![ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate]

# School inspection report

21 to 23 January 2025

# St Mary's School Ascot

St Mary's Road

Ascot

Berkshire

SL5 9JF

# Contents

# Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders provide pupils with an environment where kindness prevails, pupils enjoy learning, and they achieve well. The school's aims and Catholic ethos guide leaders in their decision-making, which promotes pupils' wellbeing. Governors oversee the school's provision and support leaders effectively, ensuring they have the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the Standards.

2. Leaders prepare pupils for life in British society effectively through the well-planned academic curriculum which fosters mutual respect and inclusivity, with a focus on individual pupils' needs, prior attainment and interests. The curriculum focus on emerging technologies is relatively new. Consequently, pupils' knowledge and understanding in this area are not, as yet, developed as effectively as possible.

3. The co-curricular provision is wide-ranging and develops pupils' skills. Through their participation in lessons and high attendance at clubs and societies, pupils display a genuine interest in the experiences provided. Leaders encourage pupils to initiate activities, enabling them to propose, set up, and manage clubs and societies responsibly and confidently.

4. Lessons and co-curricular activities engage pupils deeply in meaningful discussions about issues currently affecting society. Pupils seek ways to build upon their knowledge and understanding of societal issues by initiating clubs, societies and discussion groups. Pupils use their knowledge and skills to check the validity of facts and consider alternative views to help them form their own opinions. They make highly effective presentations to other pupils on issues important to society such as equality and inclusion. Pupils find meaningful ways to respond to issues of inequality in their local community and beyond. The development of pupils' social understanding is a significant strength of the school.

5. Teachers skilfully use their good subject knowledge to engage pupils in thought-provoking and intellectually rich teaching which furthers their progress and develops their skills and knowledge well. They ensure that pupils connect their learning to broader and relevant social and cultural issues to deepen their understanding.

6. A highly effective assessment framework is in place across all subjects. Heads of department analyse data effectively and use their analysis to ensure that teaching provides pupils with efficient support and appropriate challenge. As a result, all groups of pupils make good progress and achieve well in GCSE and A-level examinations.

7. Teaching motivates pupils to learn and succeed. They are taught how to evaluate their own progress and seek feedback and support to help them achieve well. The school enables pupils to develop mature interpersonal skills and engage thoughtfully with peers and adults during discussions.

8. Teachers adapt their teaching methods and use of resources to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that they make good progress. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), and require additional support for their English, are provided with appropriate resources to enable them to achieve well.

9. Leaders ensure that pupils' physical health is prioritised through a wide range of sporting activities, and the provision of nutritious food. They ensure that pupils have opportunities to develop skills in a wide range of sports.

10. The 'skills for life' programme provides pupils with age-appropriate and relevant, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Staff develop pupils' appreciation of cultural diversity and understanding of the importance of equality.

11. The school provides boarders with suitable and age-appropriate accommodation and effective supervision and support, ensuring that they feel comfortable and safe in the boarding houses. Leaders organise boarding time thoughtfully to enable boarders to study, take part in house activities or enjoy free time.

12. The school's effective safeguarding procedures are thorough, regularly reviewed and adjusted to reflect current statutory guidance. The safeguarding team is effective in raising staff awareness of safeguarding issues and work closely with the pastoral team to ensure that all staff are vigilant to any signs of possible concerns relating to pupils' wellbeing.

# 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:

- develop the curriculum so that pupils can increase their knowledge and understanding of emerging technologies as effectively as possible.

# Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Governors ensure that leaders are supported and appropriately challenged, so that they apply their good skills and knowledge to ensure that the school meets the Standards. Governors oversee school policies and their implementation through consistent review, so that they are in line with requirements and relevant to the school's context.

14. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities well, informed by a clear vision for the school. They promote the school's aims and Catholic ethos through all aspects of provision. Leaders foster kindness and a nurturing approach, which results in pupils being respectful, responsible and highly motivated to achieve well. Leaders utilise regular dialogue with staff to ensure that policies are understood and implemented suitably.

15. Governors and leaders are proactive in identifying risks, taking effective steps to mitigate them and monitoring the impact of decisions taken. They review risk assessments regularly. Risk assessments are thorough and detailed in their identification of potential risks and measures to reduce or remove these. All staff receive regular training on the completion of risk assessments, including during their induction.

