

School inspection report

9 to 11 September 2025

St Margaret's School

18 Kidderpore Gardens

London

NW3 7SR

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 foster a culture that encourages pupils to embody the school's motto, 'ad vitam paramus', preparing for life. Leaders and staff prioritise pupils' wellbeing, ensuring that each pupil is recognised as an individual and supported to thrive.
2. Leaders typically provide parents with the required information through the school's website. At the beginning of the inspection leaders had not uploaded the school's September 2025 safeguarding policy on to the website. Additionally, although the 2022 inspection report was available on the website, the 2018 inspection report was not. Leaders rectified both issues during the inspection.
3. Pupils benefit from a well-rounded curriculum that is planned and taught to meet their individual needs. Leaders and teachers use a range of assessment data to check what pupils know and can do. This ensures that pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), receive a positive educational experience. Pupils are valued and self-motivated. They make good progress and achieve well academically.
4. Parents are regularly provided with information regarding their child's educational journey. However, parents are not always sufficiently informed of their child's academic progress and attainment across different subjects nor what their child needs to do to improve.
5. Pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health are high priorities throughout the school. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum supports pupils' personal growth and development. Pupils build secure relationships with staff based on mutual respect. Throughout the school, the calm and purposeful atmosphere encourages pupils to focus on their learning and behave well.
6. Pupils act as good role models. They are supportive and helpful to others. However, throughout the school there are limited occasions for pupils to develop their own initiatives and contribute positively to those living and working in the locality and the wider world. This restricts the development of pupils' personal and social skills and their understanding of social responsibility.
7. The school's safeguarding procedures operate effectively and meet all necessary statutory requirements. Governors oversee safeguarding diligently. They engage in regular discussions and checks with the safeguarding team. The well-trained safeguarding team is quick to address any concerns raised. Staff receive appropriate training on safeguarding protocols and understand how to document and report any concerns. Leaders collaborate with external agencies, such as children's services, to secure timely support for pupils when necessary.

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 all required policies and information are always available on the school's website
- ensure written reports for parents provide more specific detail about their child's academic progress and attainment, alongside their next steps for the different subjects they are taught
- enable pupils to develop their sense of responsibility through experiencing different ways to support the school community, show initiative and contribute to the lives of others in the locality and the wider world.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school. They receive regular reports, make frequent visits, engage with pupils and have focused discussions with school leaders. They understand the school well and assure themselves that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They ensure that leaders consistently promote pupils' wellbeing and meet the requirements of the Standards.
9. Leaders, including governors, are experienced and knowledgeable. They share a clear vision for the school. They set high expectations for pupils. They systematically review the quality of different aspects of the provision, such as analysing assessment data, studying attendance information and scrutinising feedback from staff, pupils and parents. This information helps them to identify priorities for improvement, with pupils' wellbeing and happiness at the core of any changes. Their development plans highlight that they value pupils' all-round education as much as their academic achievement. Recent changes, for example, enhancing the support for pupils who have SEND and who speak EAL and installing a new wellbeing terrace, have had a positive impact on pupils' outcomes and wellbeing.
10. The school's accessibility plan is well thought through and meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The plan is specific about how the curriculum and site are adjusted to cater for the additional needs of pupils in the school. Recent modifications include installing enhanced classroom lighting and providing staff training in the use of radio aids.
11. Leaders utilise the expertise and advice of external agencies to inform their decision-making in various areas, including safeguarding, academic support, and mental health services. They provide the local authority with the required information regarding pupils who have an education, health, and care plan (EHC plan).
12. Leaders supply parents with appropriate information and update their policies so that these follow statutory guidance and reflect the school's current provision. However, leaders do not always ensure that all required information and revised policies are published promptly on the school's website. An up-to-date safeguarding policy and a copy of the 2018 inspection report were added to the website during the inspection visit.
13. Parents receive regular information, including termly reports, regarding what their child has learned and their attitudes to learning. Written comments offer detailed information about what work their child has covered and their personal development. However, reports sometimes lack specific information for parents about their child's progress and attainment against expected academic standards, and their next steps in the subjects they are taught. Parents are not always adequately informed about their child's academic achievements and what their child needs to learn next to support their ongoing progress and attainment.
14. Leaders demonstrate a thorough approach to managing risk. They conduct comprehensive evaluations of potential hazards, including those related to the school's urban location. Staff receive appropriate training in assessing risk, supported by an online system. This enables them to prepare effective risk assessments for activities within the school, for the site and for visits beyond the school, detailing effective control measures. For example, there are clear procedures in place to support pupils' safety during visits to the local heath for outdoor learning. Leaders regularly review and update sensible mitigation strategies to ensure they remain current and effective.

