

School inspection report

29 April to 1 May 2025

Merchant Taylors' School

Sandy Lodge

Northwood

Middlesex

HA6 2HT

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders place pupils' wellbeing at the core of their decision making. They identify and respond effectively to contextual risks and successfully foster a culture of high expectations rooted in kindness and mutual respect. Leaders promote a clear and consistent vision that aligns closely with the school's aims and values.
2. Leaders demonstrate ambition through rigorous self-evaluation, which directly informs the school's development plan. They collaborate effectively within the senior team and with the wider staff body to ensure strategy becomes practice. Leaders provide effective training that helps enable teachers to ensure that all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make good progress and develop their ability to think for themselves.
3. Governors provide effective oversight and rigorously challenge leaders' decisions, especially with regard to those relating to safeguarding and risk management. Leaders have responded well to previous inspection recommendations by developing pastoral structures, introducing wellbeing initiatives and adapting the curriculum to reduce pressure. Leaders and governors ensure that the school complies with statutory requirements and ensure that parents and local safeguarding and other external partners receive appropriate information.
4. Leaders have established a rich and ambitious curriculum that supports pupils' academic progress and aligns with the school's aims. They regularly review and adapt the curriculum to meet pupils' needs. Leaders enrich the curriculum with diverse educational trips and opportunities for pupils to engage with current affairs and satisfy their curiosity. Leaders ensure that pupils engage with a suitable accessible programme of recreation, which includes opportunities for pupils to develop their physical health.
5. Leaders implement a clear and effective assessment framework that enables staff to track pupils' progress and typically respond promptly to individual pupils' needs. Leaders analyse assessment data and ensure that success criteria are well understood by staff, pupils and parents. Teachers typically use assessment information to provide timely support, enabling pupils to develop secure knowledge and understanding. However, the planning of teaching does not consistently consider individual pupils' needs effectively so that all pupils can be supported to learn as well as possible.
6. Leaders ensure pupils develop their understanding of cultural diversity, reflect on identity and show mutual respect. Leaders promote British values, such as that of the rule of law and individual liberty, through the curriculum and co-curricular programme, enabling pupils to develop inclusive attitudes.
7. Leaders promote meaningful service and volunteering, encouraging pupils to act responsibly and contribute positively to the community. They ensure that pupils receive effective guidance in considering their next steps, including careers and higher education options. Leaders provide a suitable programme of economic education, which equips pupils to make decisions about their personal finance.
8. Leaders prioritise pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing through a culture of care and mutual respect. They provide pastoral staff with training in mental health first aid and coaching skills, enabling pupils to receive structured pastoral support where necessary. Leaders adapt academic and assessment policies to reduce potential pressure on pupils.

9. The curriculum and pastoral programme foster pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Leaders ensure the relationships and sex education programme (RSE) is age-appropriate, well monitored and responsive to pupils' needs, informed by expert guidance and involving parents in its development.
10. Leaders uphold high standards of behaviour. They consistently model and reinforce the values of mutual respect, courtesy and compassion, which pupils consistently emulate. Leaders respond robustly to the rare instances of bullying and maintain detailed behavioural records to identify and address any concern. Leaders maintain a suitable and well-maintained physical environment, implementing effective health and safety procedures.
11. Leaders prioritise the safeguarding of pupils. Staff are vigilant and report concerns swiftly to protect pupils and ensure their welfare. Leaders ensure safeguarding training is current and relevant. Governors maintain close and effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements through regular discussions with safeguarding leaders. Leaders implement a detailed safeguarding policy and review it regularly. They liaise effectively with external agencies and families when concerns arise.
12. Pupils feel safe and know how to access help when required. Leaders maintain accurate records of any safeguarding concerns and act promptly to support pupils at risk of harm. They respond effectively to any concern about the conduct of adults and oversee robust safer recruitment procedures. Leaders ensure filtering and monitoring systems at the school remain effective through regular review.

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 teachers consider individual pupils' needs consistently effectively when planning lessons so that all pupils are supported to learn as well as possible.

Material change request

13. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to include an increase in capacity from 990 to 1175 pupils.

