Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

St Mary's School

February 2023

Contents

Contents 2

School's Details 3

1. Background Information 4

About the school 4

What the school seeks to do 4

About the pupils 4

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection 5

Preface 5

Key findings 6

PART 1 – Quality of education provided 6

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils 6

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils 6

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors 6

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools 7

PART 6 – Provision of information 7

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled 7

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools 7

3. Educational Quality Inspection 8

Preface 8

Key findings 8

Recommendations 8

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements 9

The quality of the pupils' personal development 11

4. Inspection Evidence 13

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2023

School's Details

School	St Mary's School
DfE number	881/6008
Registered charity number	309266
Address	St Mary's School Lexden Road Colchester Essex CO3 3RB
Telephone number	01206 572544
Email address	principal@stmaryscolchester.org.uk
Principal	Mrs Nicola Griffiths
Acting co-chairs of governors	Mrs Melanie Loxley Mr Graeme Lambert
Proprietor	St Mary's School (Colchester) Ltd
Age range	3 to 16
Number of pupils on roll	411
	Kindergarten and Prep 54 **Lower school** 100
	Senior school 257
Inspection dates	31 January to 2 February 2023

1. Background Information

About the school

1.1 St Mary's School is located on two sites some three miles apart. It is an independent day school registered for female pupils. The lower school site, for pupils aged 3 to 11 years, includes a co-educational Nursery known as Kindergarten. Education for pupils aged 11 to 16 takes place on the senior school site. The school is a member of Round Square, an organisation devoted to the educational philosophy of Kurt Hahn. It is a registered charity administered by a board of governors.

1.2 The current principal took up her position in September 2021.

What the school seeks to do

1.3 The school aims to tailor the education of its pupils so that they are encouraged to thrive and develop a love of learning, creative flair, sporting prowess and other talents. It seeks to instil values of respect and courtesy and for its pupils to develop a 'have a go' attitude to prepare them for success in an ever-changing world.

About the pupils

1.4 Most pupils come from families with professional backgrounds who work within the local area. The school's own assessment data indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified 60 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) which include dyslexia, dyspraxia and cognition. Fifty-five of these receive additional help. English is an additional language (EAL) for 45 pupils, of whom 10 receive additional support for their English. Data used by the school have identified 70 pupils as being the most able in the school's population and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.

Key findings

2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

2.2 In the junior school, National Curriculum tests in the years 2020 to 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.3 At GCSE in the years 2020 to 2022, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).

2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.

2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.

2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.

2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.

2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.

2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

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

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

School name	*National Curriculum name*
Kindergarten	Nursery
Prep	Reception

Key findings

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

- Pupils' attainment at the end of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), in National Curriculum tests in Year 6 and at GCSE is excellent.
- Pupils make excellent progress in the lower school and good progress in the senior school.
- Pupils' communication skills are excellent. Writing is a particular strength of pupils in the lower school.
- Very positive attitudes to learning are fostered by strong and warm relationships between pupils and their teachers.

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

- The many leadership opportunities within the school enable pupils to develop a strong understanding of their responsibilities to each other and the local community.
- Pupils are adroit in making decisions about their own learning.
- Pupils' social development and collaboration are excellent.
- The school's strong culture of pastoral care fosters and supports a highly developed self-understanding amongst its pupils.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Strengthen the progress made by senior school pupils.
- Strengthen further pupils' development and application of information and communication technology (ICT) skills in lessons.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils reach excellent levels of attainment in lessons, work and public examinations. In the EYFS, 94% of children achieved expected outcomes in 2022 and broadly similar results were achieved in 2020 and 2021. At the end of Year 6 in 2022, 94% of pupils achieved expected levels in reading and writing, with 97% achieving the same level in mathematics. Pupils' attainment at GCSE has been excellent in relation to national averages. Almost half of grades awarded in 2022 were at 9 to 7, and nearly all the awarded grades were at 9 to 4. Attainment in centre-assessed grades in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades in 2021 show similarly strong results. This represents successful fulfilment of the school's aim to help pupils to thrive and develop a love of learning. Data provided by the school indicate that all groups of pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, make at least good progress from entry to GCSE level. In the lower school, about half of pupils attain in the upper ability range of tests. Children in the EYFS and pupils in the lower school make excellent progress. A large percentage of pupils who sit the 11+ examination gain places at the local grammar schools or scholarships to the senior school. Senior pupils' progress to GCSE is good and pupils are successful in gaining places to their sixth form of choice. Most parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching enables their child to make progress.

