of sharing toys, and willingly do so. Pupils value the rewards they receive in recognition of their good behaviour, especially those given in the celebration assemblies. Whilst sanctions are used rarely, pupils understand why they are required and how any inappropriate behaviour may affect others adversely. In the questionnaire, all pupils agreed that the school expected them to behave well. Year 6 pupil leaders are excellent role models for the younger pupils and take on a variety of monitor roles with eagerness and dedication.
- 3.20 Pupils show a strong awareness of the non-material aspects of life. Pupils readily explain how they learn about different world religions and the positive impact this has on their ability to show respect and reflect. Pupils respond thoughtfully to music, reflecting on how it makes them feel, as was seen in Year 2 work linked to Gustav Holst's *The Planets*. Children in the EYFS shared how they respond to different emotions and the consequent effects on their bodies. Pupils in Year 6 were amazed by the beauty of a sheep's retina, which led to reflective poetry and excellent mixed media artwork. Pupils

demonstrate high levels of enjoyment in drama lessons linked to topic work. They talked enthusiastically about the preparations that are underway for their end of year performance. Younger pupils singing in assembly were clearly uplifted by the happy tunes and lyrics. This appreciation for the performing arts is due to the importance the school's leaders have placed on drama within the curriculum.

- 3.21 From an early age, pupils exhibit a very secure understanding of how the decisions they make have an impact on their own success and well-being, as well as on others. Older pupils greatly appreciate opportunities to make decisions in their learning, such as whether they would like to take part in a dissection during a science experiment. Pupils demonstrate proficiency in choosing alternative ways of recording their learning when provided with a suitable range of options. However, in some lessons the predominant method of recording what they have learned is on worksheets and this restricts their ability to make choices in this aspect of their schoolwork. Children in the EYFS capably choose the activities that interest them, such as painting outdoors on a large roll of cling film or experimenting with binoculars in the role play bird hide. Pupils are clear regarding the importance of making the right choices, for example by opening doors for others. Pupils understand the positive impact that right decisions make. Their thoughtful responses to questions raised during the regular 'Big Question' assemblies, demonstrate how they are highly competent in discussing and reflecting on decisions and outcomes.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Miss Jacqueline Scotney	Reporting inspector
Mrs Susan Bonell	Compliance team inspector (Former bursar, SofH school)
Mr Chris Wardle	Team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPS school)