16. Leaders maintain close links and regular communication with external agencies, including relevant local authorities. They take advantage of such agencies' available training, seek advice and make referrals as necessary, to promote the welfare of boarders and day pupils.

17. Leaders at all levels engage actively in effective self-evaluation so that pupils' wellbeing is actively promoted. Leaders take account of the views of staff, pupils and parents when designing and implementing their school development plan. Leaders plan their priorities carefully and analyse the impact of their actions, consider risks and adjust provision as needed. For instance, leaders have reviewed the impact of time spent on co-curricular activities by listening to pupils' views. They have introduced protected study time so that participation in these activities does not affect pupils' achievement in academic subjects, or their wellbeing. Leaders also ensure that staff receive appropriate professional development to support them in their roles.

18. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The school implements a suitable accessibility plan which outlines clear provision for pupils with disabilities. The school teaches pupils about the importance of treating everyone equally, regardless of their backgrounds. Leaders adapt the curriculum to meet individual pupils' academic and pastoral needs.

19. Leaders implement the complaints policy effectively. They respond swiftly to any complaints that are submitted and look for any emerging patterns, carefully considering these as part of the school's self-evaluation.

20. Leaders communicate regularly with parents through a variety of ways, including events and workshops, and provide them with all required information. Parents receive detailed reports about their child's achievements and progress, and have the opportunity to discuss these in meetings with staff. Consideration is given to parents who live overseas so that such events are planned at convenient times, or so that parents can participate online.

21. Boarding areas are well managed so that pupils feel comfortable and safe. Leaders ensure highly effective systems for pastoral care. They ensure that the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS) are met.

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

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

# Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. The school offers a broad and diverse curriculum, delivered through a suitable range of subjects, including an extensive range of modern foreign languages lessons, and supported by co-curricular activities. Curriculum plans and schemes of work are reviewed regularly so that they develop pupils' knowledge and skills methodically. The curriculum meets requirements and is enriched beyond these, making it current and relevant, so that pupils are interested in their learning. Sixth-form pupils have access to a wide range of subject choices, extended project qualifications, essay competitions and other opportunities appropriate to their needs. However, as yet, the curriculum does not develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of emerging technologies as well as it might.

24. Pupils develop a wide range of skills and make links between them that they can apply across different subjects. For instance, pupils apply mathematical and scientific skills in geography lessons. They apply their literacy skills in a wide range of subjects when analysing texts or writing extended essays. Pupils demonstrate a well-developed grasp of literary terms and sophisticated vocabulary, which they use to express themselves confidently.

25. Teaching across the curriculum in both the senior and sixth-form departments of the school enables pupils to take part enthusiastically in sophisticated philosophical discussions using subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers choose up-to-date and relevant texts and resources that cover a range of cultural and social issues. For instance, in politics and economics, pupils are taught about current developments and their impact on and relevance to the topics at hand. In science, pupils communicate their learning during practical investigations and exploration. Through this, they demonstrate a secure understanding of the concepts and theory needed to interpret results.

26. Pupils' aesthetic and creative skills are developed effectively across the curriculum and in co-curricular activities. In art, pupils produce high-quality pieces of work, inspired by a range of artists. Teachers give practical feedback and guide them to improve their skills using different techniques and media. Pupils use the skills they learn in music to form and perform in jazz bands, rock bands, choirs and ensembles.

27. In social sciences, pupils develop skills of independent research, using a range of sources and presenting their findings articulately. Pupils develop modern technological skills in computing lessons and clubs. They design apps, adeptly use software to, for example, produce vector graphics, and experiment with creating different effects in photography.

28. Teachers plan lessons well and skilfully use their good subject knowledge and high-quality resources to engage pupils and enable them to learn well. They employ various teaching techniques to foster a deeper understanding of concepts. Lessons are characterised by warm and productive relationships between pupils, and between pupils and teachers. Pupils feel confident to ask questions, conduct their own research, present their findings and express their opinions. As a result, pupils make good progress and achieve consistently high grades at GCSE and A level.

