



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

EDUCATIONAL QUALITY INSPECTION
WILMSLOW PREPARATORY SCHOOL

JUNE 2017



SCHOOL'S DETAILS

School	Wilmslow Preparatory School			
DfE number	895/6011			
Registered charity number	525924			
Address	7 Grove Avenue Wilmslow Cheshire SK9 5EG			
Telephone number	01625 524246			
Email address	secretary@wilmslowprep.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Helen Rigby			
Chair of governors	Mr Nick Rudgard			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	117			
	Boys	39	Girls	78
	Day pupils	117		
	EYFS	38	Juniors	79
Inspection dates	21 to 22 June 2017			

PREFACE

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards following their inspection may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

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.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is an EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection, reporting 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

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 the published report but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

All inspections of independent schools in England are conducted according to the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

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

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the educational governor, 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. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Bill Burn

Reporting inspector

Mr Alex Osiatynski

Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)

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1. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

About the school

- 1.1 Wilmslow Preparatory School is an independent day school for girls and boys aged between three and eleven years. It is administered by a charitable trust and overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher has been appointed (January 2014) and the management team has been extended and restructured.
- 1.2 The school was founded in 1909 and moved to its present site in a residential area on the outskirts of Greater Manchester in 1925. Boys have been re-admitted since 2013. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and the Junior School are all accommodated on a single site, with a sports hall and field close by.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to offer the best all-round education in a happy, caring and stimulating environment. It seeks to achieve this through a balanced curriculum, specialist teaching and a strong pastoral ethos. The school values each child as an individual so that they are confident and ready to enjoy the next stage of their education.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds, mostly from white British families who live within a few miles of the school. The school uses standardised tests in English and Maths plus verbal and non-verbal reasoning tests to measure the ability of the pupils. These indicate that the ability profile of the school is above average. The school has twelve pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and supports them with dyslexia, organisational and social skills. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan (EHC), and one has a statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language for 14 pupils, of whom one receives specialist support from the school.
- 1.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

Recommendations from previous inspections

- 1.6 The previous full inspection of the school by ISI was an interim inspection in June 2011. The recommendation from that inspection was:
 - The school should ensure that the quality of pupils' work is not limited by the overuse of worksheets.
- 1.7 The school has successfully met the recommendation of the previous inspection.

2. KEY FINDINGS

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

- Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their work and develop excellent skills in communication, numeracy and ICT.
- All groups of pupils make excellent progress in relation to their starting points.
- Pupils achieve well in lessons through high quality teaching, although it does not always include teaching assistants in the planning of lessons.
- Pupils excel in games and creative activities.
- Pupils achieve high standards as governors and senior managers conduct thorough reviews of all aspects of the school's work.

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

- Pupils have excellent levels of self-confidence and self-esteem, and they see making mistakes as an important step on the path to learning.
- Pupils relish taking on responsibilities and making decisions, and have an active interest in their community.
- Pupils have a growing understanding of the non-material aspects of life.
- Pupils have an outstanding moral sense, and know right from wrong.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent.

Recommendation

2.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider the following improvement:

- Involving teaching assistants more closely in lesson planning to enhance progress for all groups of pupils.

