

# School inspection report

14 to 16 May 2024

## **Merchant Taylors' Prep School**

Sandy Lodge Road

Rickmansworth

Hertfordshire

WD3 1LW

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 promote the school's values and aims effectively so that they are well understood by pupils and staff. A culture of respect prevails, and pupils are confident that their individual achievements and ideas are valued. Leaders engage with pupils, staff and parents in seeking ways to improve the school. They implement new initiatives successfully and pupils and staff feel their views have been taken into account. Pupils feel confident that their education is preparing them for their adult lives. They enjoy their learning and take pride in overcoming challenges and improving their work.
2. Leaders undertake ongoing review of the quality of teaching and learning in the school. They promote consistently high-quality teaching through a structured and focused programme of training and monitoring of all staff. Leaders have reviewed and strengthened the means by which teachers provide feedback for pupils, leading to an improvement in teacher practice. Pupils have a thorough understanding of the next steps in their learning and of the importance of using the feedback they are given. Pupil progress is accelerated and their achievements are enhanced by this process, which is a significant strength of the school.
3. Leaders have identified effective characteristics of learning, known as learning dispositions, which help pupils to understand the importance of how they learn and interact with others. These permeate school life and are deeply understood by pupils. This is because staff identify dispositions which are relevant to each lesson and activity and praise pupils when they are demonstrated. Pupils are motivated and successful in their learning and social interactions. They understand that these ways of learning and communicating enable them to make good progress and engage positively with others.
4. Leaders support pupils' pastoral wellbeing effectively and are particularly conscious of the importance of supporting pupils' mental health. Leaders and staff contribute to pupils' mental wellbeing through a range of strategies and activities so that pupils understand how to manage this for themselves. As a result, pupils are aware of the significance of maintaining good mental health.
5. Leaders implement suitable procedures to ensure pupils' safety on the school premises. Checks of the school buildings and site are undertaken regularly. However, these have not always been sufficiently rigorous to identify all actions required. A maintenance issue which had not been identified by school staff was rectified during the inspection.
6. Pupils are prepared well for their adult lives. They learn to appreciate the distinctive and diverse features and characteristics of modern British society alongside an understanding of how people live in other countries. Pupils are empathetic towards people with different beliefs and attributes within a learning environment where tolerance and respect are promoted on a daily basis.
7. Pupils' safeguarding is promoted by policies and procedures which are well understood and followed by adults throughout the school. Suitable arrangements are in place to enable pupils to talk to adults in school and to provide appropriate support when concerns are raised.

## 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:

- ensure that detailed assessments of the site are carried out regularly so that required actions are identified and addressed in a timely manner.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders regularly evaluate the success of the school in achieving its aims. They reflect on current practice and identify means of improving provision in key aspects of school life. Leaders work closely with staff, who are encouraged to share ideas about new initiatives. Leaders take account of these and of pupils' views when planning next steps for the school so that they bring about demonstrable improvements in pupils' academic achievements and emotional wellbeing.
9. In line with the school aim to foster compassion, leaders have identified a need to extend provision in relation to pupils' emotional wellbeing through the allocation of additional resource in the senior leadership team. Staff have engaged in training, initiated by both leaders and individuals, to support pupils in maintaining good mental health. These measures have increased pupils' awareness of the importance of their own mental wellbeing and has equipped them with strategies through which to support themselves.
10. The school aims to encourage adults and pupils alike to strive for excellence. In pursuit of this aim, leaders have sourced and implemented high-quality training for teachers which emphasises the importance of engagement, challenge and feedback. This has been complemented by a recent initiative to improve feedback for pupils, which has had a highly beneficial and demonstrable impact on pupils' progress and achievement.
11. Leaders have identified a set of values and characteristics that they consider to be essential for pupils' success, known within the school as learning dispositions. Staff understand their role in nurturing these attributes, which include curiosity, independence and imagination. They identify these mindfully in their lessons and interactions with pupils so that they have become a common language which everyone in the school community understands.
12. Governors know the school well. They provide appropriate challenge and support to leaders. They ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge they need to fulfil their roles effectively. Governors visit the school regularly, focusing on different aspects of school life each time. They check that leaders implement the school's policies and procedures effectively and ensure that the school meets its statutory obligations.
13. Leaders have the skills and knowledge needed to identify and manage risks to pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing. They undertake regular review of provision and practice so as to identify risks which may be harder to identify. Leaders take a systematic approach to the mitigation of risks, including those relating to specific context and pupil safeguarding needs.
14. Leaders ensure the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan has been drawn up and implemented to enable pupils with different needs to access the school's physical and learning environments. Leaders monitor teaching to ensure that it does not discriminate. They promote a learning environment characterised by respect for people with different learning needs.
15. Leaders work alongside and consult external agencies to support pupils' academic and safeguarding needs.
16. A suitable procedure is in place to respond to parents' concerns and complaints. These are commonly resolved at an early stage. Formal complaints, including those which proceed to a panel

hearing, are managed in line with the school's stated procedures. Suitably detailed records are kept of both formal complaints and lower-level concerns.

