

School inspection report

14 to 16 January 2025

Stafford Grammar School

Burton Manor Road

Stafford

ST18 9AT

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	5
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	8
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	10
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	11
SAFEGUARDING	12
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	12
SCHOOL DETAILS	13
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	14
INSPECTION DETAILS	15

Summary of inspection findings

1. Staff and governors understand the aims of the school well and pupils are confident and caring. Governors provide appropriate levels of challenge and support to ensure leaders can effectively implement school policies.
2. Leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to ensure that the Standards are met and a comprehensive self-evaluation process, which includes the views and experiences of pupils, is in place. There is a broad curriculum and leaders ensure that a wide range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in performing arts, are available to pupils.
3. Pupils make good progress and staff understand the needs of pupils well. There are effective procedures in place that allow staff to have the information they require to help and support pupils. Teaching makes use of good resources but in the prep school lesson planning does not consistently enable pupils to deepen their understanding and knowledge. In the senior school opportunities to develop pupils' understanding through questioning is not always explored.
4. Communication and language are a key focus in the early years and are a theme throughout the curriculum. Learning is tailored to the individual child and activities are adapted on a daily basis to support child-led interests.
5. Pupils have high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. They understand not only specific school rules but the underlying principles that support the school aims. This helps create an atmosphere that encourages respect and compassion.
6. The school site provides a safe learning environment enhanced by the display of pupils' art and other examples of work. Leaders are knowledgeable and conscientious with regard to the safety of pupils and implement appropriate risk assessments effectively.
7. Leaders have not fully implemented all statutory guidance with regard to the publication of the attendance policy. This was fully rectified during the inspection.
8. Safeguarding procedures are thorough and the policy is effectively implemented. Recruitment procedures are robust and the frequent training of all staff ensures that they are aware of local and national trends alongside their specific responsibilities to support and protect pupils.
9. The process of handling complaints has not been communicated in a timely manner in every case. A tracking process was implemented during the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

The proprietor / Leaders should:

- ensure all statutory guidance relating to attendance is fully implemented
- ensure all complaints are handled in a timely manner
- ensure lesson planning is flexible so that in the prep school activities can be targeted to fully take into account pupils' prior attainment
- ensure opportunities are taken to allow pupils in the senior school to deepen their understanding through further exploration of their questions

