

School inspection report

12 to 14 March 2024

Old Palace of John Whitgift School

Old Palace Road

Croydon

Surrey

CRO 1AX

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. School leaders across all sections of the school have demonstrated flexibility and sensitivity whilst navigating a period of substantial change and challenging contextual circumstances, including the announcement that the school is to be closed in August 2025. Leaders have implemented impactful measures, such as support and preparation of pupils and their families with transition to the next stage of education, particularly those moving from Year 5 to Year 6. However, transition arrangements for pupils moving to other schools are not consistently effective, due to some pupils needing to leave at short notice in the context of the impending closure of the school.
2. Leaders prioritise pastoral provision across the whole school without negatively impacting on the effectiveness of academic provision. There is a particular focus on the importance of diversity within the school community. This is reflected through both curriculum design and pupil leadership. Pupil groups across the school, such as the diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) committee have contributed suggestions for specific courses or subjects to be provided.
3. Leaders at all levels have created a nurturing community. A calm, purposeful environment promotes academic achievement, and supportive relationships with staff and peers enable pupils to develop confidence and self-esteem.
4. Teachers are particularly adept at modelling aspirational language with pupils of all ages, demonstrating how to apply appropriate terminology, tone and register to a range of academic contexts. For example, as a result of such demonstration in English, pupils captured the mood or emotion implied by an author's language or word choice.
5. Pupils are able to constructively support each other's learning, including through respectful challenge and debate. Diversity of various forms is recognised and celebrated through planned activities and events by pupils and staff, such as the 'cultural celebration' week.
6. Pupils are supportive of the school's effective approach to behaviour management and tackling bullying. Pupils of all ages are supported through positive feedback and praise about their behaviour, including when on school outings or residential trips. The pupils are aware of the school's high expectations of them. As a result, pupils are well-behaved and kind.
7. Staff across the school show sensitive awareness of pupils' emotional wellbeing and speak with confidence and purpose about how best to support pupils of all ages. Leaders, staff and pupils collaborate to make the school a nurturing learning environment for all with an emphasis on collaboration between pupils themselves and between staff and pupils. This ethos is reflected in the school site, which is well maintained, secure and welcoming.
8. Leaders ensure that the whole school community is aware and respectful of the cultural composition of the local area. Consequently, cultural understanding, respect and tolerance between pupils is embedded within the school.
9. Pupil leaders are visible and impactful in their roles, setting an aspirational example to those in younger years. They encourage trust, honesty, politeness and consideration towards others. For example, Year 6 pupils organised a wellbeing week that incorporated both how they can look after each other as well as learning what they can do to support their own mental health.

10. Life skills such as budgeting are practised from early years onward, ensuring that pupils are equipped with an understanding of real-world contexts beyond the classroom.

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:

- strengthen the effectiveness of the transition of pupils to other educational establishments as they conclude their learning at the school.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The senior leadership team create a positive climate where constructive relationships and a calm, purposeful environment promote high academic achievement. They have thoughtfully managed the wellbeing of pupils and staff during a sensitive period of time, which included an announcement of the forthcoming closure of the school and a sudden bereavement that affected the entire school community. Leaders acted quickly, with support from external agencies, to ensure appropriate expert counselling support was in place for the pupils and staff.
12. Leaders across the school are alert to potential risks and take prompt and effective action to support the security of the school community. An increase in wellbeing, pastoral and mental health support are recently implemented actions. The implementation of risk assessment procedures ensures that potential risks relating to school trips, both residential and non-residential, are identified and mitigated against safely. Any remedial actions identified as part of site safety are managed in an effective manner.
13. Leaders give appropriate attention to pupils' pastoral wellbeing and foster a climate of mutual respect and nurture. Pastoral staff feel supported by senior leaders and enabled to perform their roles effectively. For example, there is a dedicated school counsellor who is available three days per week to talk to pupils.
14. There is a suitable leadership structure in place to effectively oversee all aspects of the school. Self-evaluation takes into account the views of parents and pupils. This enables leaders to have a broad understanding of the effectiveness of the provision and areas for development. Senior leaders utilise an effective teaching and learning framework to develop subject leadership across the curriculum. Consequently, subject leaders effectively monitor the curriculum and pupils' progress within their departments. Leaders track pupils' attainment and progress and use this information effectively to improve pupil outcomes through well-targeted support for individual pupils.
15. Leaders provide required information to all parents on the school website and give parents annual reports of their children's progress. The school has an accessibility plan that conforms to the requirement of the Equality Act 2010. The school provides equality of opportunity for all groups of pupils, who have an equal chance to participate and succeed across a wide range of activities and aspects of learning. Parental complaints are promptly and appropriately responded to in both prep and senior schools through mostly informal resolution. All complaints are managed effectively in line with the published procedures.
16. Governors provide the senior leadership team with appropriate support and challenge. They continually ask probing questions in order to assure themselves that leaders have the knowledge and ability to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and consistently. Governors provide effective strategic leadership by drawing on the expertise of the board and making suggestions that leaders respond to, while also fulfilling their statutory duties.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The early years curriculum is well planned, ensuring sufficient coverage of all the seven areas of learning. Planned activities engage the children in tasks that develop their physical and creative skills including exploration, development of gross or fine motor skills and working with others. This enables children to express themselves through, for example, painting or imaginative play. Subject leaders in the preparatory school ensure that long and medium-term planning covers and extends beyond the requirements of the national curriculum. Teachers use these plans effectively to provide suitable activities that both engage the pupils and support their learning. Schemes of work include themes such as mutual respect, tolerance in society, and individual liberty.
19. The senior school provides the required curriculum areas. Younger pupils sample a wide range of classical and modern foreign languages before they choose languages that they will study. As a result, pupils make good progress in examinations. Pupils also enter external competitions such as the Mathematics Olympiad and sixth form French debating competitions. The school's sixth form diploma allows for personal growth through a carousel of skills such as leadership, extended project qualifications, first aid and healthy active lifestyle sessions.
20. Children successfully achieve a good level of development in early years. Teachers model language well enabling pupils to develop good language skills. Teachers in the preparatory school consider the abilities and prior attainments of pupils in their planning. As a result, pupils are engaged in their learning and make good progress over time. Pupils speak with confidence and their literacy skills are well developed. They use a wide range of writing techniques chosen for different audiences and demonstrate understanding of complex mathematical concepts by the end of Year 6. Almost all pupils meet or exceed national expectations by the end of the preparatory school.
21. Senior school teachers are knowledgeable, passionate and enthusiastic about their subject areas. They assess pupils' skills and abilities by consistently asking insightful questions. Lessons typically involve self and peer feedback where pupils critique each other's work. High-quality displays around the school exhibit pupils' rich and varied learning. Teachers adjust their teaching when pupils show deeper understanding. Equally, they are able to re-teach or adjust the pace effectively when pupils are less secure with new concepts or skills. In the previous two years, two thirds of pupils achieved grades 7 to 9 at GCSE, particularly in English and music. A-level results are above the national average, four fifths of pupils achieve A* to C, with a similar proportion securing a place at their chosen university.
22. Leaders ensure that economic disadvantage, competency with speaking English, or any specific learning needs do not impose a barrier to learning. Preparatory school leaders provide appropriate training and guidance to teachers to identify pupils who will benefit from early support. Screening in Year 9 leads to individualised support plans and tailored strategies. Senior school, tracking of pupils' performance in categories such as 'special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)', 'bursary', 'scholarship' and 'attendance' allows for a personalised approach to monitoring individual pupil progress. This is particularly evident in independent study sessions where extra help and support are carefully targeted to meet pupils' different needs. Consequently, pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) achieve similar outcomes to their peers.