17. Information about the school's policies and procedures is provided to current and prospective parents on the school website. Information about those which are specific to the early years setting is shared with parents and carers. Parents receive a comprehensive annual report about their children's progress and attainment. In the early years, leaders provide parents with regular information about their children's progress and attainment through an online platform.
18. Staff working in the early years are sufficient in number and are suitably qualified for their roles. Leaders meet regularly with each staff member to discuss the pupils for which they take responsibility alongside training needs and any safeguarding concerns.

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

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

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

20. Leaders have established programmes of study which provide wide-ranging opportunities for pupils to learn. Pupils of all ages and aptitudes make good progress, reaching high levels of attainment. They are quick to acquire new skills, knowledge and understanding and extend and consolidate these over time. Pupils have a deep understanding of their learning, speaking with confidence and assurance about their work. Pupils who are working at higher levels are challenged to apply their learning and use their initiative in identifying solutions to complex tasks.
21. Staff develop strategies and identify appropriate resources to support the individual needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Their attainment is monitored carefully and teaching methods are adapted in response to their changing needs so that they achieve and make progress alongside their peers.
22. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching through learning walks, looking at pupils' work and lesson observations. Staff assess pupils' achievements through observations in lessons and through formal assessments. Leaders and staff use this information to track pupils' progress and attainment. This helps them to identify the support necessary to meet pupils' individual needs. Teachers in the early years extend their planning so that it responds to pupils' progress and attainment in lessons, adapting their input as needed.
23. Children in the early years make good progress. They develop appropriate skills and knowledge, through an age-appropriate curriculum which promotes alongside the school's learning dispositions from the start. The curriculum is adapted in response to children's interests and needs. Teachers plan suitable activities for children to acquire new knowledge through the development and use of new skills in key curriculum areas. These are adapted in response to children's progress and attainment in lessons.
24. Staff in the early years help children to develop confident literacy skills. They provide frequent opportunities for children to speak with and listen to adults and each other. Staff introduce children to complex vocabulary and encourage them to use more advanced words in their conversations. Reading is taught effectively, and children soon learn to read and write simple sentences. Children use their communication and social skills to extend their knowledge of stories and the world around them through collaborative investigations and conversation with the adults in the setting. They develop confidence with numbers alongside fine motor skills when matching bricks.
25. Teachers throughout the school have high levels of knowledge about their subjects and make effective use of a good range of resources. They are reflective in their approach, continually seeking ways to improve their practice. Teachers promote learning dispositions such as wisdom and concentration judiciously so that pupils understand their importance. They plan lessons well, taking pupils' prior learning and needs into account. Teachers manage behaviour well and use a variety of strategies which enable pupils to acquire new skills and knowledge and to make progress. They use skilful questioning to prompt pupils to think and find solutions for themselves. As a result, pupils are self-motivated and attentive in lessons. They talk with enthusiasm about their activities and achievements and about how they have improved their work.
26. Teachers provide high-quality feedback to pupils that is sharply focused on what they want pupils to learn and what their next steps should be. Pupils have a clear understanding of what they are

expected to achieve by completing the tasks and activities they are given. Teachers use highly nuanced comments and questions that help pupils make notably strong progress. Pupils take great care when making changes and additions to their work in response to the guidance provided. This enables them to build on prior learning quickly and attain high levels of proficiency.

27. Pupils acquire high levels of proficiency across the curriculum in response to the challenging curriculum and effective teaching. Older pupils are articulate and clear when expressing their thoughts. They use sophisticated writing techniques, relishing the challenge of setting a scene through inference rather than explanation. Pupils use their well-established skills in number work to tackle complex mathematical problems and calculations. They include matters such as dependent and independent variables when planning science investigations. Pupils consider different points of view and discuss serious issues in humanities and philosophy lessons, reflecting their mature comprehension and critical thinking skills. They acquire advanced knowledge of coding and programming in their computing lessons alongside an awareness of the potential benefits and dangers of new advances in technology.
28. The school provides a range of clubs and activities including sports, creative arts and computing. Pupils are keen to take advantage of these opportunities, which help them to follow their interests and develop their skills further. Pupils enjoy great success in their musical, dramatic and artistic endeavours, performing and creating at levels commonly expected of older pupils and regularly gaining scholarships to their senior schools in these subjects.