3.6 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are excellent. Skills for learning are developed to a high level and pupils effectively apply these across the curriculum. In the EYFS, children showed dexterity and creativity when using plastic bricks to construct a house with a dog bed and windows. Lower school creative skills are particularly strong. Year 3 pupils performed to a high standard on stage in their music concert and Year 4 pupils created accomplished portraits in the style of Picasso during an extra-curricular art club. These successes are because of the supportive and challenging learning environment the school provides. In a music lesson, Year 8 pupils produced their own high-quality version of a familiar song in pairs. They included new instruments and developed their work in a manner which was well beyond their years. Pupils in a Year 9 mathematics lesson demonstrated excellent problem-solving skills as they individually solved complex ratio and proportion problems. In a Year 9 history lesson, pupils studying the First World War collaboratively explored the reasons why photographic sources might require additional scrutiny, successfully concluding that all might not be as it seems. A very large majority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons. Inspection evidence supports this view.

3.7 Pupils of all ages demonstrate outstanding communication skills. They are respectful and considerate when interacting with one another and with adults, listening carefully to the views and opinions of others. Pupils use excellent levels of subject-specific vocabulary and are enthusiastic to share their knowledge and understanding. The youngest children in the EYFS confidently ask for resources or explain their choice of activities, seeking clarification when necessary. Writing is a particular strength in the lower school. The youngest pupils form letters neatly and accurately and the work in their books and displayed in classrooms is correctly punctuated, properly paragraphed and very well-presented. Older pupils in the lower school write with sophistication and flair. The high standard of work arises out of skilful questioning and effective teaching. Concentration and an appreciation of reading is encouraged from an early age. In the EYFS, children were engrossed in a reading activity in the playground, sitting and listening attentively around the teacher while other children played around them. In the senior school, Year 10 pupils gave excellent and particularly insightful examples as they explained their understanding of key words in preparation for the study of a Shakespearean text. Pupils' oral communication is strengthened by their participation in public speaking competitions, presentations to parents, as well as class assemblies, debating in class and in the speeches they make for applications for posts of responsibility.

3.8 In the lower school, pupils demonstrate excellent numeracy skills and a very large majority make strong progress in mathematics. Similar strengths are shown by children in the EYFS. Their confidence in numeracy is encouraged through activities such as using number lines. Children demonstrated their

enthusiasm for mathematics by choosing to complete activities based on counting blocks during their breaktime. An emphasis on mental mathematics in the lower school ensures pupils' deep knowledge of number. For example, Year 4 pupils identified a wide range of ways in which numbers can be classified and Year 5 pupils enthusiastically explained their methods of calculation using appropriate mathematical language. Pupils demonstrated good levels of numeracy in the senior school. They are adept at working with number and understand that the skills learned in mathematics lessons are useful elsewhere in the curriculum. For instance, in a Year 10 geography lesson, pupils expertly applied the mathematical concept of range when discussing temperature differences in deserts.

3.9 Pupils demonstrate good ICT skills. Pupils in Year 1 and 2 showed particular strengths in ICT in the after-school science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) activity by making and programming motorised vehicles. However, in the lessons seen, pupils' use of ICT was less well developed. Senior pupils are confident users of the school's learning platforms and are able to access resources with ease. In a Year 11 physics lesson, pupils displayed a good level of skill as they effectively accessed, navigated and completed a timed online test on density using tablets and other resources such calculators. However, pupils do not always develop and apply their ICT skills during lessons as strongly as possible.

