

School inspection report

20 to 22 February 2024

Queen Margaret's School

Escrick Park

York

North Yorkshire

YO19 6EU

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 fulfil their duties and have secure knowledge, skills and understanding of these. Accordingly, they ensure that the school fulfils the independent school standards regulations. Leaders ensure that pupils make good progress and become confident and well prepared for their next steps in life, as the school's vision states. Pupils are successful academically, with nearly all proceeding to higher education.
2. The school has suitable arrangements for the accommodation and welfare of boarding pupils. The boarding environment is comfortable and welcoming.
3. The school's culture is one of respect, responsibility and commitment. Pupils behave well. They are highly attentive and keen to learn. The school is inclusive, providing support and encouragement to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or English as an additional language (EAL), to ensure that they achieve on a par with their peers.
4. Staff pay close attention to pupils of all abilities and needs in their learning and encourage pupils to make the most of opportunities offered in school to develop their individual interests and talents to the full. This is reflected in pupils' evident happiness, progress and success. School leaders actively listen to pupils' views and encourage their initiatives to promote inclusion further. Skilled teachers use a suitable and effective range of methods and resources to promote pupils' progress.
5. The school has effective procedures for the prevention of bullying and the promotion of positive behaviour. The rewards system recognises individual acts of kindness and consideration for others, strengthening the sense of community and shared responsibility. Leaders keep careful records of any negative behaviour.
6. The suitable curriculum covers all the required areas of learning. The programmes for careers guidance, for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and for relationships and sex education (RSE) are not reviewed sufficiently to ensure that their content remains relevant to pupils' changing needs.
7. School leaders and governors accord a high priority to safeguarding pupils and promoting their wellbeing. The school implements a suitable written policy and procedures for safeguarding that reflect current statutory guidance effectively. Staff are appropriately trained and understand their duty of care. The school conducts all the safer recruitment checks that are required on staff appointments. However, recent staff files are not organised well enough to show evidence of these clearly.
8. The school has in place all the written policies required by the regulations and implements these effectively. There is an appropriate cycle and procedures for their review. Health and safety are managed effectively overall, and records carefully kept. Typically, safety checks on water safety are regularly carried out, but following recent changes in staffing at senior level, the risk assessment for legionella had been missed. This oversight was rectified during the inspection.
9. Governors monitor and evaluate the work of the school effectively and draw up appropriate plans for the future, with due consideration of any risks. Leaders are highly self-evaluative.

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 the evidence of safer recruitment checks is retained in an organised manner in staff files
- improve the oversight of health and safety records to ensure that no measures get overlooked
- review the programmes for careers guidance, PSHE and RSE to ensure that they remain relevant to pupils' needs as these evolve.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The school has in place all the written policies required by the regulations and leaders implement these effectively. Governors and leaders have an appropriate cycle and procedures for their review. Leaders at all levels work cohesively towards furthering the school's stated aims, values and plans.
11. Strategic planning, with clear targets, enables leaders to prioritise the areas for school improvement. Whole-school planning is supported by tactical plans in each area of school life. These are based on effective self-evaluation that includes consulting with parents, pupils and staff.
12. School leaders keep well informed of pupils' and parents' views, taking them into account when making decisions on the curriculum, such as the introduction of computer science. Pupil input led to the creation of a new, quiet study facility for older pupils, '*The 2022 room*', much appreciated by sixth-form pupils.
13. Parents are provided with the information required, though an informative website, a regular newsletter and written reports on pupils' progress. The school has suitable procedures for the management of any complaints.
14. Governors provide leaders with effective challenge and support, as a 'critical friend', maintaining supportive oversight of provision through various committees. Close contact and links between the governing body and senior leaders outside of formal scheduled meetings help to ensure that governors understand and know the school well and monitor its work effectively.
15. Health and safety is managed effectively overall and appropriate records kept. Leaders consider risk carefully, such as for school trips and visits, and for the school activities programme, and draw up suitable actions to mitigate these. Risk assessment is systematic and normally timely. The school tests water regularly but had overlooked updating the risk assessment for legionella. A date for this was booked in by the end of the inspection. Similarly, school files with evidence supporting staff recruitment checks had become disorganised because of recent gaps in staffing at a senior level. All the checks had been completed.
16. The school meets its requirements under equality legislation. It has a suitable plan to facilitate access for any pupils who have disabilities and appropriate provision for pupils who have SEND. These detail reasonable adjustments made for them.
17. Leaders provide a suitable curriculum that meets the needs of the pupils. They ensure that teachers do not express partisan views in subject delivery, and that the school promotes values, such as democracy, liberty and freedom of speech, alongside an understanding and appreciation of other cultures and beliefs. There are appropriate programmes for RSE, PSHE and for careers, suitable for the age range and needs of the pupils. Review of these programmes is now underway to ensure their continued relevance and suitability.
18. Leaders work closely with other agencies and partners in North Yorkshire and further afield to promote and safeguard the wellbeing of the pupils. The school's records show the benefit of regular and timely sharing of information across agencies, giving the school a fuller picture of individual pupils and relevant local circumstances.

