

# School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

## **The Queen's School**

City Walls Road

Chester

CH1 2NN

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 have created an environment where pupils in both the lower and senior schools are happy and enjoy their school experience. This is due to the quality of teaching and pastoral care, which enables pupils to achieve well both academically and personally.
2. Governors maintain effective oversight of all aspects of school life, providing appropriate support and challenge to senior leaders. They know what the school does well and what could be improved. Governors work closely and effectively with senior leaders to actively promote pupils' wellbeing and ensure that the school upholds its distinctive character and ethos as an all-female pupil school.
3. The curriculum is well planned and well taught. This enables pupils to make good progress. They achieve academic success in both GCSE and A-level examinations. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and demonstrate effective classroom management skills. Pupils are engaged, articulate and confident learners.
4. Across both the senior and lower schools, teachers regularly review and check pupils' progress, including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teachers typically use this information to plan and teach lessons that match what pupils need to learn next.
5. Pupils throughout both schools are tolerant, courteous, respectful and mutually supportive of each other. They welcome leadership opportunities, which enhance their sense of self-worth and self-esteem. In the senior school, sixth-form pupils mentor and support pupils in Year 7 to understand and follow the school's behaviour policy and expectations. Currently, this mentoring and support from senior pupils is more limited for pupils in Years 8 and 9, and as a result these pupils do not benefit personally and socially from the encouragement and guidance that sixth-form pupils can provide.
6. Teaching in Reception enables children to learn successfully. Staff model and extend children's vocabulary. Children's knowledge of early speech, reading, writing and numeracy is well developed. During suitably planned activities, children are supported to acquire fine motor skills in preparation for learning to write and taking part in a range of creative art and design activities.
7. A detailed and comprehensive curriculum is in place to develop pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils in both the senior and lower school benefit from learning alongside pupils from a wide range of different backgrounds. This enables pupils to understand the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion. Instances of bullying are very rare. When they do occur, leaders deal with these in a timely manner.
8. School development plans produced by leaders and managers demonstrate the 'one school' culture between the lower and senior schools through joined-up school improvement actions. However, co-curricular interactions and personal development programmes do not always build on previous teaching and activities as pupils move through the two schools. Current links do not give pupils sufficient collaborative and shared experiences. As a consequence, pupils do not always experience the coherent school journey that leaders intend in order to achieve their 'one school' aspiration.
9. Safeguarding arrangements throughout the school are effective and promote pupils' wellbeing. Safeguarding leaders liaise with external agencies and respond to advice given. The pastoral care

systems ensure that pupils with mental health or emotional needs are quickly identified, and that prompt action is taken. Pupils receive personalised support to meet their specific needs if required.

## 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:

- extend the use of pupil mentoring to enable pupils in Years 8 and 9 to benefit personally and socially from the guidance and support offered by sixth-form pupils
- provide more collaborative and shared experiences between the lower and senior schools in order to enhance pupils' personal, social and co-curricular development and firmly embed the 'one school' ethos.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders are committed to enhancing teaching and learning. They challenge themselves and staff to improve the quality of education while placing pupils' wellbeing at the forefront of what they do. This creates a positive environment in which pupils are encouraged to work hard, respond to the challenges offered by their teachers and follow teachers' advice on how to improve their work.
11. Governors have oversight of all areas of school development, including pupils' safeguarding and mental health matters. They ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those for the early years. Governing body committees quality assure all aspects of the school's provision. They know the school well and regularly visit the school to offer support and challenge to leaders.
12. Leaders inspire aspirational thinking, build resilience and nurture independence in pupils by embedding the school's ethos throughout the curriculum and extra-curricular activities. The school creates a vibrant and inclusive community where pupils are encouraged to thrive.
13. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, and an accurate understanding of what pupils know and are capable of. Teachers check pupils' progress regularly, including pupils who have SEND. Teachers typically use this information to plan and teach lessons that match pupils' different needs.
14. Leaders provide pupils with many opportunities to participate in committees and take on leadership roles from an early stage. These experiences enhance pupils' confidence, instil a sense of responsibility, and equip them with valuable skills for the future. Pupils are well prepared to navigate future challenges with assurance and independence, both within and beyond the classroom.
15. Leaders have established an effective transition programme that prepares pupils in Year 6 to be ready and confident for the senior school. However, the co-curricular and personal development links between the lower and senior schools are not as fully in place as they could be to support leaders' intended 'one school' focus. Across the two schools, pupils have more limited shared experiences, though the interaction of junior and senior pupils particularly in terms of younger pupil interactions and involvement with older pupils to develop their personal and social skills and enhance their educational experience.
16. An effective risk assessment policy along with an open culture to discuss and assess risk at the school ensures that pupils' welfare is safeguarded and promoted. When potential risks are identified, leaders take appropriate action to reduce risks or avoid them as much as possible.
17. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010. An appropriate accessibility plan highlights where adjustments are made to the curriculum and the premises to meet pupils' needs. Leaders collaborate with external agencies, such as children's services and other local authority support services, to ensure that pupils' welfare needs are prioritised and met. Leaders provide information to local authorities in relation to pupils who are in receipt of funding for education, health and care (EHC) plans.
18. An appropriate range of information is published for parents on the school's website. Parents are well informed about the school and their child's attainment, progress and wellbeing through a variety of assessment notifications, written reports and consultation evenings.

19. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented consistently. Where formal complaints are received, they are managed effectively through a three-stage process with clear timescales. Records are kept appropriately, including of actions taken and outcomes.

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

**20. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The school's broad and relevant curriculum encompasses all required areas for learning. Pupils study a range of linguistic disciplines, including Latin classical civilisation and Mandarin as well as traditional European languages. A good range of creative subjects are taught.
22. In the early years, children are encouraged to explore, create and try new ideas. They develop good communication skills because early years staff develop children's vocabulary and language needs through purposeful interactions and modelling language during play. Children develop confidence and independence which contributes positively to their good progress. Consequently, children in the early years exceed age-expected levels in all areas of the early learning goals (ELGs).
23. Pupils' achievement and progress over time is consistently good. Attainment at GCSE and A level across subjects is typically above national averages. Most pupils attain the highest grades at GCSE and A level. Many pupils gain entry to their first-choice universities and to demanding higher and degree-level apprenticeships. Teachers use the school's assessment system to check pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers provide pupils who need extra support with the help they need to learn successfully.
24. The creative and aesthetic curriculum includes a wide variety of subjects, such as dance, drama and art, which are popular subject choices. Pupils' participation in music and music-making is of a high standard and they regularly engage in school productions. The recent senior school production of 'Six-Teen Edition' and the lower school production of 'Mystery at Magpie Manor' reflect pupils' enthusiasm, commitment to and enjoyment of group participation in large-scale school events.
25. The school's key values of inclusion and mutual support are reflected in pupils' ability to learn together, share ideas and help each other during lessons and across subject areas. Pupils benefit from an extensive range of extra-curricular activities, which inspire them to develop new skills and expand their horizons and understanding of the world. Pupils challenge perceptions and push boundaries, especially in the combined cadet force (CCF) and global awareness activities.
26. Teachers are knowledgeable about the subjects they teach. They give clear explanations and use meaningful examples to help pupils understand the wider relevance of each subject. Pupils value the feedback they receive which enables them to extend their thinking and improve their work. Parents appreciate how they are kept up to date with their child's achievements in the wider aspects of school life. Teaching supports the principles of fundamental British and global values.
27. Leaders oversee the provision for pupils who have SEND to ensure that teaching staff receive relevant training and guidance to support pupils during lessons. Teachers are well aware of pupils' needs and individual support plans are put in place for those pupils who need additional or personalised support and particular considerations. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their different starting points.
28. A small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive additional support to help them acquire technical and subject-specific language. These pupils learn successfully and achieve well over time.
29. Teachers willingly give their time to support pupils' wider development. Extra-curricular and enrichment clubs are well attended and result in pupils' increased focus on their learning.

30. Teachers enable pupils across all age groups to benefit from a wide range of activities, enrichment trips and challenging opportunities, which extend their learning beyond the classroom. Participation in drama, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), overseas sports trips and educational expeditions, such as a recent trip to Iceland, provide character development and leadership opportunities which enhance pupils' overall educational experience.
31. Pupils in both the lower and senior schools achieve well in individual and team sporting pursuits. The high level of team participation reflects the enthusiasm that pupils have for sport in both schools. They gain recognition at county and national level, particularly in sports such as netball, hockey and football.

