



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report**

**Merchant Taylors' School**

**May 2022**

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### School's Details

<b>School</b>	Merchant Taylors' School		
<b>DfE number</b>	919/6036		
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1063740		
<b>Address</b>	Merchant Taylors' School Sandy Lodge Northwood Hertfordshire HA6 2HT		
<b>Telephone number</b>	01923 820644		
<b>Email address</b>	info@mtsn.org.uk		
<b>Head Master</b>	Mr Simon Everson		
<b>Chair of governors</b>	Mr Duncan Eggar		
<b>Age range</b>	11 to 18		
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	929		
	<b>Seniors</b>	634	<b>Sixth Form</b> 295
<b>Inspection dates</b>	10 to 13 May 2022		

## 1. Background Information

### About the school

- 1.1 Merchant Taylors' School is a day school for male pupils and was founded in 1561. The Merchant Taylors' Educational Trust is a registered charity which is responsible to the Court of the Merchant Taylors' Company for ensuring due governance of the school. Governors include representatives of the Company. The school is situated to the north of London and occupies a 280-acre site with 80 acres of playing fields adjacent to the school buildings.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has introduced the use of tablets to Year 9 pupils and developed a programme of outdoor education.
- 1.3 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school seeks to discover and develop the talents of its pupils through a broad curriculum and wide range of experiences so that they emerge as confident, self-motivated, high-level learners who care for and respect others, are secure in their values and are ready to play their full part in the fast-changing global society of the 21st century.

### About the pupils

- 1.5 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate the ability profile of the school is well above average. The school has identified 181 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include autism, dyslexia, dyspraxia, dysgraphia, cognitive processing difficulties, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and physical disability, 86 of whom receive additional specialised help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. There are 341 pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL). The school has identified 168 pupils as being the most able in the school's population and they participate in a programme of additional activities and the curriculum is modified to support their needs.

## 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. 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](#).

## Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 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 school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2018 to 2021 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships and sex education, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

### **PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils**

- 2.9 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.
- 2.10 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**

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 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**

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, 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.

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

## **PART 6 – Provision of information**

2.15 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.

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

## **PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled**

2.17 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.

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

## **PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools**

2.19 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.

**2.20 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 gain a strong base in knowledge, skills and understanding which they build on to make rapid progress and achieve excellent results in their academic work and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils are exceptionally well driven to succeed, and this motivates them to work hard.
- Pupils' communication skills are very well developed.
- Pupils achieve high standards in numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT).

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

- Pupils have strong moral values and co-exist harmoniously and are not afraid to challenge bad behaviour.
- Pupils respect and celebrate diversity within the school community.
- Pupils' social responsibility is well developed as shown in their contributions to the lives of others inside and beyond the school.
- Pupils are reflective and thoughtful, showing very well-developed spiritual understanding.

#### Recommendation

3.3 The school should make the following improvement:

- Strengthen the self-esteem of all pupils by ensuring there is a proper balance between academic and extra-curricular competition and pupil well-being.

#### 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 make rapid progress in their academic studies. This is a result of a strong desire to succeed in public examinations combined with high expectations from teachers, school managers and governors. Work is set at a challenging level and meets the needs of all pupils. Pupils of all abilities, including those with SEND and EAL, make rapid progress at all levels, and their achievements in relation to their abilities are high. In pre-inspection questionnaires, almost all parents and pupils agreed that pupils make good progress. Standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability of pupils is well above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. In 2018 and 2019, the latest period for which comparative data are available, results in GCSE examinations were well above the national



average for pupils in maintained schools, with just under 90% of grades at the highest level (the equivalent of grades 7, 8 or 9). Data for 2020 and 2021 cannot be compared to national norms but centre-assessed and teacher-assessed grades are in line with grades achieved in previous years. In the sixth form, pupils' attainment at A level in 2018 and 2019 was well above the national average with around three-quarters awarded at grade A or A\*. Teacher-assessed and centre-assessed grades in 2020 and 2021 show A-level results to be consistent with those in previous years. Highly-effective plans are in place to support pupils' individual needs. Pupils spoke of the positive impact the feedback from teachers has on their learning, and of not being afraid to ask for help due to the open culture that exists. The excellent achievement of pupils demonstrates a successful fulfilment of the school's aim of seeking to discover and develop the talents of its pupils so that they emerge as confident, self-motivated, high-level learners.

- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate high levels of knowledge and understanding. Pupils use subject terminology accurately and apply it in context with confidence. Pupils develop a strong base of knowledge skills and understanding built in the lower years which they can apply to new situations and make rapid progress in different topics and circumstances. For example, the spiral nature of the curriculum in mathematics and sciences allows pupils to deepen their knowledge, skills and understanding in topics as they are developed each year. Year 10 chemists displayed an excellent understanding of how position in the period table can help to predict the properties of elements and their compounds. Pupils in a Year 12 English lesson showed strong skills and understanding in their application of literary devices in their study of Steinbeck. There is a culture in the school where pupils are confident to speak out on intellectual matters and display mature skills of reflection. This is supported by a skilled staff body who teach with pace and high expectations. Pupils show high levels of ability in music, technology, drama and sport. Artwork on display is of excellent quality and attests to pupils' sophisticated levels of artistic skill.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate excellent skills of communication. In language lessons, pupils speak with confidence in their target language, while in Year 12 lessons in English and Latin all pupils demonstrated a very high level of textual analysis in spoken responses. In addition to speaking fluently and with good reasoning, the pupils of all ages are good at listening to their peers, and respecting their views. The quality of written work is high, as demonstrated in history essays on King John, and in English in precis work on Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. The standard of visual communication through media such as art and design is also of a consistently high standard, and can be seen on display around the school. Pupils' well-developed communication skills are supported through an academic culture which enables pupils to take risks with their input in class, through skilled teacher questioning to elicit more detail in answers and promote greater analysis in discussion. The written work is supported by careful teacher planning, and feedback through assessment which is then put into practice by the pupils.
- 3.8 Pupils have strong foundations in numeracy which are laid in the lower years. This allows pupils to make rapid progress in subjects which have numerical content. Effective use of mathematical concepts was not only seen in many mathematics and science lessons but also throughout other subjects. Pupils display excellent mathematical skills in grid systems in art, measuring in design, modelling and interpreting data in geography and measuring rhythm in music. Pupils have a high level of ability to use the language of mathematics to help explain scientific phenomena. Examination results in mathematics and the sciences are strong and these are popular subject choices at A level.
- 3.9 Pupils are at ease using technology on a day-to-day basis to help their organisation and to extend their learning, as a result of gaining a very good grounding in ICT. Pupils in Year 9 and above make extensive use of digital notetaking apps to curate their work. Spreadsheets are used effectively in science to allow pupils to organise data and make calculations efficiently. Pupils who take an interest in developing their technological skills further are very successful, for example in robotics world championships.

- 3.10 Pupils' study skills are excellent. They show an ability to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise with confidence and this was observed across a range of subjects. Pupils learn to evaluate different sources. In history and politics lessons, Year 8 pupils were able to draw developed inferences from source material looking at ideas of Jacobean and Tudor portrayal of royal power. Sixth-form historians could expertly analyse different factors when looking at Eisenhower's success in achieving his political aims and were able to show a high level of understanding of the different pressures and motivations behind competing demands. In modern foreign languages, pupils draw on their linguistic skills to compete successfully in foreign language, drama and public speaking competitions and Olympiads. Sixth Form pupils in design technology showed a high degree of perseverance and adaptability with extensive and notable project work.
- 3.11 Pupils across the school achieve a high level of success in a broad range of team and individual activities at local, national and international level. The senior leadership of the school empowers staff to develop opportunities for extra-curricular enrichment which energise and stimulate pupils. Pupils spoke of how much they achieve personally from the school's extra-curricular programme. Sport is a very significant part of life at the school, where teams have earned considerable success in regional and national competitions, including winning a national under 17 cricket cup. Pupils participate enthusiastically in the school productions and concerts which challenges and motivates them to perform at a high level. Pupils across the school are successful in individual music and drama examinations. Young Enterprise projects allow teams to compete successfully in regional competitions, and many senior pupils enjoy the opportunity to successfully undertake the Gold Duke of Edinburgh award. Pupils contribute to and produce informative academic journals in a range of areas.
- 3.12 Pupils are highly aspirational and focused in lessons. They listen maturely, thoughtfully, and respectfully, for example in an assembly about gender and sexuality. When working in groups they collaborate well, listening to each other's contributions respectfully to move a discussion forward effectively. Pupils are highly effective when working independently, for example in revision, project work and writing papers for the academic school magazines, many of which are outstanding in their analysis and argument. Pupils show high levels of perseverance, both in their studies and in extra-curricular activities and sport, for example continuing to enjoy a rowing outing despite heavy rain.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' personal development benefits significantly from the high aspirations which governors and school managers hold for them, and the systems which are put in place effectively. This ensures that the school is most successful in meeting its aims to develop pupils who behave well and care for and respect others, who are secure in their values and who are ready and willing to play their full part in society.
- 3.15 Pupils show excellent levels of self-understanding for their age, which they develop through their experiences at the school. Pupils are self-confident and rise to the challenges the school offers them, particularly through its extensive and wide-ranging programme of pupil led clubs and societies. The pupils' excellent personal development benefits from the vertical form and house systems which provide valuable and varied support to pupils by their teachers and pastoral leaders. Compassionate and approachable role models act successfully as mentors to younger pupils. Pupils are self-disciplined and aware of risks and seek out ways to overcome challenges, for example during CCF exercises when a group found themselves on the wrong side of a barbed wire fence and needed to work creatively and collaboratively to safely extract themselves from this situation. Pupils demonstrate an ability to adapt well to new situations, for example organising and running an after-school debating club at a local primary school. They demonstrate high levels of perseverance when challenged intellectually. A Young Enterprise company overcame a range of challenges in developing a dental concept but went

on to win the regional final. Strong relationships between staff and pupils are an important contributory factor to this excellence, as evidenced in the pupil and parent questionnaires. The openness between staff and pupils and the mature nature of the professional and respectful relationships provides a supportive and safe environment for pupils to grow in confidence.