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. The curriculum fosters pupils' personal skills and characteristics, such as problem-solving skills, organisation and self-esteem. An extensive programme of co-curricular enrichment, especially in sport and music, reflects leaders' emphasis on leisure pursuits to help promote good mental health and wellbeing. In participating, pupils grow in confidence and in understanding of the importance of effective teamwork and the values of commitment and perseverance.
21. All pupils learn both French and Spanish, together with Latin, in the younger age range and acquire early facility in these at an elementary level, with the opportunity to continue to improve to GCSE and A level.
22. Pupils are competent in the use of information and communication technology (ICT), applying their skills routinely in other subjects, such as datalogging for science. Following requests from pupils and parents, leaders introduced an optional GCSE course in computer science. This allows pupils to apply their ICT skills in greater depth.
23. Pupils develop their numeracy skills systematically and apply these effectively when required in other subjects, for example in science lessons. Pupils are encouraged to spot patterns and apply their prior learning to solving new problems. Regular assessment and topic reviews in mathematics allow pupils to work at their own pace and regularly consolidate their learning.
24. The priority given to inclusion and equity is central to the school's work and underpins pupils' good progress. The leader of provision for pupils who have SEND works closely with subject leaders to check that teaching methods and resources match individual needs. Support is delivered based on coaching principles, helping pupils to discover for themselves how to organise their first and next steps. Pupils learn to stand back and evaluate a situation, analyse what needs to change, articulate their needs and monitor their progress. Older pupils who have SEND comment that this is helpful in approaching life more generally, for example in managing personal relationships.
25. Pupils who have SEND flourish due to their trust in the staff who support and teach them, and the well-organised support they receive. A 'can-do' approach underpins their confidence to try, and to persevere. Leaders have embarked on a review of how best to integrate education and health care plans, to give a more cohesive view of how best to meet a pupil's individual needs, as both aspects overlap.
26. Pupils who have EAL are well integrated into school life. They quickly make good progress in spoken English. Pupils value this as a helpful skill for future employment. Pupils who have EAL are prepared effectively for relevant external examinations, to enhance their next steps. Pupils who have EAL achieve on a par with their peers.
27. Pupils throughout the school appreciate the support staff give to help them balance their workload, for example through subject clinics. Teachers know their pupils well and tailor suitable support. Pupils benefit from the encouragement provided by a personal tutor as mentor.
28. The school emphasises literacy, especially the development of oral and written skills in English, through constant reinforcement of vocabulary and idiom, and suitable levels of challenge. The English department and EAL departments complement one another, with for example subject and

topic-related vocabulary lists, and discrete literacy skills practice. This ensures that pupils who have EAL and pupils for whom English is their first language progress well.

29. Teachers use suitable resources, including clips from videos and the internet, to engage pupils and promote enjoyment in learning. Lessons are planned well to meet pupils' needs. Teachers draw on a range of methods to support learning, including effective questioning, and a careful balance of group work and individual effort. This was typically seen in a GCSE geography lesson where pupils were critically self-assessing each group's research work on the rainforest. Pupils show positive attitudes to learning, perseverance and interest. Working effectively in pairs and in groups promotes pupils' social development.
30. Pupils are prepared for GCSE and A-level examinations. Leaders track pupils' progress closely, using this information to ensure they pitch their lessons at the right level and can intervene to help. Pupils know how to improve their work, as leaders have focused successfully on this. Teachers encourage pupils to self-assess, developing self-awareness and independence.
31. Many pupils are successful academically. Most proceed to university, including those with competitive entry requirements. All groups of pupils make good progress.