29. Heads of departments are enthusiastic about their subjects and support their teams to improve outcomes for pupils. They analyse and monitor data to improve provision for cohorts, groups of pupils and individual pupils. Pupils receive regular, detailed and clear feedback on their work to enable further progress. Where required, teachers provide support for pupils through lunchtime

clinics. Pupils reflect on their own learning, and track their progress by comparing their work over time and setting targets for themselves.

30. Pupils are motivated to achieve well and apply effort in their learning. Topic information is organised online and in folders, which pupils use effectively for self-study and revision. Pupils read notes provided by teachers before lessons to help them engage in discussions. This helps them to think deeply and link their discussions to current events, building on their prior knowledge.

31. Pupils who have SEND are identified and well supported through collaboration between teachers and heads of house, with the involvement of the pupils and their parents. Teachers adapt the curriculum and teaching resources to pupils' needs. Leaders regularly review the effectiveness of support provided, including its impact on pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem.

32. The vast majority of pupils who speak EAL are highly proficient and practically fluent in English. Where required, pupils are given appropriate support, such as particular resources or additional lessons to develop their vocabulary and other comprehension of English.

33. Leaders offer a broad spectrum of co-curricular activities. Pupils develop their academic achievement through enrichment clubs to further their knowledge and skills in languages, science, technology and mathematics. They develop their physical and team-building skills through games and interschool sports. Evening and weekend activities for boarders develop a range of life skills including cooking, gardening and sewing.

## 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. Leaders ensure that through the school's aims and its Catholic ethos, pupils develop their moral and spiritual understanding. Teachers plan religious studies lessons so that pupils connect their learning to broader social issues, as well as spiritual teachings from different religions. Speakers from a range of diverse faiths such as Hinduism and Islam are invited in to deepen pupils' understanding of religions. In chapel, pupils link scripture readings and Catholic values such as solidarity with people around the world facing inequalities.

36. An effective PSHE education curriculum is taught specifically in 'Skills for life' lessons and also woven across other areas of the curriculum. In PSHE lessons, pupils are taught about resilience and mental health so that they learn to manage stress. They are taught about how to value differences in people. The suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is enhanced by talks from visiting experts. Pupils throughout the school learn about different types of healthy relationships, in age-appropriate ways. Pupils lead their own discussion groups in societies such as lesbian, gay and bisexual, and transgender (LGBT), and junior and senior diversity groups, deepening their understanding of diversity and equality.

37. The physical education (PE) programme is designed to develop a range of skills which enables pupils to keep fit and active. Activities are carefully chosen to include those that reflect developments in women's sport including football, cricket, golf, and physical strength and conditioning. Pupils learn self-defence in workshops on the weekends which develops their physical strength and self-confidence. Pupils learn about the importance of a healthy and balanced diet in maintaining their overall physical health.

38. A well-resourced health centre and a robust network of pastoral support ensures that staff are alert to pupils' physical, mental and emotional needs. There are a sufficient number of staff trained in first aid to meet the pupils' needs. The school implements appropriate procedures for any administration of medication or first aid. The school provides meals that are balanced, nutritious and varied.

39. Staff effectively implement the behaviour policy, which contributes to high standards of behaviour amongst pupils. There is a clear expectation that pupils behave well in lessons and in non-structured time. Rewards and sanctions are used appropriately. Any misbehaviour is dealt with appropriately and, where necessary, relevant talks and discussions are held to improve understanding.

40. Staff are trained to recognise signs of bullying and ways to support both the bully and the victim, although bullying is rare. Groups such as anti-racism mentors and anti-bullying ambassadors are led by pupils.

41. Pupils are well supervised across the school and in the boarding areas. Members of staff, including heads of house, are available to make sure pupils are comfortable and cared for. Heads of house ensure that pupils have a mentor or a buddy who they can talk to, and systems are in place to voice any concerns. The school maintains an awareness of where pupils are at all times. Pupils know who they can go to for support, including the well-staffed health centre or independent person.

42. Leaders implement high standards in the maintenance of the premises, including the boarding accommodation, and ensure compliance with health and safety laws. Record-keeping is meticulous. Governors commission regular internal and external reviews and audits to ensure that all required checks and maintenance are carried out effectively. Fire safety training is thorough, and staff carry out fire evacuation drills regularly, including during boarding time.

43. The school maintains admission and attendance registers accurately, with due regard to current statutory guidance. The school attendance officer works closely with the heads of house to track and promote attendance. The school informs the relevant local authorities of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.