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

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

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

33. Mutual trust and respect are tangible and visible throughout both schools, enabling pupils to thrive. Pupils are cared for and successful in their relationships with each other and with staff. These relationships are positive and contribute towards pupils' wellbeing. Pupils are valued as individuals irrespective of their age and personal circumstances. During assemblies, pupils and staff speak of the positive characteristics of and challenges faced by those who have neurodivergence. Pupils articulate that with awareness comes acceptance. Pupils are confident that they can be who they are.
34. A well thought-through and carefully planned PSHE curriculum is taught across all age groups. This is supplemented with a suitable RSE curriculum. Both curriculums support pupils to understand healthy relationships and develop personal thinking skills, which enables them to demonstrate respect and kindness towards each other. Sixth-form pupils benefit from the school's bespoke 'Q-Elevate' programme which develops their skills as leaders, scholars and future global citizens.
35. Leaders in the early years promote children's emotional wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence through positive praise and encouragement. Children's physical development is promoted through their use of a range of play equipment in the outdoor environment and visits to woodland and beach environments.
36. Pupils' behaviour is positive, and they are attentive during lessons. In lessons such as drama, physical education (PE), science and music, pupils work together well. They demonstrate good interpersonal skills and a focused approach to learning. Staff intervene to make sure that both individual and group wellbeing are maintained. Pupils have access to a pastoral hub for quiet reflection or to consult the pastoral team, if required.
37. The school's behaviour and anti-bullying policies for lower and senior school pupils are well understood and implemented consistently by staff. Leaders promote good behaviour through focused assemblies, the tutorial system and the PSHE curriculum.
38. Pupils are appropriately supervised. They behave well during lessons and informally outside the classroom. Sixth-form pupils have an established role in mentoring Year 7 pupils, which supports younger pupils to better understand and demonstrate the school's high standards of behaviour. This mentoring role does not fully extend to pupils in Years 8 and 9. These pupils do not benefit from the same guidance and modelling of best practice from sixth-form pupils to ensure that they understand how they should behave at all times.
39. The school buildings and grounds are maintained to a high standard. Health and safety protocols and procedures are robust and effectively followed, including daily safety measures and checks in the early years. Medical and first aid facilities and procedures enable pupils to receive appropriate help and assistance promptly when required. Pupils access the specialist help of medical first aiders, councillors and psychologists if necessary.
40. The school ensures that both school sites provide safe, clean and well-maintained environments for pupils to enjoy their school experience. There are effective measures in place to reduce fire risks.

Fire evacuation and lockdown procedures are regularly rehearsed. The lower and senior school sites are kept secure, with clear signage and controlled key-pad access to all buildings at entry points.

41. Leaders give pupils' attendance a suitably high focus. They follow the recent government guidelines that promote high attendance. The school maintains admission and attendance registers in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders keep track of attendance patterns and follow up any absenteeism in a timely manner. Local authorities are informed whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
42. Teachers ensure that spiritual, moral, social and cultural elements are woven through the taught curriculum and activity programmes for all age groups. This is complemented by a range of church services, including visits to Chester Cathedral, school assemblies and tutorials, which help pupils to develop their sense of social morality and spiritual understanding.
43. The school's PE curriculum extends beyond timetabled lessons and includes additional opportunities during the school day and after school. An extensive range of clubs and societies is on offer for all age groups, and these are greatly valued by pupils. This is seen through the high level of pupil participation, with netball and hockey being especially popular in the senior school and swimming in the lower school. Pupils learn the importance of teamwork, leadership and resilience as well as the confidence to try new sports.

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

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

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

45. Pupils are helped to become well-rounded and confident young women who understand right from wrong. They are taught the skills to challenge intolerance where they see it. As a result, they are well prepared for life beyond the school and within British society.
46. Pupils have a very positive view of difference and actively seek to celebrate it. They learn the meaning of respect because it is threaded through many aspects of school life, including in the sixth form. For example, it is present in the choice of texts that pupils study within the English curriculum, the choice of speakers within the sixth-form academic lecture programme and the 'Spirit of Queen's' award.
47. In the early years and Years 1 and 2, teachers prioritise pupils' social development through a variety of activities and experiences that require pupils to be responsible and respect each other. Staff model positive social skills and support pupils to interact with each other in a supportive and structured way. Pupils quickly learn to take turns when involved with activities. This development of essential life skills enables pupils to grow in confidence and increasingly develop their leadership skills as they move through the school.
48. The school recognises and celebrates pupils' diverse cultures and spiritual backgrounds. In the senior school there is a space set aside as a prayer room. The cultural days, held in both schools, allow pupils to share their different home cultures. Teachers ensure that different religious festivals are celebrated during assemblies, and pupils are encouraged to share customs that are important to them such as the festivals of Eid and Ramadan.
49. Assemblies routinely cover themes of equality, diversity and inclusion. Pupils learn about the ways in which people are different and the importance of respecting these differences.
50. The value of democracy is actively promoted through activities such as the selection process for the role of head girl. Pupils learn about completing applications, interview hustings and how to vote. Pupils are very aware of global issues through, for example, the school's charitable links with schools in Tanzania and the school's involvement with events and debates relating to current global topics. Pupils' participation in charity work, leadership roles and committees helps support them to gain valuable leadership and essential life skills.
51. Economic education is well covered in the PSHE curriculum. Pupils learn about money management, student finance, issues with debt and gambling, credit awareness and financial scams. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 discuss pay equality and work-life balance, demonstrating a good awareness of financial principles.
52. Pupils are helped to make informed choices about their futures through a careers programme that includes taster events, questionnaires and careers fairs. The well-established links with a variety of alumni help to inform pupils about a wide range of career options, encouraging them to aim high. Pupils are well informed and suitably guided towards the next stage of their education and life after school.