3.10 Pupils of all ages demonstrate excellent study skills and apply themselves well in lessons. Lower school pupils are able to make links and connections in their learning. An assembly based on the theme 'Don't judge a book by its cover' was referenced by lower school pupils later in the day while drawing parallels between their literacy and numeracy work. Pupils are able to justify the hypotheses they have reached, such as a Year 6 consideration of the potential future impact of genetically modified food. In the senior school, pupils are able to confidently synthesise information from a variety of sources. They easily apply new material to unfamiliar situations and exhibit a high level of ability to think for themselves in an original and expressive manner. For example, in a Year 10 English lesson, pupils demonstrated strong synthesising and hypothesising skills as they explored a piece of artwork to determine the purpose of the prologue in *Romeo and Juliet*. In a Year 6 English lesson, pupils identified the key differences between a badly constructed essay and a good one, maturely reflecting on the quality and detail of language and use of grammar.

3.11 Pupils' academic and other achievements are excellent, in confirmation of the school's aspiration to help pupils develop creative flair, sporting prowess and other talents. The pupils' success results from a wide range of co-curricular activities, mainly during enrichment lessons and lunchtime clubs. Pupils achieve strong success in a wide range of activities. Nearly half of the pupils in the lower school play a musical instrument and achieve success in ABRSM examinations. Nearly all of the 20 senior school pupils who took LAMDA examinations achieved distinctions. All of the pupils in the lower school are involved in school shows and around 25% of pupils take part in senior school productions each year. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they are proud of their achievements and are keen to publicly recognise the achievements of their peers. An annual fashion show allows Year 11 textile students to showcase their creations and senior pupils achieve success in national ISA art competitions. Nearly all pupils in Year 9 achieve a bronze award and 40% of Year 10 pupils a silver award in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE).

3.12 Pupils' overwhelmingly strong attitudes towards their learning are a key factor in assuring their success. Their positive attitudes reflect the school's central values of courtesy and respect which are well understood and practised by pupils. Pupils show maturity well beyond their age both in and out of class. They have highly developed self-discipline and are able to work independently with little supervision. They are collaborative learners and take great joy in the success of their peers; ensuring that all feel supported and welcome. Pupils are actively engaged in lessons and are visibly seeking to contribute as often as they can. They approach their study with great enthusiasm and want to do well. For example, in a Year 10 German lesson, pupils showed excellent levels of self-motivation as they worked to prepare for a role play. Year 4 pupils were motivated and remained engaged throughout an art activity, enjoying experimenting with shading and drawing their hand and other objects.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

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

3.14 Pupils have a highly developed sense of self-understanding. This is because the school's culture of strong pastoral care, through which pupils' progress and well-being are carefully monitored, means that pupils are well-known by their teachers and are given time to develop and express themselves. They are reflective learners and have a strong sense that mistakes are learning experiences; thus, their understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses is at a higher level than one might expect of pupils of the same age. For example, Year 5 pupils in the woodland learning environment, making a hidden den in the woods, spoke in detail about the mistakes they had made and clearly articulated what they had done to overcome difficulties. In a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils thoughtfully self-assessed their understanding of ratios and proportions in discussion with peers and deepened their understanding as a result.

3.15 Pupils understand that the importance of decision making and relish the opportunities to direct their own learning when the lesson structure allows. In the lower school this is fostered by the many opportunities pupils are given to make their own decisions, including what homework to do, choosing from a range of different activities based on thinking skills and by choosing the appropriate level of 'chilli challenge' in mathematics. In a Year 11 drama lesson, pupils selected their own pieces of text to amplify descriptions of the characters they had chosen in a Japanese short play. The intricate and nuanced outcomes showed great maturity. Pupils in a Year 11 textiles lesson reflected on their plans for the next stage of their creative and original designs. Their individually chosen coursework projects were well prepared to reflect the theme 'Great British occasions'. Decision making by pupils is strengthened by a relationships and sex education programme which enables them to reflect thoughtfully on possible outcomes when making life choices. Pupils are able to decide sensibly which extra-curricular activities to follow and how to explore the woodland learning environment.

3.16 Pupils display a well-developed spiritual understanding and a deep sense of, and appreciation for, the importance of non-material aspects of life. In the work scrutiny of Year 8 religious studies books, pupils showed an excellent understanding of many of the reasons why people can believe in God. Pupils also wrote thoughtfully to argue that Christmas had become too commercialised and their imagined obituaries of the prophet Muhammed showed sensitive awareness of the importance of faith. A lower school assembly enabled pupils to reflect on what really matters and display careful thought about choosing either a large wrapped present or a small one, concluding that 'sometimes the smaller presents are the nicest ones'.