44. Leaders ensure that boarders have good-quality sleeping and living accommodation appropriate to their age. Boarding areas are well organised and managed by suitably trained members of staff. Boarders have a lockable safe and can personalise their space to help make them feel at home. Access to boarding areas is restricted and monitored through secure systems.

45. An effective boarding induction programme helps new boarders settle quickly into the school. An extensive range of co-curricular activities meet their needs and interests. Boarders develop increasing levels of independence in the sixth form, such as by doing their own laundry, cooking occasionally, and organising social events and outings.

46. The school provides pupils in all age phases with leadership opportunities, from prefects and house captains to study mentors and liturgy captains. Pupils are trained for these leadership roles and are supported by a link adult. Pupils take their roles seriously and understand the impact these have on their own personal development and self-confidence. They actively seek ways to develop these roles for the benefit of the school community.

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

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

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

48. Pupils demonstrate a keen interest in exploring themes such as racial discrimination and inequality in global politics and how national institutions such as the National Health Service attempt to guard against these. They understand that these issues are important to society and that they are relevant to them today. Pupils undertake to build on the highly academic discussions and debates in lessons about relevant and current issues. They research these topics further, using what they are taught about separating fact from fiction in sources of information. Pupils lead talks for other pupils about topics that include the importance of diversity and inclusion, equal pay and modern slavery. They seek training and guidance to become anti-bullying ambassadors and anti-racism mentors, to provide support for other pupils in the school.

49. The school actively promotes pupils' understanding between right and wrong. The 'Skills for life' curriculum explicitly and thoroughly develops pupils' understanding and appreciation of diversity. A range of subjects across the curriculum enables pupils to develop an advanced and sophisticated social and cultural understanding. For instance, in art, pupils learn about the contributions of cultures around the world, and in history, pupils learn about how people of different races, ethnicities and beliefs have been persecuted. Pupils learn about how people's identity can be recognised, affected by external influences and expressed, such as by connecting scientific knowledge about how the human brain works to self-expression in art and poetry.

50. Pupils learn about democratic systems through subjects such as PSHE, history and politics, including about the role of the opposition in Parliament. Pupils attend debating workshops and Model United Nations conferences where they discuss and consider different viewpoints on current topics. Pupils learn about the rule of law through mock trials. Pupils put themselves forward for election to various committees in the school and represent their peers by raising questions and engaging in discussions with staff. They learn about individual liberty in relation to the rule of law through topics such as 'speaking your mind' and 'governing Britain' in PSHE.

51. Life skills continue to be promoted through weekend activities that promote a range of skills, including project management. For example, in house film workshops, pupils gain skills in cinematography, film editing and team management. Pupils attend first aid and mental health courses, self-defence workshops and debating workshops to develop their skills. Pupils prepare and deliver International Women's Day workshops alongside external professionals as part of the school's conference event.

52. Leaders arrange opportunities for pupils to listen to the perspectives of guest speakers, from Paralympians and charity workers to scientists and politicians. Leaders fulfil their responsibility to ensure that pupils are well prepared in advance of these talks and have time for reflection after. They provide time for pupils to consider and check facts, research alternative views and develop their own opinions. Leaders and staff ensure that any discussions with political content are managed in an impartial and unbiased manner.

53. The school develops pupils' economic knowledge and understanding effectively. For example, pupils visit professional football clubs, then apply what they learn to develop their own sports club business models. The school provides financial workshops that teach pupils about consumer rights and how to manage their money. Pupils learn about different types of savings and investments.

54. Career education begins in Year 7 when pupils become aware of and explore a suitable range of potential career options. As they move through the school, pupils attend careers fairs and listen to talks from professionals and alumni. These cover a wide range of opportunities, from the army to crime prevention. Online support and individual, impartial career advice is made available to pupils.

55. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Staff provide personalised support for pupils to help them choose subjects to study at A level. Older pupils share their experiences with younger pupils, so they can develop their perspectives. Staff offer support during preparations for entrance examinations and interviews for entry into universities in the United Kingdom, the United States, Europe, Asia and Australia. Higher education sessions ensure pupils are aware of alternative pathways, including apprenticeships. Staff help pupils to write curriculum vitae and, through links with parents and alumni, help to arrange work experience for them where possible.

