



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION

MERCHANT TAYLORS' PREP SCHOOL



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Merchant Taylors' Prep School		
DfE number	919/6225		
Registered charity number	1063740		
Address	Merchant Taylors' Prep School Moor Farm Sandy Lodge Road Rickmansworth Hertfordshire WD3 1LW		
Telephone number	01923 825648		
Email address	office@mtpn.org.uk		
Headteacher	Dr Karen McNerney		
Chairman of governors	Mr Christopher Hare		
Age range	3 to 13		
Number of pupils	351		
	EYFS	74	Juniors 223
	Seniors	54	
Inspection dates	12 to 13 Oct 2016		

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and grade descriptors from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 in the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Both Ofsted and ISI inspect and report on the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, they apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chairman of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended tutor time. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Paul Spillane	Reporting inspector
Mrs Elizabeth King	Team inspector (Former head, HMC school)
Mr Patrick Wenham	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)
Mr Richard Yeates	Team inspector (Headmaster, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Merchant Taylors' Preparatory School is an independent day school for boys aged between 3 and 13 years. It was founded in 1910 by Francis Terry, originally as Northwood Preparatory School and familiarly known as 'Terry's'. In 1955 the school became a charitable trust. It moved to its present site at Moor Farm in 1982. The school merged with Merchant Taylors' School in October 2015, when it adopted its present name. The governing structure has changed since the merger; the governors of Merchant Taylors' School also govern Merchant Taylors' Prep School, with a committee of governors exercising direct oversight of the prep school.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to provide a Christian caring environment in which every pupil is valued for himself and provided the opportunity of full development, and also where pupils, teachers and governors alike all strive for excellence.

About the pupils

- 1.3 The pupils reflect the diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds of the locality. Two pupils have education, health and care plans. Eighteen pupils are identified as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), mostly for dyslexia, fifteen of whom receive specialist learning support. Eleven pupils have English as an additional language (EAL), one receives extra support. The more able pupils and those with particular talents follow a modified curriculum when it is appropriate for them to do so.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. Years 1 and 2, and the Nursery and Reception classes are collectively known as the pre-prep department.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.5 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in November 2010. The recommendations from that inspection were:
- Enhance the effectiveness of monitoring the quality of teaching and learning by increasing middle leaders' involvement, promptly following up action plans and sharing best practice, and by implementing a unified system to track and set targets for the pupils' progress.
 - Improve informal links and activity sharing between the Nursery and Reception classes.

2. KEY FINDINGS

2.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- The pupils' positive attitude to all that they undertake enables them to make the most of their ability.
- The outstanding levels of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding strongly reflect the impact of the enthusiastic and stimulating teaching.
- Pupils build rapidly on prior attainment, partly due to the school's use of systematic monitoring of individual pupils' performance and progress.
- Pupils do not always benefit from the highest quality of marking as it is inconsistent across subjects.

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

- The pupils successfully develop increasing self-awareness and independence of mind.
- High levels of self-esteem enable pupils to relish challenges and opportunities.
- Pupils deal confidently and co-operatively with staff and one another.
- Pupils behave exceptionally well, displaying a genuine concern and respect for others.
- Not all resources are used to the full to enhance pupils' spiritual awareness.

Recommendations

2.3 In the context of the already excellent outcomes for pupils overall, the school is nonetheless advised to make the following improvements:

- Achieve an equally high standard of marking across all subjects.
- Use individual pupils' experience and knowledge as a resource to enhance spiritual awareness in the school community.

3. THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 3.1 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.2 The school fully meets its aims to provide its pupils with the opportunity for full development, and in which pupils, teachers and governors alike strive for excellence. An atmosphere of lively endeavour permeates school life and is reflected in high achievement across a wide range of academic and other disciplines.
- 3.3 Pupils' attainment is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. This includes the children in the EYFS, all of whom achieve a good level of development by the time they enter Year 1. The school does not enter pupils for National Curriculum tests. Consequently, the pupils' attainment by the end of Year 6 cannot be measured in relation to average performance in national tests. On the evidence available, it is judged to be excellent in relation to national age-related expectations. Throughout the school and in all subjects, academic attainment was found to be considerably in advance of that expected at the relevant age levels and stages of development. Furthermore all of those leaving from Year 8 gain places to senior schools with demanding entrance requirements, and a consistently substantial proportion are awarded academic entrance scholarships. This level of attainment, as judged, indicates that pupils also achieve a high rate of progress in relation to pupils of similar ability. Less able pupils and those with EAL or SEND make excellent progress as they are extremely well supported both in class and when receiving specialist help. More able pupils and those with particular talents achieve in line with their potential as the result of the challenge they receive in lessons through enrichment and extension tasks. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire, the overwhelming majority of pupils agreed that they are making good academic progress.
- 3.4 A small minority of pupils' questionnaire responses indicated that they feel they do not know how well they are doing in their subjects. Inspection evidence displays that pupils are clear about their level of performance and progress through targets they are set, regular assessments and often excellent written feedback from staff in individual subjects.
- 3.5 Pupils achieve high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of the academic curriculum. This is drawn from the strong subject knowledge and expertise shown in the teaching. Pupils are exceptionally articulate and display mature analytical skills. In class, they respond reflectively with thought-provoking answers to the skilful questioning by staff. Those with SEND gain confidence and make consequently good academic improvement as a result of well-planned encouragement to express themselves orally. Pupils' written work is of a high standard and on the whole is neatly presented, illustrative of pride and care. Pupils make rapid improvements in response to the range of regular and helpful marking, but the marking of work in some subjects offers less useful advice for improvement. They develop excellent reading skills. The programme used to accelerate reading has led to a greater number of avid readers, with four times more library book withdrawals last year than in the previous one. Pupils rise enthusiastically to the 'millionaire' challenge, with increasing rewards earned whenever a pupil reads one million words. They display excellent levels of numeracy in response to improved resources, including a specific mathematics scheme and systematic improvements to the tracking of progress. Pupils' secure competence in information and communication technology (ICT) is due to the benefits that they gain from continuity of teaching and careful monitoring of their progress. Their typing proficiency in ICT is deployed across the curriculum and pupils enjoy the enrichment of ICT-related activities such as music technology.

- 3.6 Pupils' study skills are of a high order. The design of the house system brings together pupils from different age groups in tutor time. Groups of pupils were observed discussing the values and qualities promoted by the school, displaying higher-order thinking skills and emotional intelligence when asked to prioritise certain values and qualities as applied to a specific set of circumstances. Pupils attend respectfully to others' points of view and demonstrate the ability to engage in animated and mature debate.
- 3.7 In their pre-inspection questionnaire responses, a very small minority of parents expressed that the school does not provide a good choice of extra-curricular activities. Inspection evidence does not support this view. Pupils achieve highly in the wide range of extra-curricular activities. The range includes Greek, non-contact boxing, chess, music technology, the quiz club and the debating society, which affords the pupils wide scope to develop their aptitudes and talents. Pupils achieve notable success in speech and drama examinations, sports and in national competitions in science, mathematics and general knowledge. Artwork of a high standard is widely displayed in the school and pupils report that they greatly enjoy performing in concerts, plays and musicals. Through this provision of opportunities and the staff's enthusiastic support and coaching, pupils achieve fulfilment and gain great pleasure.
- 3.8 Throughout the school, pupils display an excellent attitude to learning which is in fulfilment of the school's aims. The school's values are prominently displayed and productively applied in lessons, where pupils acquire and demonstrate learning skills of a high order. Pupils' ambitious approach to their studies is sparked in part by their keenness to earn house points for good work and also by teaching methods which foster independence of mind and a sense of curiosity. In science for instance, facts are viewed not only as a foundation for experiment and making things but also for intellectual enquiry, and in geography pupils responded perceptively to the invitation to consider how certain famous features of the natural world earned their particular significance.
- 3.9 Pupils in class apply themselves with evident enjoyment, keen to do well and eager to be challenged. Enthusiastic participants in their lessons, they are responsive, and readily offer answers and opinions articulately and confidently. They work conscientiously, displaying determination and perseverance. In pairs or groups, pupils co-operate extremely well and are conscious of the value of working together towards common goals. Pupils participate in extra-curricular activities in a similarly spirited way.
- 3.10 Pupils' high standard of achievements reflects the school's response to both of the recommendations of the previous inspection. The Nursery and Reception classes are now accommodated together in a building on the Merchant Taylors' School site which has a shared resource area, and all aspects of their work and activities are closely linked. In Years 1 to 8, academic co-ordination by staff is of a high order; excellent procedures have been established by the school's leadership and management for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress and for setting targets for improvement and achievement.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 4.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 4.2 The school is a vibrant and close-knit community that fully reflects its aim to be a Christian, caring community. Pupils say that they come happily to school each day, and display evident enthusiasm and a joy of life. The school successfully nurtures their growth in confidence and self-worth. Pupils become increasingly self-aware as they advance up the school, developing a clear understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance, and appreciating the importance of personal values and codes of behaviour.
- 4.3 Pupils conduct themselves sensibly and courteously around the school. Their classroom behaviour is exemplary, affording them every opportunity for productive study. This concurs with the view of the vast majority of the parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire, who confirmed that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Pupils are personable and self-assured with one another and in the company of adults; they are excellent ambassadors for their school.
- 4.4 Pupils successfully learn to co-operate and to work effectively as team members. In class, on the games field, in clubs and around the school generally, they demonstrate thoughtfulness and respect in the high quality of their collaboration. In interview, all pupils spoke warmly of the school's very friendly community in which pupils across the age groups get on very well with one another. Older pupils willingly help younger ones through undertaking the role of mentor or 'study buddy'. From an early age, pupils recognise the importance of fair play and obeying rules, and they develop a strong moral sense of right and wrong. They come to understand and respect the system of laws, and in the debating society the older pupils discuss subjects such as whether it is ever right to commit a crime.
- 4.5 Pupils gain strong spiritual enrichment from a wealth of sources such as the creative and performing arts, and the presentation of many displays in the school buildings. Visiting speakers, most recently a Paralympian, provide inspiration, pupils reported that they found the school's Remembrance Day ceremony spiritually uplifting. The woodland classroom is a well-used resource from the Nursery upwards, and pupils are excited by their exploration of the natural world as it changes from season to season. The vast majority of pupils' questionnaire responses acknowledged that the school encourages them to respect other people. Almost all of the parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Pupils co-exist entirely harmoniously, and they relish the cultural diversity that having peers from many different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds brings. Pupils' own experiences and knowledge are not always used to the full as a resource for promoting deeper spiritual and cultural understanding.