- The school has appropriate safeguarding arrangements in place. The safeguarding team has the capacity to support the proposed increased number of pupils. The school implements safeguarding procedures suitably and in line with current statutory guidance and is likely to continue to do so once the proposed material change takes place.
- The school complies with relevant health and safety and fire safety legislation and is likely to continue to do so following any increase in capacity. A suitable risk assessment policy is in place. This effectively considers contextual and situational risks associated with the school, including traffic management. When risks are identified, leaders take prompt action.
- Supervision procedures are effective, and sufficient staff are in place to maintain suitable supervision once the proposed increase in the maximum number of pupils takes place.
- The procedures for ensuring the suitability of staff, supply staff and governors are robust. Records of pre-employment checks are accurate and meticulously maintained.
- The premises, including toilet and washroom facilities, medical facilities and outdoor space, are well maintained and sufficient to accommodate the proposed increase in the maximum number of pupils.
- Leaders and managers demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles and they fulfil their responsibilities so that the Standards are consistently met. They actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

- Leaders have considered how the planned increased numbers in Years 7 and 8 might affect the delivery of the curriculum and planned appropriately. They have carefully considered how they intend to ensure that the school will continue to meet the Standards once the proposed material change takes place.

14. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Leaders put the promotion of pupils' wellbeing at the centre of their decision-making. They communicate a clear vision for the school and have established a positive culture that sets high expectations, celebrates achievement and values kindness, in line with the school's aims. Leaders consistently model and reinforce the values of mutual respect, courtesy and compassion, which pupils emulate in turn.
16. Leaders set high ambitions for the success of the school. They engage in robust and dynamic self-evaluation to drive improvement. This self-evaluation underpins the school's development plan. Leaders have established effective structures within the senior team to translate strategy into practice. Leaders consistently adopt a collegiate approach with the broader staff body and develop opportunities for staff to audit and expand their skills. Leaders ensure teachers receive regular training and encounter a range of different pedagogical approaches to maintain the consistent effectiveness of teaching. This includes strategies to support the learning of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders encourage teachers to monitor their practice and self-evaluate to develop their skills further. Leaders encourage staff to coach and mentor each other. Governors regularly visit lessons with leaders to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the school's teaching and learning.
17. Governors are suitably trained in safeguarding. They rigorously interrogate leaders' decision-making, including with regard to safeguarding and health and safety. Through structured visits to the school, governors evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the decisions that leaders make. Their effective oversight ensures that leaders utilise their skills and knowledge effectively so that the school consistently meets the Standards.
18. Leaders and governors oversee effective and comprehensive risk assessments to mitigate risk of harm to pupils and staff effectively. They have a deep understanding of the importance of mitigating any potential contextual risks to pupils' welfare and actively develop strategies that manage and mitigate such risk. Leaders regularly review the suitability of risk assessments and ensure that staff are appropriately trained in assessing risk. They ensure that the letting of the school grounds and buildings is managed appropriately and prioritise the minimising and removal of risks in the school environment.
19. Leaders have successfully met the recommendation to strengthen the self-esteem of pupils made as a result of the previous routine inspection. Leaders have reorganised the senior team to provide for a specific leadership position dedicated to pastoral care. Leaders have increased the number of senior staff trained in safeguarding to the level of a designated safeguarding lead. Leaders have decided to train all pastoral leaders in mental-health first aid. Leaders have introduced a 'pupil voice app' that enables pupils to report concerns about their own, or other pupils' wellbeing anonymously. Leaders have thoughtfully reorganised the curriculum to support pupils' wellbeing. For instance, leaders have reduced the number of ability sets in mathematics. This limits the number of incremental steps and thus helps to manage pupils' expectations about progressing to a higher set. Leaders have crafted written grade descriptors for assessment outcomes, the wording of which balances praise for high achievement with a check on the pupils' welfare in the context of such high attainment. Pupils have responded well to these initiatives and feel that any concern they express about their wellbeing is effectively addressed.