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. Leaders prioritise the care and support of pupils, including the promotion of good mental health. They provide a health and wellbeing centre staffed by nurses and a counselling service.
34. Leaders focus on sport and the arts to help develop pupils' good mental health. Boarders enjoy the ample recreational opportunities on and off site. Through participation in activities, such as squash, fitness and swimming pupils acquire productive habits of healthy exercise and perseverance that strengthen their emotional wellbeing. Participation in music and arts activities develops pupils' range of leisure pursuits.
35. Pupils build positive relationships with others, as seen in staff and pupils rehearsing together in band practices. Mutual respect between staff and pupils develops pupils' high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. This creates a calm, happy atmosphere in school, where friendships blossom across different pupil groups. This promotes boarders' successful personal development, as they feel at home and play a full part in their school community life, as participants or leaders of clubs, for example.
36. Pupils enjoy learning. In creative subjects older pupils use imagination and express their emotions, producing work of a high standard. For example, in fine art sixth-form pupils chose spiritual topics, such as 'love', to focus on. They show insight in exploring the meaning of teddy bears to their owners, displayed with acrylic watercolours. In photography pupils demonstrate to others their appreciation of the effect on emotions of the use of light and atmosphere in storytelling, using a 300-slide research project presentation. The school's Anglican tradition promotes pupils' spiritual awareness further through attendance at chapel. Pupils develop their understanding of diverse religions in their religious education lessons.
37. Boarding accommodation is clean, comfortable and well maintained. Pupils easily communicate with home. Boarders in Year 13 have attractive, individual studio accommodation, where they organise their own laundry and prepare meals. This semi-independence helps them to prepare for university life.
38. A well-planned induction programme helps pupils new to the school, including boarders and pupils with EAL, develop confidence in their new environment and settle in quickly. Pupils are appropriately supervised and access suitable medical facilities if ill or injured. Boarders are registered with medical and dental practitioners. Pupils have balanced, nutritious food suitable for all dietary needs, and leaders actively consider their views on this.
39. The behaviour policy is implemented effectively. Serious sanctions, such as for vaping, are rarely needed as positive behaviour is the norm. Pupils receive recognition for the many instances of particularly appreciated behaviour through '*goodwill*' and '*commendation*' marks. Staff keep suitable records on electronic systems, allowing senior leaders an overview and to see where further support is required. Parents are involved where necessary.
40. Leaders know where behaviour could sometimes be better. The merging of two boarding houses to one for Forms I to IV (Year 7 to Year 10) has led to a busier house. Leaders are supporting younger

pupils to understand better the impact of immature behaviour on others and are considering how best to organise age ranges in future.

41. The content of the programmes for PSHE and RSE is appropriate for the pupils' age range. For example, the RSE programme includes helpful information on understanding risky behaviours and on sexual consent. Pupils' understanding and progress in RSE are regularly checked informally, through discussion and occasional quizzes. This provides adequate, but not developed, information for leaders to inform their planning to meet pupils' needs. Leaders have begun a review of these programmes to ensure their continuing relevance as pupils' needs evolve, together with a more effective method of assessment.
42. Classrooms are airy and well equipped, with suitable lighting and acoustics. Typically, checks related to health and safety are conducted regularly and records maintained well. Changes in staffing had led to a delay in updating the risk assessment for legionella, but this was rectified during the inspection.

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

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

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

44. The curriculum actively promotes pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural and social development, developing their understanding and respect for British values. Through the study of English literature, history and geography and through the taught PSHE programme, pupils increase their understanding of British laws and institutions. For example, they learn about influential historical figures and writers, elections, the monarchy and the role of the police. The school takes equal care to develop pupils' tolerance and understanding of others' background and cultures. The multinational context of boarding reinforces this as pupils get on well together and learn from one another.
45. Pupils demonstrate that they share the school's values of respect, responsibility and care and compassion in their attitudes to one another in lessons, in the boarding houses and around school. In discussions, pupils listen well to each other. Pupils assist one another in lessons without prompting and show patience. The tutor programme weaves in discussions about topics that further pupils' empathy, such as when younger pupils reflected on the virtue of kindness, having watched a powerful video '*When we dare to care*'.
46. Pupils pursue their interests and talents in a range of activities at lunchtime and after school. They work together effectively in groups, including in music lessons and band rehearsals, sport and games. These activities develop pupils' social skills and confidence. Pupils' and teachers' shared contribution to the school's aims and ethos are reflected in the culture of responsibility and commitment evident in school, and in the many shared activities. Relationships between pupils and teachers are warm and relaxed, with a sense of common purpose.
47. Pupils are proud of the inclusive feel of their school and have initiated a number of groups to reflect and raise awareness of individual difference, such as the *Beyond Allies* inclusion group and newsletters. This group seeks to further understand and find common ground amongst the different cultures and views in school, for example, about sexual orientation. Leaders encourage such pupil initiatives to promote inclusion. Leaders actively work against discrimination through the curriculum, for example when comparing perspectives in history topics and in literature.
48. Pupils see democracy and responsibility in action through their active participation in the house and tutor systems, and councils. Older pupils act as mentors to younger ones, typically commenting that they learn the necessity of patience and good listening skills. Though their open attitudes, boarders have built up a mutually supportive boarding community, but also get involved beyond the school gates, for example by singing in local care homes and by raising funds for charity. Pupils develop empathy through involvement in their local community, with the elderly or in the primary school. Pupils' cultural awareness deepens through trips and links with other countries, such as to Iceland in the half-term holiday, and through an active homestay link with a school in Chile.
49. Leaders promote the principles of right and wrong in school, for example, by using the rewards system and school assemblies to recognise where pupils have made the right choices in their actions. Pupils articulate their views confidently, showing a well-developed sense of fair play.
50. Older pupils are prepared well for moving on to university and future careers through a well-planned programme of careers guidance. This includes one-to-one guidance interviews for older pupils and