23. Younger pupils engage in a variety of clubs to challenge the mind such as cryptic crossword club, curiosity club and debating. Older pupils similarly have a choice of interesting co-curricular activities to choose from that includes a wide range of societies and sports, such as football, cricket and badminton. The wide range of activities enables pupils to interact socially with others, develop confidence and teamwork skills as well as aiding them to develop new skills and interests.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. The early years curriculum provides children with many opportunities to develop independence and self-esteem. Children develop their agility, balance and co-ordination in physical education activities. They play and work together in a mature way because they are encouraged to build positive relationships and be kind to each other. Teaching in the early years encourages children to be independent, to identify and share how they are feeling and what they could do to manage their emotions.
26. The preparatory and senior curriculum enable pupils to develop the self-assurance and confidence to take on new challenges. Teachers provide positive feedback and encouragement, helping pupils to cope with mistakes and increasing their sense of ownership of their achievements. Pupils have opportunities to develop their personal health and physical education through an effective games programme and timetabled physical education. This contributes to the development of their mental health and cognitive abilities as well as understanding how exercise contributes to healthiness, such as by helping to prevent heart disease and stroke.
27. Effective teaching of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education in age-appropriate and relevant settings supports pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. It provides them with strategies to deal with stress, anxiety and the importance of sleep and a healthy diet. Leaders have adapted the curriculum to reflect recent challenges experienced, with the inclusion of topics on bereavement built into the timetable and access to counsellors for individuals who need this support. Pupils are notified in advance if a sensitive topic is due to be taught and further support given if needed. For example, in recent sessions about female genital mutilation, pupils and parents were given advance notice and staff checked in with pupils during and after the talks.
28. The relationships and sex education programme contributes to promoting the school's aims of capable, confident and connected individuals. For example, form tutors have one-to-one discussions with pupils to ensure that they are making progress and monitor their emotional wellbeing. This enables pupils to recognise such things as the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one relationships and that there are different types of committed, stable relationships. Pupils learn about appropriate usage, benefits and potential risks of social media.
29. Leaders and staff model expectations about behaviour and being part of a community effectively. Pupils throughout the school show mutual respect when socialising at playtime and in the dining hall. Pupils are motivated to act responsibly and respectfully. They are very supportive of each other. For example, pupils look out for anyone who might be unhappy or on their own during breaktimes to check they are okay.
30. The recently introduced behaviour policy is understood and applied effectively throughout the school. Older pupils engaged in revising the 'student code of conduct'. Teachers promote positive behaviour by giving constructive praise. As a result, pupils are well-behaved and kind. There has been a considerable decrease in the number of serious behaviour incidents this year compared to the previous year. Leaders implement a number of effective strategies to prevent bullying, including teaching pupils how to recognise potential bullying and what to do if it happens. Pupils have confidence that any incidents of bullying will be addressed efficiently.

31. The school ensures there is wide-ranging and effective provision to support pupils' emotional wellbeing, including trained counsellors. Leaders ensure suitable supervision is in place when pupils arrive at the school and during the school day by the appropriate deployment of staff. For example, staff at the preparatory school supported by the wellbeing prefects, organised a week of wellbeing activities to support the school community. This helped pupils with the importance of developing strategies to support themselves and one another.
32. The school is well maintained. Drinking water is plentiful and clearly signed and there are many external lighting points. Sufficient outdoor recreational space and appropriate toilet provision are available for pupils across the school. The school policies for health and safety, fire safety and first aid are effectively implemented. Pupils learn about fire hazards and the significance of fire protection measures. They develop the skills to quickly and safely evacuate a building, find designated assembly sites, and listen to and follow the directions of staff fire marshals in the case of an emergency. Medical facilities are suitable for the care of those sick or injured, with the senior school having additional medical staff and a room separate from the care facility. Should pupils hurt themselves, a first aider is always easily to hand.
33. The admissions records are accurately maintained. Leaders inform the local authority appropriately if pupils are absent from education. Attendance is well managed with proactive parental engagement to encourage high levels of attendance.

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

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

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

35. Pupils, including the very youngest, understand the rule of law and difference between right and wrong. Pupils develop their understanding of moral and ethical questions such as the value of trustworthiness or the value of apologising. They understand that they do not always have to agree with other people, but their views should be respected. British values such as democracy are promoted and celebrated by studying themes such as elections and British institutions. The local Member of Parliament (MP) and other politicians have visited the school on several occasions to show support for the school. This included when eco-prefects wrote to their MP about making space for nature within Croydon.
36. Leaders develop pupils' sense of responsibility and facilitate opportunities for pupils to engage with community groups and organisations. Visits to and from the local fire and police stations support pupils' understanding of British life and values. Leaders promote wider community links, including working with local care homes, charity events and supporting local primary schools.
37. Pupils are supported for their transition into the next stage of education, whether it is in a new class, a new key stage or a new school, but with varying levels of effectiveness. Leaders have discussed the ongoing requirement for this work where pupils have been moving on to new schools quickly. Plans for transition from Year 5 into Year 6 in the senior school are in place. However, planned pastoral support and academic preparation when pupils are moving on to a new educational establishment are not always implemented as effectively as possible due to pupils needing to move at short notice in the context of the imminent closure of the school.
38. Careers education for all ages prepares pupils for the workplace and for further study. It provides them with the skills and knowledge they need to choose and pursue their own aspirations. Leaders and staff provide support with applications for university places, apprenticeships and jobs. The careers guidance equips pupils with useful information and appropriate attitudes needed to navigate and enter working life or higher education successfully.
39. The school's PSHE curriculum includes effective economic education. Teaching encourages pupils to consider the difference between wants and needs in terms of financial planning alongside consideration of the impact of advertising that encourages people to make purchases. For example, pupils recently evaluated whether the money needed to have the latest pair of trainers could be put to better use. At the preparatory school there is an 'enterprise day' for all pupils from the youngest to the oldest, where classes are provided with a budget to create and sell goods at the school fair. Year 3 pupils also visit a local cafe to determine how a business is run. Consequently, pupils develop knowledge of budgeting and understanding about profit and loss.
40. The school promotes a culture of tolerance and respect. Leaders have produced appropriate materials that promote multi-faith tolerance, the benefits of pluralism, human rights and religious freedom. A prayer room is always open for pupils to use and the school makes adjustments to the school day to accommodate the needs of pupils who observe religious festivals. Pupils are interested and respectful of the different cultural and linguistic backgrounds of others. There are diversity, equality and inclusion (DEI) groups in both prep and senior school. The DEI committee run by pupils annually organise a culture week to bring different communities together including those who represent protected characteristics, such as race, sexual orientation, religion or belief. There are a