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

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



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

30. Pupils develop a mature understanding of their own strengths and relative weaknesses, understanding that they can use and improve these. They feel safe and supported in school, due to their positive and supportive relationships with staff. Leaders and staff help pupils to become self-confident by, for example, encouraging them to take risks in their learning without fear of failure. Teachers provide feedback that is consistently positive and constructive so that pupils understand they are being helped to learn rather than being criticised. Consequently, pupils take pride in their achievements and are motivated to explore new avenues in their work and leisure activities.
31. Pupils demonstrate a spiritual understanding of non-material aspects of life through their empathy for others. They place a high value on friendship, happiness, health and acceptance within the school and wider community in response to the promotion of compassion and consideration by adults throughout the school. Leaders and teachers encourage pupils to reflect on values such as respect and the need to care for others. Pupils appreciate the supportive culture of the school and the positive impact this has on their emotional wellbeing.
32. Leaders communicate the importance of respect for all individuals through discussion, assemblies and the curriculum. Pupils learn about the importance of maintaining healthy relationships through the well-considered relationships and sex education programme. This is delivered within the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, which is drawn up with close reference to pupils' needs and prior attainment. PSHE is taught well, enabling pupils to gain a mature understanding of their place in the world. Pupils appreciate their PSHE sessions, valuing their impact on their physical and social wellbeing. Pupils speak freely in these lessons, and throughout the day, knowing that their views and feelings are valued.
33. Pupils of all ages understand adults' expectations of their behaviour and the consequences which result if these are not met. Children in the early years develop their moral understanding through reflecting on their actions and words. Staff support children so that they learn to manage their feelings and treat those around them with kindness and compassion. Staff work closely with parents to support children when concerns arise and record such discussions appropriately. Pupils in the pre-prep learn about the importance of wise decision making, self-regulation and using kind words. Leaders implement the behaviour policy effectively so that concerns are dealt with swiftly and appropriately when they are reported. Bullying is rare and is managed in line with the school's policy.
34. Pupils learn about the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through the curriculum, assemblies and visiting speakers. They are supported in this through a range of physical activities and the availability of healthy options at lunch time. Physical education is delivered effectively by specialist teachers alongside a range of recreational activities. Pupils understand the importance of being active and of making healthy choices when choosing how to spend their free time.
35. Leaders recognise the potential pressures on pupils in their academic lives and have recently included a role on the leadership team with a focus on pupil wellbeing. This has raised both pupils' and staff's understanding of how pupils can be supported in maintaining positive mental health. Staff are trained in how to support pupils when anxieties arise, including through advice about how to manage a balance between their school work and relaxation time. Pupils recognise the

importance of this support and can readily identify key personnel in the school who are able to provide it.

36. Appropriate health and safety systems are in place, including those relating to fire prevention. Leaders implement systems and checks to confirm that the premises are well maintained and provide a suitable learning environment for pupils. Staff undertake regular surveys of the physical environment and grounds and address any issues identified swiftly and effectively. Leaders addressed a single concern relating to maintenance during the inspection visit which had not been identified prior to the visit.
37. Suitable arrangements are made for the delivery of first aid. Pupils' injuries are recorded accurately and parents are informed appropriately when accidents occur.
38. Adults working in the early years setting and on the main school site are suitably qualified. They are deployed in sufficient numbers and supervise pupils effectively. Leaders assign a key person to each child in the early years setting to help ensure their individual needs are met and maintain contact with their parents or carers.
39. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained as required and the local authority is informed of changes to the school roll, including during non-standard transition times when necessary.

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

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

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

41. Pupils are prepared well for their future lives. Pupils value the learning dispositions which relate to their interactions with others. Pupils of all ages recognise the benefits of collaboration in their lessons and activities. Children in the early years can explain what this means, having been praised for supporting their friends in both work and play. Older pupils work productively together, recognising the importance of listening to others and taking everyone's ideas into account.
42. Pupils understand that they have a responsibility toward others, whatever their needs and characteristics. They are confident and self-assured, knowing that they are valued and accepted by others. Pupils feel that there is no pressure to fit in, because leaders promote a culture of respect for others. This is modelled by adults throughout the school and actively reinforced through the curriculum within PSHE and religious studies lessons.
43. Children in the early years acquire an early understanding of others' cultures and faiths through planned activities and visits from parents. Older pupils gain knowledge and understanding of other faiths through religious studies lessons and assemblies. They appreciate that not everyone chooses to have a faith. They learn about, and take an interest in, other cultures through geography lessons, school events, assemblies and educational visits.
44. Pupils are highly motivated to contribute to the lives of others in school and the wider community. They support charities both locally and further afield. Pupils take the initiative to support new causes in their own way alongside events organised by the school. Pupils develop a sense of responsibility towards the natural world through their sessions in the woodland environment, the eco gardening club and geography lessons.
45. Children in the early years begin to acquire an understanding of right and wrong through leaders' promotion of fair rules, which are appropriate to their level of understanding. This is developed well as pupils move through the school. Older pupils relate their understanding to dispositions such as empathy, and readily take responsibility for their own behaviour. Pupils are taught about British laws and the justice system, enhanced by a recent visit from a judge. This helps pupils to develop a confident understanding of how the legal system works and the consequences of breaking the law.
46. Pupils develop a mature understanding of the benefits and nature of democracy. They know what it means and how it is different from other systems of governance. Pupils value the opportunity to engage in the democratic process when they vote for their peers to take up roles in the school. Political matters are presented impartially and pupils are given plentiful opportunities to discuss current affairs. As a result, pupils learn to be discerning and develop a mature understanding of such issues. Prefects are allocated positions of meaningful responsibility, and pupils of different ages represent their peers on the school and eco councils. Pupils are confident that their voices are heard by leaders and their ideas acted upon.
47. Pupils begin to develop their economic understanding through effective role play opportunities in the early years. As they move through the school they develop their ability to manage money through budgeting on school trips and the study of matters such as taxation and money management in PSHE lessons. Older pupils understand the importance of managing their money wisely alongside the mathematical understanding needed to do so.

