

School inspection report

28 to 30 January 2025

St Christopher's School

32 Belsize Lane

Hampstead

London

NW3 5AE

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' use of self-evaluation to inform effective action to promote pupils' wellbeing is a significant strength. Leaders evaluate and implement highly detailed plans to improve the pupils' learning experience. These plans have a clear and highly beneficial impact on the pupils' learning as well as their emotional wellbeing. This is because leaders successfully implement their plans to develop the academic and pastoral provision so that it encourages pupils to approach their studies and interactions with others with high levels of confidence and enables them to make good and often rapid progress.
2. The curriculum provides pupils with a broad and balanced range of subjects and develops their skills, knowledge and understanding in subjects such as philosophy, thinking skills and chess as well as in required subjects. Leaders track the pupils' progress effectively.
3. Teachers prepare thoughtful lessons which cater to all groups of pupils, ensuring that those pupils who need support receive it, whilst those who need to be stretched are suitably challenged. Teachers provide thoughtful feedback and advice to pupils about their work. As a result, pupils make good and often rapid progress in their learning.
4. Children in the early years benefit from a range of experiences which facilitate their making good and sometimes rapid progress towards the early learning goals. They are encouraged to develop independence, and they are keen to learn. Children make use of a range of indoor and outdoor equipment and learning opportunities to develop their skills, such as in writing and in their movement. Children learn to co-operate with one another and start to learn how to manage their emotions when they are unhappy.
5. Pupils develop positive self-confidence. They are articulate, thoughtful and kind to one another. Pupils' behaviour in and out of lessons is good. Leaders and staff swiftly resolve any rare acts of unkindness.
6. Pupils are taught about issues relating to equality and inclusion. Pupils demonstrate an appreciation of cultural diversity and demonstrate high levels of respect for those from different backgrounds to their own.
7. Pupils have the opportunity to make a difference to their own community as elected representatives or by joining other school-wide groups. Pupils engage positively in charitable endeavours to make a positive contribution to wider society.
8. Safeguarding procedures at the school are effective. Leaders and staff maintain vigilance over any signs that a pupil's wellbeing might be at risk. Appropriate training equips leaders and staff to carry out their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. The school carries out all required safer recruitment checks. Governors monitor safer recruitment processes as part of their oversight of the school. However, this oversight had not identified a small number of minor administrative errors and anomalies in the single central record of appointments (SCR).

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

The proprietor should:

- strengthen the oversight of the single central record of appointments so that any errors or anomalies are identified and promptly corrected.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders communicate the school's ethos and approach to education effectively to staff, parents and pupils. They make highly effective use of their evaluation of the school's successes and areas for development to enact detailed plans and ambitious initiatives to improve pupils' learning and wellbeing. For example, leaders provide opportunities for professional development so that teachers can engage with current research and utilise their understanding of current thinking about best practice to contribute towards school development. Leaders implement appropriate processes for sharing effective practice between staff. Leaders have introduced teaching schemes across all ages which equip the pupils with the tools and the language needed to both express and manage their feelings. Leaders work with staff to promote pupils' self-knowledge and positive behaviour, through values and expectations which are clearly and consistently shared with pupils. Leaders, with the support of governors, enable and equip early years practitioners to develop a rich curriculum and provision.
10. Pupils clearly benefit highly as a result of leaders' effective self-evaluation and decision-making that supports such initiatives. Children and pupils make good and often rapid progress. Pupils enjoy and engage thoughtfully with their learning because teachers are consistent in classroom strategies informed by the school's development planning. Many pupils demonstrate high levels of self-confidence, pride and autonomy.
11. Governors' oversight of the school's policies and procedures is typically effective. Governors ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills to carry out their duties effectively. They meet with leaders and scrutinise their reports to check that the school promotes the wellbeing of the pupils effectively. Governors also monitor the school through regular visits to meet with staff, parents and pupils and to observe teaching and learning.
12. Leaders have an appropriate understanding of how to manage and mitigate risk. Risk assessments are thorough and effective. They include suitable consideration of potential risks in the school's environment, learning activities and trips to the local area and beyond. Staff are appropriately trained in risk assessment procedures. Leaders consider what risks might be most relevant to the school's geographical context and take effective measures to mitigate these. Leaders also consider any potential risks to pupils' emotional wellbeing, such as by effectively managing any anxiety that older pupils might have about assessments related to senior or secondary school entry.
13. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place to promote improved access to the curriculum and school buildings for any pupils with a disability.
14. Leaders provide all the required information to parents, both via the school's website and in regular reports which provide parents with detailed information on their child's progress.
15. Leaders liaise appropriately with outside agencies where this is necessary to support pupils and their families. Leaders provide the required information to the local authority with regard to the use of funds for pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans.
16. Leaders implement an appropriate complaints procedure effectively. They respond to any complaints submitted to the school in a timely manner and keep suitable records of these and their responses to them.