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The aims of the school are clear to pupils and staff. Governors hold leaders to account through a range of committees and link governors and provide support to them where necessary. Pupils are supported and cared for in an atmosphere that is welcoming and inclusive.
11. Leaders provide clear direction to staff and they have implemented comprehensive communication routes, including in regard to academic progress and the individual needs of pupils, to help ensure that pupils' wellbeing is promoted. Staff understand their responsibilities and leaders ensure that procedures are implemented consistently and effectively.
12. A thorough self-evaluation process involving the views of pupils, staff and governors is in place which is used to identify areas for development. The recent introduction of the wellbeing centre has assisted pupils who require space and time for self-reflection and additional support.
13. Leaders have effective oversight of risk management and safeguarding and mitigate risk with care. Risk assessments are detailed, up to date, and include steps to reduce risk which are implemented in practice. Training for staff in risk management and safeguarding is frequently updated and links with external agencies are used to help ensure pupils get the right support.
14. A thorough accessibility plan is in place which supports improving accessibility to the curriculum, information and the school site. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 effectively.
15. The school website provides comprehensive information to prospective and current parents about policies and procedures. Written reports about pupils' progress are informative and contain meaningful information about academic attainment and effort. Leaders complete an annual review, and a statement of how funding is spent, for pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan and are funded or partly funded by a local authority.
16. The written complaints policy is in line with statutory requirements. A comprehensive complaints log is kept including detail of resolution dates and stage. The process of handling a complaint has not been communicated to those involved in a timely manner in every case. A tracking system for the processing of formal complaints was implemented during the inspection.
17. Leaders in the early years foundation stage have created a welcoming and sensitive setting that helps to enable pupils to learn and develop their skills effectively. Daily risk assessment and individualised planning further promote pupils' wellbeing.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders have implemented a broad and balanced curriculum and pupils engage with the wide range of subjects available, particularly at GCSE level. In the sixth form a variety of opportunities exist within the curriculum beyond formal public examinations such as massive open online courses (MOOCs). A wide range of extra-curricular activities is offered to pupils, particularly in music. The opportunities offered to develop skills and knowledge within and beyond the formal curriculum are welcomed by pupils and they develop skills such as working in teams, communication and problem solving.
20. The curriculum takes into account pupils' aptitudes and is constantly reviewed alongside achievement data at all ages to ensure that it continues to enable pupils' progress. Leaders ensure that programmes of study within subjects are meeting pupils' needs by reviewing pupils' academic outcomes against national trends in external examination results.
21. Pupils in the prep school benefit from the use of some shared facilities, including those for art, design technology and music to expand the curriculum in order to help develop pupils' skills and knowledge further.
22. Children in the early years experience a comprehensive curriculum that covers both the prime and specific areas of learning including expressive arts. Learning is tailored for each pupil in terms of outcomes and assessed against the early learning goals, for example in reading matched to pupils' needs and through child-initiated play and questioning.
23. Teaching schemes are well planned and ensure that pupils can access the curriculum. Leaders monitor teaching quality through a number of processes and enable staff to share successful practice.
24. Staff understand the learning and personal needs of pupils of all ages, including in the early years. Teaching enables pupils to improve their skills, as seen in a sixth form English lesson where difficult and sensitive topics were debated thoughtfully while studying Shakespearean texts. In the prep school, lesson planning does not consistently include activity that is targeted to pupils' prior attainment and enables them to deepen their understanding and knowledge.
25. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and pupils are keen to take opportunities across the curriculum and at all ages to raise questions in order to deepen their learning. In some cases, in the senior school, adherence to lesson planning does not always enable pupils' full exploration of the subject.
26. Pupils are well motivated and successful in acquiring new knowledge and understanding, as seen in a Year 8 physical education lesson where pupils were quickly able to apply the explained theory of team work to their practice.
27. Leaders have implemented effective systems to feed back to pupils which allows them to understand what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their progress and leaders have successfully developed school-wide feedback procedures including the successful implementation in the senior school of the comment, progress, response (CPR) policy. Assessment outcomes are regularly communicated to pupils and this helps them understand what they need to do to improve.

28. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are well supported with individual education plans which are understood by teachers and implemented well in lessons. This helps to enable pupils who have SEND to make good progress.
29. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are effectively supported in the school. Pupils' needs are identified early and the consistent and systematic support enables pupils to make good progress. Levels of need for pupils who speak EAL are constantly reviewed and recommendations of support techniques are effectively implemented. Staff are empathetic to the experience of pupils who speak EAL offering support in understanding of idiom, subject specific vocabulary and language useful for everyday life including to support social interactions.
30. An effective system of assessing the progress of pupils is in place. Leaders review individual pupils' progress alongside wider oversight of subject specific data and provide additional support where required.
31. Leaders regularly monitor lessons and achievement data to quality assure teaching and learning, often with specific targets for analysis, such as 'the effective deployment of the support staff'. Feedback from this oversight is shared widely with staff in order to help improve teaching.
32. In the early years, children's communication, language and social skills are developed throughout the curriculum. Pupils were observed to read words using phonic knowledge and blending of sounds while supported through teacher input.
33. Pupils appreciate and take full advantage of the extensive programme of recreational activities that is available to them, particularly in sport and music. The majority of pupils participate in performing arts and there have been a number of successes in national competitions and qualifications alongside opportunities to perform at external venues.