53. The pupil-led student councils in both schools consider all aspects of pupils' school experiences. The councils gather opinions and ideas from their peers and present these to leaders and staff. Alongside regular surveys, leaders use this information to improve the school.
54. Pupils acquire a broad general knowledge of, and respect for, public institutions and services in England through, for example, visits by members of the police force or the teaching of proportional representation. The history curriculum helps pupils to understand the basis on which laws are made and applied in the United Kingdom through, for example, learning how the government operates in England as well as how the devolved governments of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales operate independently but in tandem with the government in Westminster.

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

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

## Safeguarding

56. Leaders ensure that the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy DSLs in both schools are appropriately trained and know how to make timely referrals to the local authority, children services and the police. There is a suitably trained safeguarding leader for children in the early years.
57. Staff are trained to understand safeguarding procedures which are robustly managed. Accurate records are kept of any safeguarding actions taken, including detailed notes and records of outcomes. The safeguarding teams take care to closely monitor any vulnerable pupils. Weekly review meetings take place between senior leaders from both schools to ensure that key staff are kept well informed.
58. All staff are well briefed and kept up to date with changes in safeguarding policies and procedures. Leaders and governors ensure that they follow and implement current statutory guidance.
59. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online, through assemblies, tutor time and PSHE lessons. The information technology department has suitable systems in place to filter and monitor the use of technology to ensure that pupils work in a safe online environment.
60. Pupils know how to report any worries or concerns that may arise in and outside of school. They have a wide range of adults in school to whom they can speak if they need to and use electronic reporting systems to alert staff of any concerns or worries.
61. Members of the governing body with safeguarding expertise have an overview of safeguarding policy and procedures. In the event of a safeguarding incident, leaders and governors jointly undertake a review and make changes to any protocols as necessary. An annual safeguarding report is shared with the local authority and is reviewed by the nominated safeguarding governor who reports back to the full governing body.
62. All senior managers are trained in safer recruitment procedures, including governors who may be involved in staff appointments. A suitable and accurate single central record of appointments (SCR) is in place, which is subject to spot checks by senior leaders and nominated governors to ensure that it meets statutory requirements.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

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| <b>School</b>                          | The Queen's School   |
| <b>Department for Education number</b> | 896/6020   |
| <b>Registered charity number</b>       | 525935   |
| <b>Address</b>                         | The Queen's School<br>City Walls<br>Chester<br>CH1 2NN                   |
| <b>Phone number</b>                    | 01244 312078   |
| <b>Email address</b>                   | secretary@thequeensschool.co.uk  |
| <b>Website</b>                         | <a href="http://www.thequeensschool.co.uk">www.thequeensschool.co.uk</a> |
| <b>Proprietor</b>                      | The Queen's School Chester   |
| <b>Chair</b>                           | Mrs Kirsty Jean Whiteley   |
| <b>Headteacher</b>                     | Mrs Joanne Keville   |
| <b>Age range</b>                       | 4 to 18  |
| <b>Number of pupils</b>                | 384  |
| <b>Date of previous inspection</b>     | 15 to 18 March 2022  |

## Information about the school

64. The Queen's School is a selective, independent day school for female pupils, founded in 1878. It is a charitable trust with oversight provided by the governing body. The school is located on two sites within the city of Chester, with a senior school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years, and a lower school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years located just under a mile away from the senior school.
65. The early years provision operates as part of the lower school and consists of one Reception class.
66. The school has identified 110 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.
67. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 23 pupils.
68. The school states its aim is to educate and empower more young women to lead and shape the world in which they live, by encouraging a global mindset and a lifelong love of learning. This vision is underpinned by the Queen's School pillars to think independently, collaborate confidently and aspire globally.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

25 to 27 March 2025

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

70. 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 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.

71. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)