

School inspection report

23 to 25 January 2024

St Benedict's School

54 Eaton Rise

Ealing

W5 2ES

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. The reflective culture of the leadership team and the promotion of forgiveness and service in assemblies echo the school's interpretation of the Rule of St Benedict. The governing body receives direct evidence from staff and pupils about key areas of the school, including safeguarding, so they have an informed and effective oversight. Governors and senior leaders ensure that all elements of school life, including in the early years, meet the relevant Standards and requirements.
2. Leaders consistently assess and mitigate risk to pupils' education and wellbeing. They have a sharp awareness of the need to identify pupils who have unrecognised anxieties and concerns.
3. The 'Helikon Centre' in the senior school provides a focus for pupils of all ages to engage in intellectual challenges. As a result, many pupils are successful in national competitions and debating. Leaders have introduced new approaches to provide highly effective feedback to pupils. Pupils gain confidence from the use of peer assessment that is sustained over the long term.
4. Almost all pupils make good progress from their starting points, and about three-quarters of GCSE and A-level results candidates gain higher grades.
5. Leaders in the early years have a clear awareness of the needs of children of this age and plan accordingly. Adults have an informed knowledge of pupils' development and carefully guide children into new challenges to draw out the development of numeracy and language. Children begin to develop a sense of right and wrong, which evolves into a mature moral awareness by the time they reach the senior school.
6. Leaders of the provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) identify and support effectively those pupils with individual needs. Teachers generally plan effectively to meet the individual needs of other pupils who have SEND. Occasionally, progress in the senior school, although good, is limited because these support strategies are not implemented in lessons.
7. Staff, supported by the senior pupils, promote positive behaviour so that in lessons and around the school pupils almost without exception show respect and consideration for each other.
8. The personal, social, health and economic education (PHSE) programme is generally effective, and leaders emphasise the importance of responsibility in a community. As a result, pupils show high levels of tolerance and respect to others.
9. An effective programme of relationships education is implemented in the junior school. The teaching of the relationships and sex education (RSE) programme in the senior school is not as consistently effective. Pupils do not always have the opportunity to build their understanding because teachers do not encourage discussions and sometimes skim over sensitive topics.
10. Leaders ensure that school buildings are both well maintained over time and improved in line with the needs of pupils. Health and safety and fire safety requirements are met. Leaders prioritise security and supervision arrangements and pupils say they feel safe.
11. Leaders encourage opportunities for pupils to contribute to others in school and beyond. One-to-one mentoring of younger by older pupils is common. Almost all pupils take part in direct charitable activities during their time at school.

12. The careers guidance arrangements are a significant strength of the school. A well thought out strategy plan covers all year groups, tailoring advice and opportunity. It encourages high levels of ambition, provides knowledge and experience of work, and links consistently with a wide range of external opportunities and resources.
13. Safeguarding arrangements are well planned and effective in assessing and mitigating emotional and other risks to pupils. Immediate and appropriate action is taken when necessary, and leaders have an effective relationship with external safeguarding partners and other agencies. Secure recruitment procedures contribute to the safety of pupils.

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 ensure that:

- in the senior school, teachers consistently adjust their planning so that pupils of all abilities have the opportunity to make even stronger progress
- the relationships and sex education programme enables senior pupils to explore sensitive issues in sufficient depth in order to develop their understanding of the topics.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. The school's aims and ethos are based on the Rule of St Benedict. They are published to parents, and their impact is discerned in both the reflective culture of leadership and the promotion of forgiveness and service amongst pupils.
15. Governors work closely with leaders to formally evaluate all aspects of school life. Leaders have a secure understanding of risk and are quick to take action if necessary. The continuous rebuilding and refurbishment plan has provided an environment in both junior and senior schools that promotes pupils' sense of calm and high levels of behaviour. As a consequence of evolving need, governors have added 'pastoral pods' and a wellbeing room in the junior and senior school respectively.
16. Individual governors with appropriate expertise and interest focus on particular areas of school life, including safeguarding, and health and safety. They visit the school regularly, meet with leaders, staff and pupils. As a result, they maintain an accurate and informed oversight of key areas. In particular, they recognise the challenges of 'hearing the unheard' and have supported a range of initiatives that are effective in encouraging pupils to share any anxieties that they might have.
17. Leaders have appropriate skills and knowledge and are not complacent. They regularly engage with external agencies and professional bodies to develop their expertise. They ensure that all elements of school life meet the relevant standards and requirements, and that staff, and where applicable pupils, understand any consequent protocols or approaches. Leaders in the early years have an informed oversight of the particular requirements at this age. In areas where change is considered, for example in approaches to managing behaviour, pupils are widely consulted and their views integrated into any reviews.
18. Leaders in the early years have a secure awareness of the needs of children of this age. They manage staff effectively and hence successfully promote children's development in the seven areas of learning, so they make good progress towards their developmental goals.
19. Documentation across the school is thorough, particularly in the areas of safeguarding, the handling of behavioural and any bullying incidents, and records of assessment. As a result, leaders monitor and identify trends in key areas and take any necessary action.
20. Leaders ensure that appropriate information is made available to parents. Parents of both junior and senior school pupils have regular opportunities to meet senior leaders and other staff. Leaders encourage parents to attend frequent presentations that inform them about key issues such as mental wellbeing, subject and university choices or consent.
21. The school's complaints procedure is in line with requirements. It encourages parents to share worries with senior leaders. As a result, there are very few formal complaints and, when there are, these are handled quickly and in line with the policy.
22. Leaders have made appropriate adjustments for those with disabilities through an accessibility plan and ensure that in all areas the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. In the early years children engage well with their learning, as they choose their own activities, and whom to work or play alongside. Teachers follow through children's ideas, gradually and subtly introducing and reinforcing new vocabulary. Children respond positively when challenged to create sentences or think of different adjectives. Governors and leaders provide an extensive range of indoor and outdoor resources. As a result, children enjoy exploring climbing frames, experimenting with colour in art, and building models. Teachers and other staff have an accurate knowledge of the needs of individual children and adjust the style and extent of their support accordingly. All children follow a programme that meets their needs, including their development of language. As a result, almost all children achieve a good level of development by the end of Reception.
24. Leaders in the junior school plan and review the curriculum so that it covers all areas of learning. The junior school's internally assessed project qualification gives pupils the opportunity to develop their interests outside the taught curriculum. Leaders have recently introduced higher and extended project qualifications which are examined at the end of Years 8 and 12 respectively. Results show that these are successful in developing pupils' research and investigative skills.
25. Leaders encourage senior school pupils to follow a broad range of subjects at GCSE, including at least one modern foreign language and a creative arts subject. In practice only about two-thirds of GCSE pupils follow the advice, in line with the school's ethos of promoting individual responsibility and freedom of choice. The 'Helikon Centre' hosts a regular programme of debates and external speakers that develops pupils' independent thinking, research and presentation skills. As a result, many are successful in national essay or other academic competitions. The pupil-led debating society provides a supportive forum in which the speaking and listening skills of senior pupils grow to a level at which they compete successfully in national competitions.
26. Leaders use data effectively to evaluate pupils' progress against national benchmarks. A well-planned assessment framework enables leaders and teachers to measure pupils' short- and longer-term progress, and to monitor their engagement in co-curricular activities. Teachers use the information effectively in their planning. The frequency and detail of both oral and written assessment of work is a powerful contribution to pupils' learning.
27. At both GCSE and A level, roughly three-quarters of examinations are at one of the highest grades. Both male and female pupils make progress above that expected compared to their assessed starting points. The progress of female pupils is more rapid. Leaders and teachers are developing training and other strategies to further improve male pupils' achievement, and the gap is closing.
28. Teachers are adept and effective at embedding the confidence and speaking skills of pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL). As a result, they make rapid progress with their fluency in English. Leaders accurately identify pupils who have SEND, including specific learning and additional needs, and provide direct and regular support when required. This is effective in ensuring their progress matches that of other pupils. Across the school, lesson plans recognise the needs of these pupils. Junior school teachers amend their methodologies, language and activities to support pupils' understanding. Occasionally, senior school teachers do not follow these plans, and this can limit some pupils' opportunities to progress even further in these lessons.
29. Teachers' informed knowledge of pupils' pastoral backgrounds helps nurture mutual respect. As a result, pupils behave well in class almost without exception. For the most part teachers match

activities to pupils' interests and abilities. Typically, teachers have good subject knowledge and are able to prompt pupils' thinking and answer their questions. In the few lessons where teachers did not directly answer their questions, often when they were teaching subjects outside their specialism, pupils became frustrated.