15. Leaders maintain a suitable complaints policy that outlines clear timelines and processes. They respond promptly to any concerns raised, keep appropriate records of complaints and regularly monitor these records to identify any trends.
16. Effective leadership of the early years ensures that children are taught well and make good progress. Leaders provide early years staff with training and guidance to develop their professional practice. Leaders build positive relationships with parents and external agencies to support children's welfare and needs.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Pupils actively engage with the school's balanced and well-resourced curriculum that meets their different needs well. Specialist teachers use their expertise to deepen pupils' understanding in subjects such as modern foreign languages (MFL), art and music, encouraging pupils' linguistic and creative abilities. The curriculum is thoughtfully planned, equipping pupils with essential skills and knowledge across a wide range of subjects. For example, leaders' recent curriculum review resulted in giving pupils the opportunity to study a wider range of scientific subjects at GCSE.
19. The early years curriculum is carefully planned and taught across all areas of learning to meet the needs of children at different developmental stages. This prepares children well for their future learning. High-quality interactions between staff and children, including those children who speak EAL, supports children's communication and language development. Children listen attentively to staff and to each other. They answer questions confidently. Leaders and staff check regularly on what children have learned and use this information to plan children's next steps and to inform discussions with parents.
20. Teachers support pupils to learn by planning well-structured lessons. They share with pupils their good knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, their subjects. Teachers give clear explanations and demonstrate key teaching points in various ways. The most effective lessons are characterised by work specifically tailored to pupils' needs and content that sparks their curiosity and builds on what pupils already know. Pupils are encouraged to ask and answer questions freely and share their ideas and views with each other. Pupils, including those who have SEND, achieve well and make good progress from their different starting points. Pupils typically achieve GCSE examination results in different subjects that are above national averages.
21. The school's assessment framework enables teachers and leaders to monitor pupils' performance closely. Leaders systematically analyse data across subjects and share these insights with teaching staff so that they have an accurate view of how well pupils learn. Teachers use this information to provide personalised support to address any gaps in pupils' skills and knowledge. Frequent discussions help pupils understand their achievement levels. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding and give constructive feedback. This enables pupils to reflect on their own learning and set achievable goals.
22. Teachers adapt their teaching so that those pupils who speak EAL become more confident and fluent in their use of English. Staff identify these pupils early and provide additional help such as one-to-one sessions to support pupils' learning. Staff regularly review and track the progress made by pupils who speak EAL and plan their next steps, so they continue to learn successfully.
23. The leader of provision for pupils who have SEND oversees a well-structured process to identify the additional needs of pupils. Teaching staff are supported to adapt how the curriculum is taught and provide personalised and flexible strategies that are well matched to pupils' needs. These strategies include using specialised resources to teach essential content, developing 'working together' plans which outline tailored actions for support and set clear, achievable outcomes, and obtaining support from external professionals when necessary.
24. Pupils participate in a diverse range of clubs which builds their confidence and develops essential life skills, such as communication and resilience. They engage in sports clubs, such as netball and

football, creative activities, such as art and electronics and sessions aimed at promoting emotional wellbeing, such as the 'calm club' and yoga. Pupils enjoy these opportunities and appreciate how this helps them to develop new skills and broaden their interests.