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. Pupils are taught a broad and balanced curriculum. Pupils develop their command of language and their confidence in using numbers because application of these is woven into many subjects. Pupils learn about science and technology and develop their creativity in aesthetic subjects such as music, drama and art. The schemes of work set out the how school intends to methodically develop the pupils' subject knowledge across all subjects. Lessons in Spanish, Latin, philosophy, thinking skills and chess encourage pupils to develop their wider knowledge, skills and understanding, and support their core learning. For example, Year 5 pupils use the framework of a well-known gameshow to explore the meanings of words and learn about etymology, while Year 1 pupils consider why humans need sleep.
19. Leaders and teachers consider how to bring learning together in different subjects. For example, teachers of humanities collaborate in the teaching of topics and older pupils write mathematical stories which challenge and develop their skills in both literacy and numeracy.
20. Children in the early years develop their communication skills through an appropriate programme of learning. Staff model and encourage appropriate interaction and accurate use of language. They provide a stimulating range of activities in which children can practise their skills and explore new knowledge. Adults listen to children reading on a frequent basis to encourage the development of their understanding of letters and the sounds they represent. Children make good and sometimes rapid progress in their fundamental skills through play, for example improving their fine motor skills during role-play activities. Teachers in the early years discuss the curriculum with subject leaders to share effective practice and to consider educational research, in order to develop teaching methods to reflect current thinking about best practice.
21. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and use a range of good quality resources to support their teaching effectively. They consider pupils' needs and prior attainment in their planning, and implement a range of consistently effective teaching methods and strategies to encourage pupils to engage with their learning. For example, Year 1 pupils explore the sounds that letters make through various appropriate activities, such as word and sound treasure hunts, while Year 3 pupils engage in a range of activities that enable them to make mathematical predictions.
22. Teachers understand the individual needs of pupils and tailor learning so that pupils can undertake tasks that build on their prior knowledge with confidence. Teachers provide pupils who find a topic difficult with additional prompts or resources. They encourage pupils with high prior attainment to attempt suitably challenging activities. Teachers provide pupils with clear and pertinent feedback in a variety of ways which helps pupils to improve their work. Pupils make good and often rapid progress in their learning as a result of these measures. They achieve well at the end of their time at school, gaining places at a range of selective senior and secondary schools.
23. Teachers assess the progress pupils make over time through frequent reviews of their work and regular formal assessments. Leaders use their careful analysis of assessment information to modify the curriculum and teaching methods to address particular learning needs.
24. The school provides suitable support to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), primarily from their teachers and teaching assistants in the classroom, and also, when appropriate, from specialist learning enrichment teachers. These specialists also share their

knowledge with all teachers to help enable them to meet individual pupils' particular needs. Where appropriate, staff provide pupils with additional resources to support their learning, such as seating cushions to promote their concentration and learning. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good and often rapid progress.

25. A small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language require additional support for their English. Teachers provide them with effective support when required, such as translation tools and vocabulary sheets, which help these pupils develop their English skills effectively.
26. Pupils experience a suitable range of recreational and extra-curricular activities which further promote their skills and interests in, for example, clubs such as cross-stitch, photography and board games. They engage in sporting and creative play developing their physical, social and teamwork skills.