20. School policies are thorough and published as required on the school website. Leaders regularly review their implementation and effectiveness. They ensure that policies reflect latest statutory guidance. Leaders liaise appropriately with external agencies, including the local authority and safeguarding partners, and act on their advice. Leaders ensure that policies are understood by staff and ensure that any changes are communicated promptly.
21. Leaders ensure that parents are well informed about their child's progress. Parents regularly receive information about their child's attainment, effort and conduct. Leaders provide suitable opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress with staff.
22. Leaders provide relevant financial information as required to any local authority which provides funding for the education, health and care (EHC) plan of any pupil. The school has a suitable and detailed accessibility plan, which is regularly reviewed. Leaders and governors ensure that the school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
23. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure. Leaders manage complaints appropriately and in line with the time scales set out in the procedure. Leaders reflect on complaints and take appropriate actions in response, including when a complaint is not upheld.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. The rounded and challenging curriculum is designed effectively to engage pupils' interests, foster their curiosity and inform teaching that promotes their skills, knowledge and understanding across the range of disciplines. The curriculum includes a diverse programme of educational trips and visits designed to broaden pupils' wider experiences and support their learning.
26. Leaders thoughtfully review the curriculum to ensure that it remains relevant and meets pupils' needs in relation to their age and aptitude and prepares them effectively for the next stages of their education and lives. Leaders ensure the curriculum sequences learning so that it methodically builds on pupils' learning. The curriculum is sufficiently flexible so that it can provide opportunities for pupils to explore topical affairs.
27. Leaders implement an effective assessment framework to track pupils' progress and respond to their needs. The assessment framework incorporates data and grade descriptors, and is understood well by teaching staff, pupils and parents. Leaders analyse the data they collect on pupils' progress in order to inform provision. Teachers' systematic use of attainment data enables them to understand pupils' progress. They provide pupils with helpful feedback that pupils use to develop their learning and work.
28. Teachers have high levels of subject knowledge. They engage pupils through effective use of a range of high-quality resources, such as appropriate artefacts that reflect historical periods or developments in civilisation. Teachers skilfully respond to pupils' questions and use dialogue to help advance pupils' knowledge and understanding. Teachers typically plan lessons that enable pupils to build on their knowledge and understanding, although planning does not always consider the needs of individual pupils' as effectively as possible to ensure that teaching consistently supports pupils to learn as well as possible.
29. Teaching encourages and enables pupils to speak fluently and reason well across the range of subjects. For instance, in history pupils explain possible motives behind historical events and use precise language to describe power struggles. Similarly, in philosophy, pupils explain the ontological argument with confidence and distinguish accurately between *a priori* and *a posteriori* reasoning.
30. Leaders identify the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, and provide these pupils with appropriate support. A team of specialist staff provides guidance for teachers to enable them to support pupils who have SEND. Pupils who have SEND regularly participate in a review process so that they can express their views on the support they receive and secure any necessary amendment. Learning support representatives within each department ensure that the support for pupils who have SEND is appropriately tailored to the requirements of individual subjects.
31. There are very few pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and need additional support for their English. Staff provide such support effectively when required.
32. The school provides a rich, varied and stimulating range of enrichment and recreation options. This provision enables pupils to pursue and extend their interests and skills through a wide array of sporting activities and clubs and a range of academic societies, such as law, medicine and dentistry, and English literature. Through these activities, pupils develop their skills and knowledge and

establish new friendships. Pupils take the initiative to set up their own societies, such as the aviation society.

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

33. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

34. Leaders support pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing effectively, including through the promotion of a culture of positivity and encouragement and much pastoral support. Since the previous inspection, all pastoral leaders have been trained in mental-health first aid. This informs their support for pupils in managing their emotional health. Teachers carefully consider how to impart test results to pupils to manage pupils' anxiety about their performance, for instance by celebrating the extent of pupils' success as well as identifying areas where their work could improve. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their mental health through activities such as meditation club. Pupils can access pastoral support from adults when required. This includes ready access to a variety of pastoral leaders, including tutors, house staff and heads of sections. Pupils also refer concerns to staff through an app that is available to them. A team of counsellors is available to pupils for further support when required.
35. Pupils are aware of key issues in male mental health. Year 12 pupils have taken the initiative to organise a conference on wellbeing for a local school for female pupils to promote wider understanding and knowledge of themes in mental health and welfare.
36. Leaders programme a series of assemblies and talks that develop pupils' spiritual and moral understanding. There are opportunities for discussion of moral and spiritual issues throughout the curriculum, such as through the well-structured and comprehensive programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and religious studies. Pupils learn about different religions and their spiritual perspectives and practices. Religious studies and other lessons provide opportunities for pupils to consider the qualities that might differentiate a religion from a set of philosophical principles. Pupils have access to a chapel, which provides a calm setting for contemplation and reflection.
37. The well-structured and suitable programme of relationships and sex education (RSE) is comprehensive and suitably adapted to the age of the pupils. It includes age-appropriate discussion of topics such as consent. Leaders consult external advisers to help ensure the suitability of the RSE programme and make appropriate adjustments to the curriculum in response to any trends and patterns they discern. Teachers of RSE are appropriately trained. Leaders monitor lessons to ensure that they are effective and relevant. Teachers regularly assess pupils' understanding, and pupils complete a questionnaire after each lesson to reflect on their learning.
38. Staff implement the behaviour policy fairly and consistently. Leaders encourage pupils to reflect on behaviour that falls below their high expectations. Leaders celebrate and reward good behaviour. Staff consistently model respectful behaviour that engenders trust. As a consequence, pupils reflect leaders' high expectations in their conduct. Pupils display courteous attitudes. They relate easily with others across friendship and age groups. This is underpinned by leaders' establishment of tutoring structures that bring together pupils from all year groups. Pupils listen respectfully to each other and co-operate readily.
39. Bullying is rare. Leaders implement rigorous procedures, underpinned by a detailed policy, to address any instance of bullying. Instances of bullying are suitably recorded, and leaders analyse logs to identify and address any patterns or trends. Pupils are taught about different types of bullying and understand how bullying differs from occasional friendship disputes.