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

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

26. Leaders and staff promote pupils' self-confidence through the school's encouraging environment centred around the 'prosper' acronym, which emphasises positivity, relationships, optimism, strengths, purpose, endeavour and resilience. Pupils take risks and understand that mistakes are part of their learning process. This helps them to build a secure sense of self-worth. Pupils receive regular recognition for their endeavours and achievements through assemblies, form time, and newsletters which boosts their self-esteem. Every pupil participates in various performances, such as 'girls' factor' and 'movement display', where they can perform to others, further developing their self-confidence.
27. The school's nurturing ethos enables pupils to appreciate the non-material aspects of life and the importance of mutual respect and tolerance. Pupils' spiritual understanding and knowledge are developed through a well-taught 'belief' curriculum, planned weekly assemblies and carefully crafted opportunities in lessons such as languages and arts. Teachers facilitate meaningful discussions that encourage reflection and enhance pupils' knowledge and understanding of a variety of religions such as Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.
28. Pupils engage in a varied physical education (PE) curriculum using the school's grounds and local spaces, such as the nearby park and swimming facilities. They develop their skills in various sports and learn how exercise contributes to a healthy lifestyle. Pupils demonstrate increasing levels of skill, teamwork, and enthusiasm. They achieve success in both school and external sporting events.
29. The PSHE and relationship and sex education (RSE) curriculums are age-appropriate. Pupils are taught to challenge discrimination and deepen their understanding of differences such as disability and race. Through the RSE curriculum, pupils explore and learn about relevant age-appropriate topics such as puberty, consent and healthy relationships. Pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to navigate different social situations and understand the feelings of others. They listen carefully, acknowledge emotions and respond with empathy. Pupils are encouraged to share their feelings right from the start in the early years. Furthermore, well-designed calm spaces, such as the wellbeing terrace, give pupils a quiet reflection area if needed. Pupils talk to staff openly about a range of topics, including social influence.
30. Leaders ensure that the clearly articulated behaviour policy is applied consistently throughout the school. The policy and systems are perceived as fair and effective by the school community. Pupils exhibit high standards of behaviour and possess a clear sense of right and wrong. Incidents of bullying are infrequent. Leaders handle these situations effectively when they arise, addressing inappropriate behaviour and resolving any conflicts amongst friends.
31. Staff have cultivated a positive learning environment in the early years and children readily engage in their learning. They quickly learn the well-established daily routines. Teaching plans are tailored to children's individual interests and needs. This enables children to develop their independence and self-esteem. Children skilfully use larger equipment to improve their strength, co-ordination, balance, and gross motor skills.
32. Leaders support pupils' welfare through a robust approach to health and safety. They implement relevant health and safety laws, including the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005, and meet

the necessary standards for safe evacuation. Leaders maintain the premises well, keep thorough records and conduct required checks and maintenance, including for fire safety.

33. Suitable medical facilities are available for pupils who are injured or unwell. Trained staff, including paediatric first aiders in the early years, administer first aid promptly and competently. Pupils know who to approach if they feel hurt or unwell.
34. Supervision is well organised and staff take the time to get to know each pupil individually. Staff maintain an active presence around the school. They remain vigilant at all times. Leaders ensure the required staff-to-child ratios in the early years.
35. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in accordance with current statutory guidance. They track attendance extensively and swiftly follow up any instances of pupil absence. The local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

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

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

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

37. Pupils learn about the economy and how to manage their finances through age-appropriate lessons and activities integrated into the curriculum. In the early years, children engage in imaginative role-play activities such as going shopping and using money. By Year 4, pupils start to understand the principles of annual household incomes through their 'children around the world' topic. During geography lessons, pupils in Year 7 consider global wealth inequality which increases their understanding of key economic concepts. PSHE lessons help develop pupils' financial literacy through topics such as 'aspirations and money'. The oldest pupils learn to manage budgets and understand taxes by discussing the difference between take-home pay and total salary.
38. Pupils are well-prepared for life in British society. Teachers develop pupils' social and cultural understanding in lessons and by actively promoting mutual respect. A range of well-organised whole school themed days, such as the 'International Day of Languages', provide opportunities to explore cultural traditions and celebrate diversity. Assemblies delivered by leaders promote tolerance and give pupils a clear understanding of the importance of recognising individual uniqueness and celebrating difference. As part of form time, pupils look at news articles and sensitively discuss current themes. This helps pupils to develop a global outlook and understanding. Teachers ensure that political themes and content are addressed impartially and in an unbiased manner.
39. Leaders provide some opportunities for pupils to take on roles of responsibility and engage in community activities but this is limited. Pupils could have more opportunities to develop their own initiatives, enhance their organisational skills and enact positive change within the school community. Currently, pupils seldom support the local and wider community or initiate charitable endeavours not organised by the school. This results in missed opportunities for pupils to enhance their personal and social development.
40. Leaders manage pupils' transitions between different year groups effectively. This support addresses pupils' questions and eases their concerns as they move towards times of transition. Staff prepare older pupils for examinations, develop their interview and presentation skills and ensure the curriculum is adapted to meet pupils' evolving needs. Careers education, taught through the PSHE curriculum, is complemented by activities such as one-to-one meetings for pupils in Year 11 and talks by representatives from various careers, including lawyers and dentists. Careers guidance has recently been enhanced through the use of an online platform, providing pupils with tailored and relevant career advice. This, alongside a work experience week for older pupils and a programme of external speakers for all pupils, helps pupils understand different routes and empowers them to make well-informed decisions about their futures.
41. Staff in the early years support children's social development by encouraging them to listen to one another and share resources. They take turns playing with different equipment, illustrating consideration for themselves and others. Visits from medical professionals and the police, alongside trips to galleries, such as the Tate Modern, help children begin to understand public institutions and the wider world. Caring staff quickly respond to children's needs, helping them settle into well-planned activities and feel safe and secure.
42. Teachers weave themes throughout the curriculum and during assemblies such as promoting self-worth, respecting others and making informed decisions. Within the school's friendly community