- 4.6 Pupils benefit from the opportunities provided for all age groups to contribute to others, the school and the community. For example, all members of Year 2 undertake work as 'monitors' and lead an assembly. Formal roles are available to all in Year 8, which include librarianship, sports captaincy, membership of the school council, mentoring and acting as school ambassadors. Both whole-school and house-based charitable ventures awaken pupils to issues in the wider world and develop their understanding of and compassion for people much less fortunate than themselves.
- 4.7 Throughout the school, pupils respond excellently to the encouragement to think for themselves and to take initiatives. Philosophy is a taught subject in Years 1 to 4. A fantasy football league, in aid of charity, is the result of a pupil initiative. Pupils appreciate the fact that proposals made in the school council actually lead to changes and improvements, such as additional sports equipment and themed lunch menus. They recognise and appreciate that as they move up the school, they receive greater independence and freedom to make decisions. Pupils develop broader thinking skills; in Latin the 'hot chilli challenge' promotes pupils' learning of decision-making as they choose work of a specific level of difficulty.
- 4.8 Encouraged and supported by teachers and coaches, pupils develop resilience and perseverance. The school promotes a culture of controlled risk-taking and learning from mistakes. Pupils are self-critical, self-evaluative and confident to undertake challenges. Their resilience is strong, as demonstrated by their approach to such challenges which lives up to the school's published exhortation: 'it's not 'I can't do it', but 'I can't do it yet.'
- 4.9 All of those pupils who responded to the questionnaire stated that they understand how to keep safe online. Pupils in interview confirmed that they had been regularly educated in the dangers of social media, and they sign a declaration that they will use ICT responsibly. Pupils state that they feel safe at the school and that they know what to do if they need help or advice, or if one of their peers is in difficulty or distress. They understand the importance of healthy eating and frequent exercise. Pupils make nutritious and appropriate choices from the plentiful lunches. They are very well looked after if they are injured or unwell.
- 4.10 In their responses to the questionnaire, all of the parents commended the quality of maintenance of the premises. The site's royal history and architectural distinctiveness mean much to the pupils, contributing significantly to their great pride in their school and lending a further spiritual benefit. When they leave the school, the pupils are extremely well prepared for the responsibilities, opportunities and experiences of the next chapter in their lives.