- 3.16 Pupils demonstrate a good level of understanding that decisions that they make when choosing subjects to study can be instrumental in determining their own future success. They are supported well by the school in developing knowledge and understanding of their options, for example through sixth form extension lessons and taster GCSE lessons. Pupils are aware of their agency in decision making regarding relationships and this has been supported by a recent joint one-day conference with a local independent girls' school which focused on relationships and consent.
- 3.17 Pupils' spiritual understanding is excellent. They reflect through activities such as yoga and musical and artistic activities. Pupils recognise the benefits of being outside and choose to do so as much as possible taking up the wide range of recreational and sporting activities available to them. The school offers grounds which are well used beyond the classroom as an environment that helps pupils to be calm and create opportunities to stop and think. Pupils enthusiastically participate in a number of faith groups, recognising they enhance the spiritual lives of the whole community. Their spiritual development is deepened through fortnightly sessions looking at current affairs through a moral lens, led by the school chaplaincy. Pupils are confident that they can take a question however big or small to an attentive and interested staff body. Pupils gain a great deal from their participation in reflective activities such as philosophy lessons and religious studies, during which a Year 7 group thoughtfully and maturely contemplated life after death. Pupils develop their spiritual understanding by coming together to create music for each other in the wide variety of orchestras and choirs within the school. Pupils benefit from well a well-planned PSHE curriculum that encourages a reflective approach to big issues and an important opportunity to synthesise ideas and to listen to others.
- 3.18 Pupils show in discussion and questionnaires that they have a strong sense of right and wrong and a clear understanding of the code of conduct and its benefit to the community. Pupils generally behave very well. They are confident that sanctions are measured and fair and trust teachers in their implementation. Pupils also report that there is some poor behaviour when occasionally a small number of pupils are unkind to each other in relation to a perception of their academic or sporting ability. At these times, pupils' self-esteem can be vulnerable in a school where competition is actively encouraged. When this does occur, their peers understand the important role they have in stepping in and often do so. Pupils find staff approachable. Pupils eagerly take on leadership opportunities which the school provides. They demonstrate tolerance and respect for others, supported by access to a range of societies that further develop these values. They demonstrate this in their good behaviour in lessons and around the school, and the courtesy and consideration they usually show to one another, their teachers and to visitors to the school. Pupils are generally respectful to one another, showing an excellent ability to listen to each other, negotiate and work collaboratively.
- 3.19 The pupils' social awareness and ability to work effectively with others is excellent. In the classroom, in recreational spaces and during organised extra-curricular activities, pupils demonstrate excellent awareness of their peers, developing positive relationships enabling them to collaborate and solve problems in a variety of contexts. The social development of the pupils is enhanced by the links forged with the local independent girls' school, including combined activities in the CCF and charitable work.
- 3.20 Pupils contribute to and support the lives of others within school, and in the local and wider community. They do this extremely well through taking on positions of responsibility and senior leadership roles as they move up through the school, including in an effective school council which pupils confirm has resulted in a number of welcome developments being implemented. Their personal development is enhanced by participation in the school's charity work in which they strive to help and improve the lives of others. Pupils report that they gain great moral and spiritual development from supporting various charities, including providing an annual residential activity week for local underprivileged children for which they have raised £35,000 this year.

- 3.21 Pupils consistently show excellent understanding of the importance of respect and clearly place a very high value on the diversity within their community. They are culturally aware and go well beyond demonstrating tolerance to those from different backgrounds, showing real pride in the differences that are represented throughout the school. Pupils note that the school roll is very diverse, and that they benefit socially from mixing with others from a wide variety of backgrounds. Pupils report that they enjoy celebrating a large range of the festivals and special days of various religions throughout the year, and gain a strong understanding of the importance of diversity through assemblies, tutorials and societies, several of which are pupil led.
- 3.22 Pupils understand the importance of exercise and of looking after their own mental and physical well-being. They reflect in tutorials on how to handle the pressure around revision and they practise mindfulness or even table tennis as well as listening to advice from older pupils. Pupils talked positively about recent improvements in the variety of food on offer at lunch although some noted that choices for vegetarians were more limited. Most pupils also appreciate the wide range of sports available at the school, including the provision of water based, minor sports and more traditional field sports, which helps them stay fit and healthy.

## 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 the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited 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

Mr David Holland	Reporting inspector
Mr Julius Sidwell	Compliance team inspector (Vice principal, HMC school)
Mrs Fiona Angel	Team inspector (Senior deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Richard Evans	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)
Mr Michael Horrocks-Taylor	Team inspector (Second master, HMC school)
Mr Guy Sanderson	Team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)
Mr Roger Shaw	Team inspector (Second master, HMC school)
Mr Chris Townsend	Team inspector (Headmaster, HMC school)