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

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

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

28. Children in the early years experience a range of activities which promote their physical and emotional development. Outdoor facilities support the children in furthering their gross motor skills, learning to manage risk, for example by climbing and digging in sand. Staff encourage children to share and take turns and support them to manage their feelings.
29. Pupils experience appropriate lessons in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and a relationships and sex education (RSE) programme which meets the requirements of current statutory guidance. Staff teach pupils in an age-appropriate way about issues such as managing friendship, such as considering the feelings of someone left out of a game, and different types of healthy relationship. For example, pupils learn about different types of family structure. Pupils are taught about how bodies grow and develop, including during puberty, and about ways to keep themselves safe and healthy when interacting with others, for example learning about topics such as privacy and consent. Leaders consult parents about the curriculum and keep them informed of the topics being taught.
30. Pupils develop high levels of self-knowledge and confidence because of the support and encouragement given to them and the nurturing environment at school. Through the PSHE curriculum, staff provide guidance to pupils about how to recognise and manage their emotions. Pupils are taught breathing techniques to calm themselves down if they are upset. Leaders and staff also support pupils' self-confidence through frequent praise for their effort and achievements, and pupils are keen to praise and support each other.
31. Pupils develop their understanding of world faiths, and their spiritual ideas and practices, through the wider curriculum as well as in their religious education (RE) lessons. Leaders utilise assemblies and other school events to celebrate festivals and other religious times of importance.
32. Behaviour management is effective. Leaders and staff communicate the school's values and behavioural expectations clearly and consistently. Pupils learn how their actions and behaviours can impact on their own and others' learning and emotional wellbeing. Teachers maintain a calm, orderly atmosphere in their classrooms and use consistent techniques to effectively quieten pupils, for example after a period of discussion. As a result, pupils' behaviour, whether in the classroom or around school, is typically considerate and thoughtful.
33. Incidents of bullying are few because leaders and staff support pupils in navigating any disagreements which in turn minimises the risk of these escalating. Leaders effectively manage the few incidents that do occur. Teachers educate pupils about the forms bullying can take. Sanctions, which focus on reflection and remediation, are appropriate and effective.
34. An appropriate programme of physical education (PE) enables pupils to develop their fitness, co-ordination and teamwork skills. For example, younger pupils improve their underarm and overarm throwing skills, while older pupils develop their positional awareness in netball.
35. Pupils are appropriately supervised during the school day through the effective deployment of staff, including periods of recreation, and when on trips outside the school. The school maintains the required staff-to-child ratios at all times in the early years.

36. The school maintains appropriate admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance, which is above the national average. They look for and act on any patterns of absence which might unduly affect pupils' learning. The school suitably informs the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
37. The school premises are suitable and well maintained. Any defects are reported and promptly corrected. All required health and safety checks and maintenance, such as the regular testing of the water supply and electrical systems, are carried out. Suitable fire safety arrangements are in place, such as an up-to-date fire risk assessment. Staff conduct regular fire evacuation drills to ensure that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency. Staff receive appropriate fire safety training.
38. Staff are appropriately trained in first aid, and there is always at least one paediatric first aider in the early years. Staff administer first aid or medication promptly and appropriately when required. Staff maintain suitable records of any first aid given and inform parents appropriately. The school provides suitable medical facilities for pupils to use in the short term.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