advice on UCAS preparation. Pupils are further prepared for their next steps through a life skills course including, for example, first aid, interview techniques and cooking a meal.

51. Pupils learn about budgeting in their PSHE and life skills courses, but would welcome further input on financial awareness. Leaders have begun a review to ensure that the careers and PSHE programmes stay relevant to all, given the changing nature of work and workplaces. This review is part way through extending the content to better meet the needs also of the younger pupils.

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

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

Safeguarding

53. Safeguarding procedures are effective. The school implements a suitable, up-to-date safeguarding policy that reflects current statutory guidance and provides helpful information to staff. Governors maintain appropriate oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements and review the policy and procedures annually.
54. The school conducts all the required safer recruitment checks on staff and records these on an appropriately maintained record. However, changes in staffing at senior levels have meant a hiatus in oversight of record-keeping, which is not typical of the school's normally careful approach. At the start of the inspection, staff files were not organised effectively enough to clearly show the evidence of the safer recruitment checks that the school makes on staff.
55. Staff are suitably trained and understand the part they play in safeguarding pupils. Leaders act promptly on any low-level concerns, seek advice where needed and take appropriate action on more serious issues that arise.
56. Leaders manage low-level concerns appropriately at an early stage. Staff feel supported when they raise concerns or ask for advice. The school has effective arrangements to respond to any allegations against staff that may arise. The school has suitable procedures to deal with any incidence of child-on-child abuse.
57. The school has regular contacts with relevant external agencies to help safeguard pupils. Advice is promptly sought where needed and appropriate action taken, including referrals if required. Records are properly kept, so that the safeguarding leaders maintain an effective overview of safeguarding concerns and actions taken in response to these.
58. The programme for PSHE and RSE makes an effective contribution to safeguarding by teaching pupils how to keep safe and how to manage risk. Leaders raise pupils' awareness of the inherent dangers of the internet and social media through the PSHE curriculum, ICT lessons and school assemblies. The school operates suitable monitoring and filtering systems for pupils' use of the internet and sets limits on mobile phone usage. Pupils have someone they can go to when they have any concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | Queen Margaret's School |
| Department for Education number | 815/6035 |
| Registered charity number | 517523 |
| Address | Queen Margaret's School, York Escrick Park York North Yorkshire YO19 6EU |
| Phone number | 01904 727600 |
| Email address | enquiries@queenmargarets.com |
| Website | https://.queenmargarets.com/ |
| Proprietor | Queen Margaret's School, York |
| Chair | Mr Terry Burt |
| Headteacher | Mrs Susan Baillie |
| Age range | 11 to 18 |
| Number of pupils | 214 |
| Number of boarding pupils | 145 |
| Date of previous inspection | 23 January 2023 |

Information about the school

60. Queen Margaret's School is an independent school for female pupils. The school was founded in 1901 and moved to its present rural location near York in 1949. The school is owned and governed by a board of trustees.
61. The school is predominantly a boarding school, with full boarders, weekly boarders and flexi-boarding. A small number of boarders from overseas attend for a short, fixed period stay. Boarders are accommodated in one of four houses, all situated on the main school site.
62. The school has identified 37 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for 63 pupils.
64. The school states its aims are for pupils to achieve excellence inside and outside the classroom and develop independent thought, learning and research skills. It seeks to enable pupils to grow with emotional maturity, social awareness and respect for individuality and difference. The school intends that, in so doing, pupils become interesting, well-informed, happy and confident members of the community. The school's ethos is based on the values of commitment and excellence; honesty and openness, bravery and resilience; kindness, respect and tolerance and on friendship, fairness and fun.

Inspection Details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 February 2024

65. A team of three 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 the safeguarding governor
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- 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**.

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For more information, please visit isi.net