56. The school develops pupils' sense of responsibility towards others effectively. The Charities Committee plans fundraising and events to support charities in the United Kingdom and overseas. Pupils on a sports trip to South Africa visit the school they support, whilst also learning about the culture. Pupils contribute to the local community by volunteering at the local charity shop and care home. They engage with pupils from local primary schools, helping them with reading, mathematical activities and play.

## 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. Governors and senior leaders maintain diligent oversight of safeguarding arrangements in the school through regular reviews. They ensure that comprehensive safeguarding policies and robust procedures are implemented effectively.

59. The safeguarding team understand their roles and responsibilities and ensure that statutory guidance is followed. They are appropriately trained for their roles and seek opportunities to attend further training and networking groups, organised by the local authority.

60. Leaders work closely with external safeguarding partners such as local authorities and the police to seek advice and ensure that they take the right course of action where necessary. Leaders with designated responsibility for safeguarding refer safeguarding concerns on to relevant agencies when necessary. Leaders maintain suitable and secure safeguarding records which include details of decisions and actions taken.

61. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) works closely with the pastoral lead to ensure that all relevant staff are aware of pupils' needs. Staff receive regular, updated training on safeguarding, including 'Prevent' duty training about measures to combat any risks relating to radicalisation or extremism. Staff are sent a safeguarding bulletin every three weeks with updates to information. Staff know how to report and record concerns about pupils. Staff are also trained and are confident to report any concerns about adults working in the school that may arise.

62. The school follows strict protocols to protect pupils from online harm, including the use of an appropriate filtering and monitoring system. The safeguarding team monitors any alerts and uses the information to look for patterns and identify potential risks. Pupils are taught about online safety and understand that the rules around devices are in place to help keep them safe.

63. Pupils know who they can go to if they have a concern. Pupils have various avenues of support, including boarding staff, tutors, heads of year and an independent person. Older pupils are trained as peer mentors. Pupils use an online system to report concerns anonymously, if desired.

64. Effective safer recruitment arrangements are in place. The school carries out all required checks on adults who interact with pupils before they commence working at the school. The school maintains an accurate single central record (SCR) of appointments, which governors check regularly.

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

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

# School details

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| **School** | St Mary's School Ascot |
| **Department for Education number** | 868/6002 |
| **Registered charity number** | 290286 |
| **Address** | St Mary's School Ascot<br>St Mary's Road<br>Ascot<br>Berkshire<br>SL5 9JF |
| **Phone number** | 01344 296600 |
| **Email address** | genenquiries@stmarysascot.com |
| **Website** | https://www.st-marys-ascot.co.uk |
| **Proprietor** | St Mary's School Ascot |
| **Chair** | Ms Clementine Vaughan |
| **Headteacher** | Mrs Danuta Staunton |
| **Age range** | 11 to 18 |
| **Number of pupils** | 384 |
| **Number of boarding pupils** | 365 |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 6 to 8 October 2021 |

# Information about the school

66. St Mary's School Ascot is a Catholic independent day and boarding school for female pupils in Berkshire. The school was founded in 1885 by a religious order, the Institute of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now named the Congregation of Jesus. In 1984, the St Mary's School Ascot trust was established and a board of governors appointed who oversee the school.

67. Boarders are accommodated on site in the main school building and two sixth-form courtyards in seven boarding houses in the school.

68. The school has identified 91 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

69. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 70 pupils.

70. The school states its aims are to nurture in each pupil a sense of their own worth and talents by fostering their intellectual, spiritual and personal development; to develop in each pupil a love of learning and independent thought through a rigorous academic education; to promote a strong sense of personal responsibility, kindness, cooperation and social justice founded in respect for the diverse needs of others in a global community; to encourage each pupil to enjoy the full sacramental life and spiritual richness of the Catholic Church; to foster a partnership between parents, school and the wider community; to inspire in each pupil the confidence to collaborate and to lead through an enriching and fulfilling boarding experience and follow in the spirit of Mary Ward who cherished 'freedom of spirit, sincerity, and a cheerful disposition'.

# Inspection details

**Inspection dates**                              21 to 23 January 2025

71. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

72. 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

- 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.

73. 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**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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

For more information, please visit isi.net