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

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

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

35. The school community is inclusive, understanding and supportive. Leaders ensure that the school's values which include integrity, compassion and respect are promoted. Pupils are enthusiastic and willing to offer positive comments about their school experiences. Positive and respectful relationships are clearly evident between pupils and between pupils and teachers. Through praise and as a result of constructive interactions with teachers, pupils demonstrate self-confidence in their approach.
36. Staff encourage pupils to speak out should they have concerns and if they feel they have been treated unkindly by others or have witnessed others being treated this way. Pupils are confident to approach staff with concerns and know that these are treated seriously and addressed quickly.
37. There is an effective programme of activities in place to promote pupils' development for those below school age. The effective use of outdoor space promotes pupils' social development through the use of outdoor play equipment, and a role play activity area encourages pupils in their own self-care in considering the importance of looking after their teeth.
38. In the early years, mutual respect between pupils is evident. Taking turns and being patient are actively promoted by staff during activities and children understand the importance of this. Rewards are used to encourage pupils to learn while appropriate time management of lessons helps to ensure good behaviour.
39. The Wellbeing Centre allows pupils to have the opportunity reflect in a calm environment and access help and guidance where required. This is monitored effectively by trained staff to identify pupils who may require additional support.
40. Staff ensure that pupils' mental health and wellbeing are supported. A number of staff are trained in mental health first aid to further help pupils. In the prep school older pupils are trained as 'Mental Health Champions' in order to assist others.
41. Pupils fully understand how physical activity has a positive impact on wellbeing, as seen through physical education lessons and the high participation rates in extra-curricular sporting activities.
42. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is in line with statutory guidance and is seen as important by pupils. The 'Life and Wellbeing' lesson content is diverse, including many personal development and health topics often delivered by health professionals. This content is reviewed regularly by leaders to improve its relevance and effectiveness.
43. Leaders' expectations of behaviour are well understood by pupils. Rare occurrences of poor behaviour are promptly challenged by staff and consequences are understood by pupils as necessary and appropriate. Sanctions are swiftly implemented and consistently applied.
44. The anti-bullying strategy minimises bullying and incidents are effectively logged and managed. Leaders are aware of current concerns, trends and behaviours of groups or individuals and have deployed a range of strategies to support pupils and address behaviours. Staff are trained to identify

bullying and deal with it well. They effectively supervise pupils throughout the school day to promote good behaviour and set expectations.

45. Older pupils are given a variety of roles with responsibility which helps them develop leadership skills and self-confidence. In the senior school this can include leading activities, assisting staff in supervision at lunchtime and supporting younger pupils in subject clinics.
46. Admission and attendance registers are well maintained and leaders effectively review patterns of attendance to support pupils' wellbeing. Leaders appropriately report pupils who have joined or left the school at non-standard transition points to the local authority. The school had not published the attendance policy on its website and the policy did not contain contact details as required. The policy was updated in line with statutory guidance and placed on the school website during the inspection.
47. Leaders pay close attention to delivering health and safety requirements effectively. Staff are knowledgeable and conscientious with a good awareness of potential risks. Documentation, records and risk assessments are detailed, appropriate and specific to the school site and to activities conducted by pupils and staff. Fire safety precautions and the implementation of first aid requirements are effective.