40. Leaders adopt a robust approach to health and safety and ensure that required checks and maintenance are carried out systematically across the school site. Staff are well trained in health and safety matters. They are vigilant and know how to report concerns, which leaders follow up promptly. Leaders maintain detailed and appropriate health and safety records. Suitable fire safety arrangements are in place, including regular fire evacuation drills and up-to-date fire risk assessments. Governors rigorously oversee the arrangements for maintaining the security of the school site.
41. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid. They are suitably deployed over the site. Effective records are maintained of any administration of first aid or medication.
42. Pupils are suitably supervised at all times, including at breaktimes and during recreational activity. Leaders methodically assign staff to supervision duties to ensure that supervision is effective.
43. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. They review pupils' attendance regularly and take appropriate action when concerns arise. Leaders liaise well with parents to promote good attendance and, where necessary, report absence to the local authority. They inform the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition. Leaders implement appropriate plans to support pupils who are absent from school for an extended period owing to health issues.
44. The physical education (PE) programme is accessible to all pupils and provides a wide range of exercise and sporting activities for pupils to promote their physical health effectively and develop their individual and team skills. Pupils participate enthusiastically in physical activity and develop their athletic, gymnastic and sports skills.

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. The curriculum is designed to enable pupils to engage thoughtfully with social, political and cultural issues. In discussions relating to visits by political figures, pupils gain understanding of democratic principles and processes, such as the role of a member of Parliament in representing their constituents. Pupils develop a mature understanding of the importance of recognising and respecting differing political views as part of life in a democratic society and express their diverging views respectfully. Leaders ensure that partisan political views are not promoted in any teaching or discussions.
47. Staff promote British values in their teaching, including those of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and respect for those of different faiths and beliefs. They take opportunities to promote and reinforce these values across the curriculum, such as in PSHE, assemblies, religious studies and history. For instance, pupils effectively apply their understanding of British values in discussions in PSHE lessons about honour-based violence and other harmful practices. Through trips, for instance to the battlefields of northern France, pupils gain understanding of the legacy of the past and its impact on shaping contemporary British life. Assemblies address a wide range of social themes, such as disability, sexual orientation and democratic participation, enabling pupils to reflect thoughtfully on such issues.
48. Pupils consider the importance of respecting people's protected characteristics, such as their sex or beliefs, throughout the curriculum. For instance, in Year 11 drama, pupils explore themes relating to these characteristics in their study of *Frankenstein*, while in sports science pupils learn about barriers to participation, including issues of gender, race and disability. In Year 9 drama, pupils thoughtfully explore themes relating to diversity through studying *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*.
49. Pupils consistently exhibit a clear understanding of right and wrong in their daily interactions, upholding the school's values of kindness and respect. When pertinent, pupils debate ethical themes such as the arguments for and against assisted dying. Pupils effectively explore moral issues in art and consider the ethics of various historical cultural practices. They also investigate ethical dilemmas, for instance, through debating the practice of testing on animals in the development of human medicine. The PSHE curriculum supports pupils in developing their understanding of how British institutions, such as the courts, uphold the rule of law and the broader responsibilities of citizens in fulfilling their duties in society.
50. Pupils demonstrate a high level of religious and cultural awareness and reflect on the value of learning from those with different beliefs and cultural backgrounds to their own. Some pupils participate in religious and cultural societies, such as the Jewish and Asian societies. Trips, such as those to Nepal, develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity and how their own backgrounds and experiences relate to those of others.
51. The school encourages pupils to develop their sense of social responsibility. For instance, pupils undertake much work on their own initiative with a national charity which brings together disabled and non-disabled children. Pupils volunteer in the community through participating in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) and the Combined Cadet Force (CCF). They devise a range of fundraising strategies to support local charities, including those that support homeless members of

the community. Pupils regularly support each other in the school, for instance through mentoring each other at lunchtime to improve their academic knowledge, skills and understanding.