pupils use affirmative language and respond empathetically to one another. Pupils learn about justice during lessons. They develop an understanding of rights, responsibilities, laws and democratic principles. They cultivate moral courage to engage with ethical issues and become active citizens. Older pupils learn about England's judicial system and the role of the elected Parliament in law-making. They also address complex issues like fairness and human rights. Special days and excursions, such as visits to the Houses of Parliament, further enhance their understanding. Pupils actively participate in democratic practices such as electing school council members.

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

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

44. Leaders have established a secure safeguarding culture that supports pupils' safety. Leaders put effective safeguarding policies and procedures in place that reflect current statutory guidance. Governors oversee the school's safeguarding arrangements through scrutinising detailed reports and the regular updates they receive from the designated safeguarding leaders. Governors also undertake a thorough annual review of the school's safeguarding systems to check these are effective. Staff know to record any concerns in the school's electronic management system. Leaders regularly and carefully review this information to identify trends and ensure that appropriate support is provided to pupils, as necessary.
45. Those leading safeguarding undergo regular training to maintain their knowledge and understanding of their responsibilities. The safeguarding team provides staff with thorough induction training and regular safeguarding updates. Staff training covers critical topics, including the 'Prevent' duty which includes risks related to radicalisation, alongside understanding misinformation and raising awareness of mental health issues.
46. Leaders assess staff knowledge of safeguarding through discussions in meetings and by sharing 'snippets' during staff briefings. This ensures that everyone understands procedures and any changes in practice. As a result, staff promptly report any concerns and demonstrate a secure understanding of the school's child protection systems.
47. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share any worries they might have. They teach pupils the importance of discussing concerns early and ensure that pupils understand how to raise any worries. Pupils report worries, either by speaking with an adult or posting these in a 'worry box'. The supportive relationships between staff and pupils reassure pupils that their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately.
48. Leaders maintain effective working relationships with local safeguarding partners, such as children's services and the police. They follow any advice received, escalating concerns when necessary. The safeguarding team maintains thorough records of concerns and how these are managed.
49. Pupils gain an understanding of how to keep themselves safe in different situations through the content taught during PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons and assemblies. Pupils receive additional guidance from external speakers, who explain about online safety and how to stay safe on roads. The school implements robust internet filtering and monitoring systems which provide effective oversight of staff and pupils' online activity. These systems generate real time alerts to leaders that help them to identify potential concerns and respond swiftly.
50. Leaders responsible for safer recruitment ensure that all necessary pre-employment checks are completed before any adult begins their role at the school. These checks are recorded methodically in the single central record (SCR) of appointments and reviewed on a regular basis.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St Margaret's School
Department for Education number	202/6014
Registered charity number	312720
Address	St Margaret's School 18 Kidderpore Gardens London NW3 7SR
Phone number	020 7435 2439
Email address	enquiry@st-margarets.co.uk
Website	www.st-margarets.co.uk
Proprietor	St Margaret's School Hampstead Ltd.
Chair	Mrs Emily Brettle
Headteacher	Mrs Sharron Shackell
Age range	4 to 16
Number of pupils	149
Date of previous inspection	10 to 13 May 2022

Information about the school

52. St Margaret's School is an independent day school. It is registered as a single sex school for female pupils. It was founded in 1884 and moved into its current premises in 1954. It is situated in a residential area in Hampstead, London. The governors, who are also trustees of the charity which operates the school, oversee the running of the school. The headteacher has been in post since September 2025.
53. There are currently a small number of children in the early years setting, in one Reception class.
54. The school has identified 44 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
55. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small number of pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to provide a secure, caring and challenging learning environment in which pupils are encouraged to strive for excellence in all that they do. It also aims to encourage respect for others, within a school community, that will nurture, recognise and realise the potential and talent of each individual.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

9 to 11 September 2025

57. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. 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.

59. 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

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