30. Leaders have skilfully combined the curricular and co-curricular activities and these successfully develop pupils' independence and sense of wellbeing. Leaders continually review sporting opportunities to ensure there is equality of opportunity between genders. Leaders have created a stimulating environment that they further enhance with a plethora of two- and three-dimensional art, much of which has been created by current or former pupils.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

31. Leaders clearly and unequivocally link the school's culture with the Rule of St Benedict in their interactions with pupils, teachers and pastoral staff. They highlight St Benedict's emphasis on obedience, perseverance, discretion and reverence. Leaders encourage governors to listen directly to pupils' views. As a result, the school's behaviour policy has been reviewed, with group sanctions and penalties for uncontrollable lateness withdrawn. Adults and senior pupils promote positive behaviour, so that in lessons and around the school pupils almost without exception show respect and consideration for each other. In the early years children share naturally, let others 'go first' and are quick to include newcomers in their games.
32. Although formally separate from Ealing Abbey, the school uses the abbey building for weekly services. During these, leaders present opportunities for spiritual reflection, which many pupils take up through prayer and song. All pupils follow a religious studies course, which focuses on spiritual and moral values in the context of faith, in particular Catholicism, but including other religions. As a result of this participation and studies, pupils develop a secure spiritual awareness.
33. Leaders in the early years shape activities to promote children's emotional and physical development. As a result, children are kind to each other, and confidently assess risk when, for example, climbing on apparatus.
34. The PSHE programme is generally effective, and leaders emphasise the importance of responsibility in a community. As a result, pupils develop high levels of tolerance and respect to those of a different age, race, faith and gender, and to those who have disabilities.
35. Junior school pupils are able to make the distinction between unkindness and bullying. In this age group, leaders have created a 'Rainbow Room' to encourage a culture of talking and wellbeing, which is highly effective in supporting pupils who want to share their concerns. Throughout the school, teachers' knowledge of their pupils results in conversations that are honest, sensitive and supportive of individual pupils. The cumulative effect is that pupils are contented and self-assured. Incidences of bullying are very rare at any age.
36. Leaders implement an effective programme of relationships education in the junior school. It astutely builds on pupils' previous knowledge and gives opportunities for them to discuss and explore issues. Hence, by the end of Year 6, pupils have an accurate knowledge of issues that affect their personal health and an understanding that choices can have a direct impact on their lives.
37. The delivery of the RSE programme in the senior school is not consistently effective. Leaders ensure that it meets statutory requirements. However, teachers lack confidence to respond to some of the pupils' questions. Occasionally, teachers avoid or skim over sensitive issues. Pupils are critical that some topics are repeated each year without variation of depth, and that examples are not always related to their own contemporary experience. As a consequence, not all pupils have the same opportunity to build their understanding. Sixth-form pupils have initiated some changes, in particular discussion of sexual harassment issues.
38. Governors and school leaders ensure that school buildings are both well maintained and over time improved in line to meet the needs of pupils. For example, accommodation to support the physical and mental health needs of pupils has recently been refurbished. Leaders provide suitable first aid

treatment for pupils. Health and safety, including fire, requirements are met. Leaders prioritise security and supervision arrangements, and pupils feel safe. Admission and attendance registers are accurately completed and used effectively to monitor the very rare instances of unexplained absence. When pupils join or leave the school, the required reports are made to the local authority.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