52. The school provides a suitable economic education that equips pupils with knowledge and skills to enable them to make well-considered decisions about their personal finance. Pupils learn about financial themes such as budgeting, loans, taxation, mortgages and the base rate of interest and its effect. Pupils develop entrepreneurial skills and insights into commercial decision-making through the 'Young Enterprise' programme.
53. Pupils receive effective guidance in considering their next steps in work or education. A specialist team provides up-to-date and well-informed advice about possible future choices, including higher education options and degree apprenticeships, and how to research them. The comprehensive careers guidance programme includes individual support for pupils so that they can discuss their goals and practise interview skills. Pupils also review their strengths, interests and potential for various career pathways through psychometric assessments. Leaders arrange for alumni and other adults to speak to pupils about their own decision-making and professional experience. Appropriate discussion about careers options, suitably tailored to the age of pupils, takes place in the curriculum, including in PSHE and specific days dedicated to such inquiry.

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

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

Safeguarding

55. Leaders have established a robust culture of safeguarding. Staff maintain vigilant oversight of pupils' welfare and are quick to report any concern that a pupil might be at risk of harm.
56. Safeguarding leaders are trained appropriately for their role. Staff and governors receive regular, appropriate safeguarding training that reflects current statutory requirements.
57. Governors rigorously scrutinise the effectiveness of the school's safeguarding arrangements. This occurs both at governors' meetings and through frequent discussions with the school's designated safeguarding leader. Leaders and governors review the safeguarding policy and procedures periodically to ensure their continued suitability.
58. Leaders address safeguarding concerns promptly and appropriately as they arise, including by implementing appropriate plans to support pupils affected by safeguarding issues. They maintain detailed records of safeguarding concerns and the reasoning that underlies the decisions they take in response to these. Safeguarding leaders liaise with external partners, such as children's services and the local authority designated officer (LADO) and refer concerns to them when necessary.
59. The school has appropriate procedures to respond to any allegations made against adults and leaders understand the requirement to refer to the LADO if the threshold for referral is met. Staff report low-level concerns to senior leaders, who take appropriate action as required.
60. Leaders maintain appropriate online filtering and monitoring systems. They regularly review and adapt the arrangements to ensure their continuing effectiveness. Pupils learn how to stay safe online.
61. Leaders ensure that all statutory pre-employment checks are undertaken diligently, and that appropriate risk assessments and supervision are in place for any employees who commence work prior to the scrutiny of a disclosure and barring check. Leaders ensure that new staff receive suitable induction. The single central record of appointments is meticulously maintained and regularly reviewed by governors.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Merchant Taylors' School
Department for Education number	919/6036
Registered charity number	1063740
Address	Merchant Taylors' School Sandy Lodge Northwood Middlesex HA6 2HT
Phone number	01923 820644
Email address	info@mtsn.org.uk
Website	www.mtsn.org.uk
Proprietor	Merchant Taylors' Educational Trust
Chair	Commodore Andy Cree CBE
Headteacher	Mr Simon Everson
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	960
Date of previous inspection	10 to 13 May 2022

Information about the school

63. Merchant Taylors' School is an independent day school for male pupils. It was founded in 1561 by the Worshipful Company of Merchant Taylors of the Fraternity of St John Baptist in the City of London. In 1933 the school relocated from the City of London to its present location in Moor Park, north London. The Merchant Taylors' Educational Trust is responsible for the governance of the school. The current chair of governors took up his responsibilities in July 2024.
64. The school has identified 249 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
65. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small proportion of pupils.
66. The school states its aims are to help pupils develop into rounded individuals of good character and to support them to discover their full potential in both academic work and beyond.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

29 April to 1 May 2025

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

68. 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
- discussion with the chair of governors
- discussions with the headteacher, 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.

69. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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