40. The school develops pupils' understanding of values such as the importance of mutual respect, equality and fair treatment from an early age. Pupils learn about themes such as Black history, issues that can be faced by lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people, and influential female figures who have made a difference to wider society. Staff make effective use of books and other resources to develop pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. Pupils can apply to become 'rights reps', a group which promotes inclusivity, for example by organising a pupil-led world food day. Such measures contribute to the school's effective preparation of pupils for life in British society.
41. Pupils learn how rules are essential for societies and communities to function effectively. Through the curriculum, pupils are taught how such rules have changed over time and, as a result, develop an appreciation of moral principles. Pupils reflect on their actions when they make mistakes. They learn how to discuss and disagree agreeably, and to recognise and respect each other's point of view.
42. Younger pupils are encouraged to role play different occupations. Leaders arrange events which encourage older pupils to consider the pathways towards certain careers. Teachers arrange transition days which provide support to pupils as they prepare for their next academic year, and leaders provide detailed and effective support to older pupils and their parents with regard to entry to secondary or senior schools.
43. Pupils develop their understanding of money through various subjects in the curriculum. For example, in mathematics, pupils solve number problems using currency, and in geography, pupils analyse the financial impact of aid in developing nations. In PSHE, pupils learn about budgeting and bank accounts and consider how they spend money and what influences their spending.
44. Pupils have a range of opportunities to contribute to the school community, such as through the environmental group, 'Seedlings', or the school council. These roles involve elections during which pupils articulate how they will make a positive contribution to the life of the school. Senior pupils act as treasurers for the school council, which has a budget to spend on improvements, for example adding to play equipment for recreational use. Pupils can also become form captains and vice-captains.
45. Through these experiences and the curriculum, pupils learn about democratic systems and British institutions such as Parliament. Teachers take care to ensure that any discussions which touch on political matters are conducted fairly and without bias.
46. The school develops pupils' sense of social responsibility effectively. Pupils engage in many activities which encourage them to contribute to wider society, such as raising funds for a local hospital as well as other charities. Pupils learn that they can have a positive influence on the lives of others.

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

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. Leaders promote an effective culture of safeguarding across the school. The school implements appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures that reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.
49. Staff know how to spot signs that a pupil's welfare might be at risk because they receive appropriate and regular safeguarding training, including about any changes to statutory requirements. They understand their safeguarding responsibilities and the need to be vigilant for any safeguarding concerns. The safeguarding team is trained at the level required to have the knowledge and confidence to carry out their roles.
50. Leaders maintain detailed records and monitor any ongoing concerns effectively. Leaders take prompt action whenever safeguarding concerns arise and liaise effectively with pertinent external agencies, when necessary, to support pupils. Governors exercise suitable oversight of the school's safeguarding measures, including by discussing anonymised cases with leaders and scrutinising reports.
51. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when they are using the internet. Access to the internet at school is suitably monitored and filtered, and staff check the filtering and monitoring systems on a regular basis.
52. Leaders encourage pupils to share any concerns they may have with adults at school. Older pupils are able to share any worries anonymously should they so wish.
53. The school carries out all required pre-employment checks on staff and governors before they take up their responsibilities and records these checks in a single central record of appointments (SCR). Leaders and governors monitor the SCR regularly. Nonetheless, a number of minor anomalies and administrative errors had not been identified. Leaders corrected these during the course of the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Christopher's School
Department for Education number	202/6013
Registered charity number	312999
Address	St Christopher's School 32 Belsize Lane Hampstead London NW3 5AE
Phone number	020 7435 1521
Email address	secretary@stchristophers.london
Website	www.stchristophers.london
Proprietor	St Christopher's School
Chair	Mrs Silvia Fiaccavento
Interim headteacher	Mr Mark Maddocks
Age range	4 to 11
Number of pupils	254
Date of previous inspection	1 to 4 March 2022

Information about the school

55. St Christopher's School is an independent day school for female pupils in Hampstead, north London. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. The current interim headteacher took up his post in September 2024 and the chair of governors took up her position in September 2023.
56. There are 37 children in the early years comprising two Reception classes.
57. The school has identified 48 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. The school has identified English as an additional language for 109 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to nurture creativity, curiosity and freedom of thought through a rigorous curriculum, enabling the pupils to find joy in learning, understanding and to embrace challenge whilst still revelling in childhood. The school seeks to champion the aspirations and ambitions of the pupils so that they grow into inclusive, courageous and principled young people.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 January 2025

60. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. 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 interim 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.

62. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net