48. Pupils are well prepared for each new stage in their education within the school and when moving to their senior schools. Transition arrangements within the school and with the associated senior school support pupils' confidence and progress. Pupils gain confidence prior to visiting and moving to their senior schools through their active participation in challenging and creative speech and drama lessons throughout their time at school.
49. Older pupils are well prepared for the world of work through a varied careers programme. This includes visits from past pupils and support in identifying personal strengths and aspirations for the future. Pupils value these opportunities, recognising their importance in preparing for their future lives.

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

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

## Safeguarding

51. Leaders implement suitable policies and procedures that ensure pupils are safeguarded effectively. Governors maintain effective oversight of safeguarding through regular visits, discussions with staff and an annual review of safeguarding policy and procedures.
52. Pupils have trusted adults to speak to in school. They are confident that they are listened to and their concerns addressed. Leaders identify and respond appropriately to concerns about pupils' mental wellbeing. Pupils who have SEND are supported through staff's recognition of and response to their specific safeguarding needs and potential vulnerabilities.
53. Staff, leaders and governors receive suitable safeguarding training. Their knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities is strengthened through regular updates and checks on their understanding by the school's safeguarding leaders. Leaders have provided training for staff so that they are confident when recording concerns on the school's information management system.
54. Staff have a secure understanding of the staff code of conduct and the need to report concerns about the behaviour of adults in the school, should any arise. Leaders liaise with external agencies about these concerns, as required.
55. Pupils receive detailed guidance in PSHE and computing lessons about the ways in which they may need to consider and manage risks in their lives. As a result, they have a clear understanding of how to stay safe, including online. Governors maintain a suitable system for filtering and monitoring pupils' use of the internet. Attempted breaches are quickly identified and reported to leaders. Pupils understand the important role this plays in keeping them safe. A suitable policy limiting the use of devices in the early years setting is implemented and understood by staff.
56. Staff understand their roles and responsibilities in safeguarding pupils. They report any concerns about pupils promptly, as required by the school's policy. Records are detailed and are stored securely and systematically. Leaders take prompt action in response to concerns raised, and work collaboratively with external agencies and parents when appropriate.
57. Suitable arrangements are in place to manage allegations of child-on-child abuse. The school has a suitable strategy to identify and mitigate risks from radicalisation. Staff understand specific risks relating to this within the context of the school and world events.
58. Leaders carry out the necessary checks before a person begins work at the school. They document these accurately in the school's single central record of appointments.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Merchant Taylors' Prep School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	919/6225
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1063740
<b>Address</b>	Merchant Taylors' Prep School Moor Farm Sandy Lodge Road Rickmansworth Hertfordshire WD3 1LW
<b>Phone number</b>	01923 825648
<b>Email address</b>	office@mtpn.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.mtpn.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Merchant Taylors' Educational Trust
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Duncan Eggar
<b>Headteacher</b>	Dr Karen McNerney
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	372
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	6 to 7 November 2019

## Information about the school

60. Merchant Taylors' Prep School is an independent day school registered for male pupils in Rickmansworth, Hertfordshire. The school is a charitable trust, managed by a board of governors which also has oversight of Merchant Taylors' School. The school consists of the pre-prep department, for pupils aged 3 to 7 years, and the prep department, for those aged 7 to 13 years.
61. There are 75 children in the early years, in two Nursery classes and two Reception classes. The early years classes are accommodated on the site of Merchant Taylors' School. The setting has been granted exemption from the learning and development requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework.
62. The school has identified 32 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. No pupils speak English as an additional language.
64. The school states its aims are to provide a caring environment in which all pupils are valued and encouraged to develop compassion. It seeks to provide opportunities for its pupils to develop new skills and interests and to enable them to strive for excellence.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

14 to 16 May 2024

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

66. 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 another governor
- 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.

67. 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)**.

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