39. In assemblies and lessons, leaders use the Rule of St Benedict to give clear messages about moral choices and tolerance. As result, pupils show high levels of respect for each other, including those of different gender, backgrounds or beliefs. Although female pupils are in the minority, there is respect and equality of opportunity for them in every area of school life. In the early years, children quickly develop social skills through the provision of different joint activities. They begin to develop a sense of right and wrong, which evolves into a mature moral awareness by the time they reach the senior school.
40. Leaders place emphasis on developing debating skills, an area in which pupils gain national success, and which allows all pupils to build self-confidence and develop respect for the rule of law and public institutions. The school's 'Parliament Week' includes transforming the school library into a version of the House of Commons and enables all pupils to understand both democracy in practice and the mechanics of political decision-making. In both the junior and senior school, leaders give pupils opportunities to contribute to change, for example in decisions about school uniform.
41. Leaders provide a plethora of opportunities for pupils to contribute to others in school and in the local community. Many younger pupils are 'high-voice' members of the Ealing Abbey choir. One-to-one mentoring of younger by older pupils is commonplace and valued by both parties in supporting younger pupils emotionally and in their learning. Almost all pupils take part in direct charitable activities during their time at school. For example, junior school pupils 'grow £5' for a national charity, which develops their economic understanding. Senior school pupils have a secure understanding of finance as result of the careers programme. Leaders promote the value of service through, for example, The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), which prepare pupils for later life.
42. Leaders ensure that from an early stage pupils develop an awareness about the opportunities available after they leave school. The careers team help pupils from the start of Year 7 to develop the skills needed to identify their own personalities and attributes, emphasising this requires underpinning by an individual's involvement in a balanced range of different activities. Pupils of this age are given access to careers software that enables them to explore areas of interest.
43. Leaders, academic and pastoral staff and older pupils are all involved in advice given about choice of GCSE and A-level subjects. The careers team organise a bi-annual careers event, careers breakfasts, university evenings and a series of workshops on 'alternative pathways'. Many of the interactions lead to work experience. Each university applicant receives continuous one-to-one guidance, including video-conferences with former pupils following similar courses at similar universities, and further work experience if needed. Pupils are encouraged to be and, as a result, are ambitious. The careers team research suitable courses for pupils with particular needs. As a consequence, almost all pupils achieve one of their chosen universities in a broad range of disciplines, and others gain degree-apprenticeships.
44. No recent former pupils have withdrawn from higher education courses because they were not appropriate. Pupils speak and parents write persuasively about the impact of the careers programme on all senior school pupils.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding procedures with regard to children at risk and those in particular need are implemented effectively. Governors receive training and advice from external bodies on the management of safeguarding. They have an informed oversight of the arrangements, based on frequent discussions with safeguarding leaders, staff and with pupils. The culture of safeguarding is pro-active, and governors and school leaders prioritise the safety and wellbeing of pupils in their decision-making. There are a variety of methods by which pupils can share any worries in confidence. Safeguarding leaders have a sharp insight regarding potential safeguarding risks to pupils in the locality. Pupils have received training in strategies for keeping themselves from harm whilst travelling to and from school. Pupils feel safe at school.
46. The safeguarding policy includes suitable definitions of abuse and has been reviewed effectively in line with the latest statutory guidance. The school listens to the views of individual pupils as required by current statutory guidance. Safeguarding records are detailed and maintained in line with statutory guidance. They note actions and log steps taken as a result of any concern. Training of the designated safeguarding lead and other staff is up to date and in line with local requirements. In particular they are aware of the signs of types of abuse and evidence of potential extremist behaviour.
47. Pupils receive guidance on staying safe and understanding what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety. New arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of online technology are effective. The physical and mental health of all pupils involved in any incident are given a high priority. Leaders have ensured that staff are aware and successfully support children in the early years and pupils with special or additional needs.
48. The school engages closely with the relevant local safeguarding partners. Suitable arrangements for handling of allegations against staff or senior leaders and potential misconduct are included in safeguarding procedures. They include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). Records show that such procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies if circumstances require it.
49. Leaders recently reviewed the effectiveness of the school's recruitment procedures for staff. These are outlined in a separate recruitment policy and rigorously followed. The review found some minor errors in the recording of checks, which were amended before notification of the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	St Benedict's School
Department for Education number	307/6006
Registered charity number	1148512
Address	54 Eaton Rise Ealing W5 2ES
Website	http://www.stbenedicts.org.uk
Proprietor	St Benedict's School Ealing
Chair	Mr Joe Berger
Headteacher	Mr Joe Smith
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	1106
Date of previous inspection	22 to 23 January 2020

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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