THE QUALITY OF PUPILS' ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

- 2.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 2.5 Pupils have highly positive attitudes to their work, and they complete regular and demanding homework assignments. They are eager to explain that they enjoy being challenged and that when they find a task especially demanding they always battle through to the end. Their level of attainment in nationally standardised tests is above average.
- 2.6 Pupils have generally excellent levels of knowledge and understanding. Almost all children in the EYFS achieve expected levels by the time they move up to Year 1. All pupils, including those with SEND, EAL, and those identified by the school as the most able, make progress that is at least good in relation to their starting points. For example, older pupils displayed detailed knowledge of the pop art movement and the work of Andy Warhol, and were able to develop useful hypotheses about what characterised the examples they saw of his work. Where the teaching is urgent and adventurous, it enables pupils to develop their grasp of the subject and show skills in synthesising information and summarising in note form. They can imagine how a story might have begun, and how it might continue. They respond well to teaching which features skilled questioning and allows pupils patiently to consider and weigh up evidence.
- 2.7 Pupils have highly developed communication skills. In the EYFS, children are confident in reading both aloud and privately. As they move through the school, pupils become proficient in speaking in formal and informal contexts. They are articulate, fluent, and generally free of self-consciousness, and take full advantage of opportunities in speech and drama lessons, and across the full range of the curriculum. Their writing shows a range of competences, and at its best shows skilled and confident handling of complex syntax, wide vocabulary, and accuracy. The acquisition of new passive vocabulary, and turning it into active vocabulary, are systematic features of lessons. In an English lesson, for example, older pupils acted out the emotions felt by an animal in a story, exploring words like 'grief-stricken', 'dejected' and 'irritable'. Listening and reading skills are well developed, and encouraged carefully and insistently by teachers in all subjects. Reading aloud is a common element of many lessons and assemblies. Pupils take it in their stride and almost without exception enjoy the experience.
- 2.8 Pupils' numeracy is strong and contributes to a high level of attainment in mathematics. It also equips them well for the demands of science and information and communication technology (ICT). Beginning in the EYFS, pupils attach priority to knowing their tables and to skill in mental arithmetic, in line with expectations in lessons. They show a competitive excitement at being quick and accurate. They relish the opportunity to solve mathematical problems, however heavily disguised, and their enjoyment is evident wherever they are challenged to apply their learning in fresh contexts.
- 2.9 Pupils acquire excellent skills and knowledge in ICT. They are expert in the creation and use of spreadsheets and presentation software. They are competent in word processing and are still able to develop excellent handwriting skills. These abilities ensure that they are able to meet the demands of other subjects. They are effective at research using the internet. They have responded well to the guidance they have received on evaluating sources. They make shrewd judgements about the status of what they find.
- 2.10 Pupils make excellent progress in their academic subjects. Almost all parents and pupils supported this view in the pre-inspection questionnaire. The school is not academically selective at entry. Almost all pupils gain entry to the secondary school of their choice, including those with the most demanding entry requirements. Annual standardised testing is supplemented by a rigorous system of individual tracking and comprehensive assessment reviews twice a year. The school's monitoring of pupils' academic work shows that all groups

of pupils make progress that is at least in line with their abilities, and often exceeds expectations. They benefit from highly effective support beyond the classroom. In addition, teaching ensures that a wide variety of tasks are set to cater for different learning styles. Pupils are quick to seize open-ended opportunities to write at length in continuous prose, for example. In this way, the school has met the recommendation of the previous inspection report to ensure the quality of the pupils' work is not limited by the overuse of worksheets.

- 2.11 Pupils learn different skills and make rapid progress because of a curriculum that accurately meets their needs and interests. It is flexible and constantly under review, so that pupils are enabled to learn Spanish, for example, instead of French. Specialist teaching is generally demanding and covers ground quickly, and carefully matches the tasks set to the aptitudes of different groups of pupils. Where teaching was occasionally less effective, most pupils were supported well, but the lack of pace and challenge meant that the needs of the most able were not always met. This is in part because planning of lessons does not always enable teaching assistants to enhance the progress of all groups of pupils. Imaginative cross-curricular links further enrich pupils' experience. Scientific work on the moon landings, for example, leads into design exercises to consider what kind of vehicle would be needed to travel on the moon's surface.
- 2.12 Pupils' achievements in extra-curricular activities are excellent. In music, results in external examinations show that the most talented pupils are enabled to shine. Most pupils learn at least one musical instrument. Pupils have recently won music scholarships to senior schools, as well as numerous awards at the annual Alderley Edge Festival. Pupils have also excelled at the same event in reading competitions and drama, and the results in the external speaking assessments have been outstanding. Pupils confirm that they take advantage of opportunities to represent the school in competitive fixtures across a range of team games, from cross-country fun runs to national competitions run by the ISA and IAPS. In art, individuals and groups have had success in the ISA Art Competition and the Wilmslow Show. Pupils' art is confident and imaginative, and displayed throughout the public areas of the school.
- 2.13 Pupils are competitive in games and creative activities. This contributes to the high levels of success they achieve. This competitiveness derives in part from their eagerness to please their teachers, with whom they have an excellent relationship.
- 2.14 Pupils' excellent achievements reflect meticulous monitoring and review of all aspects of their school lives by the senior management. This is responsive to formal and informal feedback from pupils and parents. It is a process supported by a board of governors that believes in high expectations, balancing the school's ambition to create an environment for pupils that is happy, caring and stimulating.

3. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.2 Pupils have strong self-confidence and self-esteem. From the start the youngest pupils take the opportunity to speak up in assemblies and lessons. The oldest are accomplished public speakers, and readily offer comment and questions in class. These represent a range of skills and competencies from higher order thinking to simple checking. What links them all, though, is that they are all born of a clear understanding that the school is a safe environment in which it is not only acceptable to make mistakes, but positively encouraged as a way of learning and making progress. Pupils are unanimous in both questionnaires and discussions that teachers and classmates alike will recognise this and be supportive of their efforts. Pupils know and are grateful for the endless availability of their teachers, who routinely set aside time for extra coaching and encouragement; and pupils benefit from the atmosphere and expectations created by the school. They owe a good deal too, to the formal training they receive through their speech and drama classes, plentiful opportunities to perform both within school at assemblies and outside events. Pupils show resilience and self-discipline, whether completing homework tasks or learning how to abseil. They take full advantage of the outstanding quality of the relationships between staff and pupils, and the small class sizes, which make it possible for teachers to know their pupils well and support their progress. Pupils have learned to be effective in self-editing and self-correction. In the questionnaire, a small minority of pupils indicated that they did not know how well they are doing in their subjects and how to improve their work. In discussion, pupils were unanimous that the written comments on their work and oral feedback in class are clear. The pupils suggest through the questionnaires that feedback could be more consistent in telling them how to improve their work. This is supported by inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work, both in the formal process and in class. Insufficient use is made of self-assessment and target setting.
- 3.3 Pupils are shrewd decision-makers when given the opportunity. Guidance and support from adults is a reliable feature of their lives in school. Where possible, though, they enjoy making their own decisions and are increasingly successful at it. In the EYFS, children can judge accurately which route through an obstacle course in PE is the most appropriate for them as individuals. Thereafter pupils are pleased to make their own decisions about which extra-curricular activities to join, which senior school will most closely suit their needs when they progress to the next stage of their education, and which questions to tackle in the morning challenge at tutor time. On the hottest day in England since 1976, pupils in assembly were clear about what was to happen next: they would drink plenty of water, stay in the shade, put on hats, and run around a bit less. Within the formal disciplinary system, rarely required, the individual is asked to choose a course of action, and is aware of the consequences of a wrong decision. The school council, buddy system and team of ambassadors are all influential in making important changes to school routines and facilities. Recently they have initiated decisions on the allocation of playground space, and a concerted effort to reduce waste through paper cup use at the water fountain. Pupils also assume a measure of responsibility for ensuring that nobody is lonely in the playground.
- 3.4 Pupils have a growing understanding of the non-material aspects of life. This comes in various forms, from the music and art that permeate the school buildings to the Easter and Christmas events that the pupils find memorable. In the EYFS, children were moved when a story contained a twist for a favourite character. Similarly, the embryonic promotion of mindfulness enables pupils to have fun and learn to relax, while in an English lesson they welcome the periodic requirement to be still, and just listen to nature. Assemblies make a further valuable

contribution, using parables to illustrate and underline a point about pupils' behaviour and attitudes.

- 3.5 Pupils have a strong moral sense and learn the difference between right and wrong. In the EYFS, children listen carefully to each other, and understand the need to take turns in the classroom. This is seen in pupils from Year 1 in their active promotion of environmental issues, and in the way they treat one another with kindness and tolerance. The school's desire to seek a positive outcome to disciplinary matters sets an example in this regard. Pupils speak with pleasure of learning to pause and count silently to ten when in danger of losing their temper. They respect rules and understand the need for them, to the extent that by Year 6 the rules have become well established and the need to refer to them begins to diminish. The quality of relationships among pupils is excellent by the time they leave the school. As indicated in the questionnaire by parents and pupils, behaviour among pupils is typically excellent, with courtesy and self-control valued by every member of the community. Pupils also accept responsibility for their own behaviour and its consequences. As in class, they see making mistakes as a step along the path to learning.
- 3.6 Pupils have highly developed collaboration skills, and enjoy the opportunity to share ideas with classmates and support one another's learning. Teamwork and leadership skills have their foundations in the work of the EYFS, and carry on through solving the problems of their stuffed toy in Year 2 mathematics, and *Guess Zoo* in Year 6 science. Pupils say that the skills and attitudes learned on annual residential courses develop and reinforce their ability to be leaders and team members.
- 3.7 Pupils make an excellent contribution to the wellbeing of others in the school, through their work as ambassadors, buddies and council members. They also take the first tentative steps towards fundraising for charities in the local community and beyond. The 'reindeer ramble' and 'toddle waddle' exemplify the school's wish to promote an awareness of the needs of others when pupils are still young. Pupils develop a sense of belonging and healthy competition through the house system, which enables them to make common cause in pursuit of the overall house cup, as well as on sports day. Their competitiveness also comes from the pride they feel in their school, and the way it encourages them always to give of their best. Pupils confirmed in discussion that they aim to be the best possible version of themselves, without comparing themselves with others.
- 3.8 Pupils' respect for others of different faiths, cultures and beliefs is a natural element of their upbringing. They speak enthusiastically of what they learn of diverse religions in religious education, and of visits to local places of interest.
- 3.9 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the need to stay safe online and how to go about it, displaying detailed knowledge of appropriate behaviour and strategies. They readily acknowledge the role the school has played in equipping them appropriately. Likewise, they understand the importance of healthy eating and exercise in modern life.