number of societies pupils can join, and these groups provide opportunities for personal growth and the development of leadership skills. Diversity is further promoted in the curriculum. For example, Year 9 poetry includes the study of LGBTQ+ writers and every year group studies at least one text by writers from different cultures across the world.

41. The oldest pupils of both schools willingly take on prefect roles. In both preparatory and senior school, they set a positive example to others. At the senior school, the Head Girl and Senior Prefect selection includes the opportunity for pupils to be part of the process. As ambassadors for the school, they enable pupils to ask questions about day-to-day school experiences, help pupils to feel connected to the school and develop their own leadership skills. Other roles include subject prefects who organise subject clubs and provide mentoring support for younger pupils.

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

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

Safeguarding

43. Leaders have effective systems in place to check the suitability of all members of staff and other adults that come into the school. They carry out all required recruitment checks and record these appropriately. The school's safer recruitment procedures and records are compliant with current statutory guidance.
44. Staff are appropriately trained and understand the duty upon them to act if they have a concern about a child's safety. Staff receive weekly safeguarding reminders and understand how to respond to disclosures and allegations. Safeguarding leaders are trained appropriately for their role.
45. Leaders respond to safeguarding concerns promptly and appropriately, including any related to child-on-child abuse or allegations against staff. Leaders liaise with and refer to relevant outside agencies swiftly and effectively where necessary to ensure that pupils are safeguarded appropriately. Pupils know who to talk to if they have any concerns and are confident that they will be listened to, taken seriously and helped.
46. Pupils feel safe and are well aware of potential risks to their personal safety. Filtering and monitoring support pupils' safety when online whilst in school and pupils are aware of the filtering system and its purpose. Pupils are taught about the risks they might encounter when online and how to keep themselves safe when using the internet or social media. Pupils can explain clearly the difference between a 'real' friend and someone who might say they are a friend online. They know not to give out personal information and to report anything that makes them feel uncomfortable.
47. Governors receive appropriate safeguarding training. They meet regularly with those responsible for safeguarding and review reports of incidents which occur. This maintains effective oversight of safeguarding policies and their implementation. In addition to continuous monitoring, a suitable annual review of safeguarding is undertaken.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Old Palace of John Whitgift School
Department for Education number	306/6082
Registered charity number	312612
Address	Old Palace of John Whitgift School Old Palace Road Croydon Surrey CR0 1AX
Phone number	020 8688 2027
Email address	schooloffice@oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk
Website	www.oldpalace.croydon.sch.uk/
Proprietor	John Whitgift Foundation
Chair	Mr Christopher Holding
Headteacher	Mrs Jane Burton
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	324
Date of previous inspection	18 to 20 September 2019

Information about the school

49. Old Palace of John Whitgift School is an independent day school for female pupils. It was opened in 1889 and is one of three schools in the John Whitgift Foundation. Although the governance of the school is overseen by the Court of the John Whitgift Foundation, it has its own governing committee which is responsible to the Court for reviewing and monitoring all statutory regulatory requirements. The senior school and sixth-form department are based in central Croydon.
50. The Pre-school and preparatory departments are based in south Croydon. The school has 30 pupils in early years across one Pre-school class and one Reception class.
51. The school has identified 43 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
52. English is an additional language for one pupil.
53. The school states its aims are to allow pupils to become capable, confident and connected individuals, well positioned for a successful and meaningful future.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

12 to 14 March 2024

54. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

55. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, 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.

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

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