3.17 Pupils' moral understanding is excellent. They can confidently articulate their feelings about the school and their peers. They have a strong sense of right and wrong. For example, in a Year 5 philosophy lesson on the theme of consequences, pupils thoughtfully considered whether all lies are the same morally, contrasting 'white lies' told to avoid hurting people's feelings with lies for other purposes. Pupils generally behave with kindness and sensitivity towards each other and their teachers. Pupils accept responsibility for their behaviour and seek to improve if things don't go to plan. Pupils maintained orderly conduct in lessons, allowing effective learning to take place. In the senior school, pupils demonstrated a high level of self-discipline before registration and focussed quickly when the teacher entered the room. In response to the questionnaire, a very small minority of senior school pupils did not agree that pupils are kind or show respect to each other. Inspectors found that the behaviour of pupils around the school was overwhelmingly positive. An overwhelming majority of pupils agreed that the school expects pupils to behave well and a very large majority of them agree that the school sorts out any poor behaviour. Governors contribute effectively to mould and uphold the positive ethos that pervades the school by appropriate challenge of the school's leadership.

3.18 Pupils' social development and collaboration is excellent. In the EYFS, children play together at break time, sharing equipment such as climbing ropes, without disagreement. All pupils, but especially those in the lower school, form strong relationships with classmates, and across year groups. The

collaborative learning seen in most classes was outstanding, with pupils often working in small groups or discussing in pairs to reach their conclusions. In a Year 9 physical education lesson, pupils demonstrated well-developed team working skills as they enjoyed a volleyball session. They encouraged each other as they explored their individual learning targets. Pupils have a highly developed understanding of the benefits that come from supporting each other in class discussion and elsewhere and those with particular strengths are willing to help others. For example, in a Year 6 netball practice pupils enthusiastically supported each other when they were rotated off the court to enable others to play.

3.19 Pupils develop a strong understanding of their responsibilities to each other and the local community. This is because of the many leadership opportunities within the school, such as prefects, listeners, anti-bullying ambassadors, eco team leaders, sports leaders and an active school council. Pupils fully engage with the opportunities to use their ability, skills and energy to contribute to the local community and national charities; their efforts are directed by a pupil-led school charity committee. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and Round Square service projects enable a large majority of older pupils to engage in active service in the community. Charitable funds are enthusiastically raised through activities such as movie nights and cake sales organised by the pupils.

3.20 Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds and they see diversity as a strength. For example, Year 5 pupils wrote that experiencing diversity helps develop understanding that everyone is unique and 'that you can be you and be awesome'. Written work in Year 2 religious education (RE) books demonstrates a detailed study and sophisticated understanding of the Jewish festival of Sukkot. During a history lesson, Year 5 pupils showed understanding of the reasons why women might not have been well represented on ancient Greek vases. The pupils showed sensitivity and appreciation of the different background and traditions of ancient Greece while comparing them to current norms and values. A senior school diversity club supports LGBTQ+ pupils and helps to foster a culture of respect and understanding. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.

3.21 Pupils' understanding of staying safe and keeping healthy is excellent. They are acutely aware of the benefits and dangers of the online world and are able to make positive choices about their use of social media. They enjoy their sport at the school and are pleased that there are a range of physical activities on offer; participation levels are high. Pupils understand the need to maintain a healthy diet and good cleanliness. For example, Year 2 pupils made effective videos extolling the virtues of good dental hygiene. In a PSHE lesson, Year 4 pupils identified the key components of a healthy lifestyle. In a senior school tutorial lesson, pupils showed excellent insight and maturity as they discussed the benefits and drawbacks of e-cigarettes. They demonstrated a highly developed sense of the social pressures that might be applied by peers, and how they might navigate these to keep to stay safe and healthy.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Michael Goodwin	Reporting inspector
Mr James Slocombe	Compliance team inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mr David Gajadharsingh	Team inspector (Head, SoH school)
Mr Gavin Sinnott	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)