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

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

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

49. Leaders have developed a personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, entitled 'Life and Wellbeing', that effectively supports the development of pupils' understanding of human, social and cultural matters and prepares them for life in British society. This is delivered by suitably trained staff across all sections of the school.
50. School rules help pupils understand fundamental British values such as the value of empathy. Pupils understand these values and discuss them with intelligence and compassion. In PSHE lessons pupils successfully establish and agree ground rules for discussions in order to be respectful of all views.
51. Pupils' social development is supported by extra-curricular activities, notably when staff encourage them to work and play together. This is evident throughout the school including in the early years. Pupils show a noteworthy ability to positively socialise with others across different age groups at breaktimes, encouraged by effective staff modelling and supervision.
52. Leaders help pupils understand the needs of all through the effective PSHE curriculum and this helps develop an inclusive and accepting culture. Pupils' understanding of different cultures is extended through curriculum work as seen in Year 5 music.
53. Careers guidance is in place throughout the senior school and pupils are given suitable support to help make their choices in both the school curriculum and beyond. They understand how the choices they make that affect their future plans and are assisted by both staff and professionals from the local community to understand their options.
54. Leaders have identified opportunities for pupils to showcase their dramatic and musical talents in local care homes and at religious services organised by civic organisations. Pupils are widely involved in charitable activity including in the 'Gold Ribbon Run', which raises awareness and funds for children's cancer charities. These endeavours help pupils to build compassion for all, learning not be selfish and experiencing genuine fulfilment doing something meaningful for others.
55. Pupils take their responsibilities within the school seriously. They are complimentary about the role of the school council which is active in discussing pupils' concerns. Sixth form pupils enjoy their roles as mentors in activities and curriculum subjects. Year 8 pupils requested the responsibility of mentoring new pupils in Year 7 which the school has implemented. These responsibilities enable pupils to develop their social skills and to ease the process of transition to a new environment.
56. Leaders, in consultation with pupils, have identified a need to extend the provision of economic education which is delivered through the personal, social, health and economic education programme. This has helped pupils further their understanding of tax, mortgages and budgeting.

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

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

- 58. Staff, including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and their deputies are well trained and understand their roles in safeguarding pupils. The safeguarding team works effectively with external agencies including the police and children's services to help ensure pupils get the support they need.
- 59. Pupils feel safe at school and believe that any concerns will be dealt with quickly. They know whom to turn to for support and are confident staff will support them. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including online.
- 60. Staff know and understand reporting procedures and effectively use the school systems to promptly inform the safeguarding team of any concerns. Staff receive and welcome regular updates on safeguarding themes that reflect national and local contextual risks to pupils.
- 61. There is a robust system in place for dealing with concerns and leaders work effectively with the local authority designated officer (LADO) where required, to both refer cases and to seek advice.
- 62. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) ensures that safeguarding records are detailed, accurate and securely stored. These records are monitored for links with behaviour and patterns are used to amend the school's PSHE curriculum to help pupils' understanding of personal safety.
- 63. Suitable measures are in place to reduce the risk of radicalisation to pupils. Robust filtering and monitoring of the internet is in place and leaders ensure that filtering arrangements are tested frequently.
- 64. The governors with specific responsibility for safeguarding meet frequently with the safeguarding team and provide appropriate support and challenge to leaders. Governors are suitably trained and ensure the safeguarding policy is both in line with statutory guidance and is effectively implemented.
- 65. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment and meet regularly to oversee recruitment processes. Suitable checks for all staff, volunteers and governors are carried out before they start work and are accurately recorded on the central record of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Stafford Grammar School
Department for Education number	124489
Registered charity number	513031
Address	Stafford Grammar School Burton Manor Road Stafford ST18 9AT
Phone number	01785 249752
Email address	office@staffordgrammar.co.uk
Website	www.staffordgrammar.co.uk
Proprietor	Stafford Grammar School
Chair	Mrs Julia Causer
Headteacher	Mr Nicholas Pietrek
Age range	4-18
Number of pupils	381
Date of previous inspection	29 March to 1 April 2022

Information about the school

67. Stafford Grammar School was founded in 1982 as a co-educational independent senior day school situated on the outskirts of Stafford. In 2007, the prep school opened on the same site, sharing some facilities. The school is governed by the trustees of the Stafford Grammar School charitable trust. The school comprises three sections, prep, including the early years foundation stage for pupils aged 4 to 11 years; senior, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years and sixth form, for pupils aged 16 to 18 years. Since the last inspection, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2022.
68. There are six children in the early years, in one Reception class
69. The school has identified 62 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
70. The school has identified English as an additional language for 15 pupils.
71. The school states its aims are to provide encouragement and support to help each individual realise their potential, believing that everyone can succeed given the right conditions and to be a vibrant community of happy, caring and confident individuals who achieve more than they think possible.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 January 2025

72. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

73. 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.

74. 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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