

School inspection report

28 to 30 January 2025

Royal Grammar School (RGS) Guildford

High Street

Guildford

Surrey

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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. Governors' active oversight across both school sites ensures that leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders and governors successfully communicate the school's aims and values of inclusivity, scholarship, integrity, respect, courage and collaboration. These aims and values provide direction and momentum for the school's development and improvement. Consequently, pupils receive an education where success is measured in academic terms as well as in terms of taking part and developing as both individuals and part of a team.
2. The well-designed curriculum and breadth of co-curricular opportunities cultivate pupils' achievement. Pupils attain highly in external examinations.
3. Leaders regularly provide detailed information to parents about their children's attainment and progress. However, the reporting on pupils' progress in relationships and sex education (RSE) is not as thorough as that for other subjects.
4. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme is taught well to meet the needs of the pupils. This curriculum is well planned, enabling pupils to develop an understanding of relationships, families, and health and wellbeing. As a result, pupils develop social skills, confidence and self-esteem, ensuring they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.
5. Leaders maintain a school culture that actively promotes inclusion and mutual respect highly successfully. This is a significant strength of the school. Leaders utilise internal and external expertise to review this aspect of school life, for example by commissioning a survey about race, ethnicity and religion. They make adaptations as necessary to ensure a positive and inclusive learning environment for all groups of pupils. Pupils proactively seek to understand the barriers people may face and work together to support each other in making the most of what the school offers. This fosters a sense of community, which promotes mutual respect, understanding and acceptance extremely well. From a young age, pupils are taught to appreciate diversity and to value the strengths and potential in everyone. Their development of mutual understanding and respect creates a culture of acceptance and fosters pupils' empathy and understanding very well.
6. Leaders in the senior school have set a clear aim of developing academic curiosity and ambition in pupils. Staff supplement their deep subject knowledge with tailored professional development to deliver exciting lessons which challenge pupils. Extensive individual support enables pupils to participate in these lessons and develop a breadth of knowledge and enthusiasm for scholarship. This is a significant strength of the school. This strong academic culture leads to pupils who readily engage in critical thinking and deep learning and display intellectual curiosity. This fosters individuality and develops social skills, confidence and self-esteem.
7. There is a secure culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Staff receive appropriate safeguarding training and understand the clear procedures in place for reporting concerns. The safeguarding team readily provides proactive support and maintains meticulous records. They respond quickly whenever safeguarding concerns are raised. The early years setting is welcoming and calm. Transitions between learning rooms, including the outside area, are managed smoothly. Children engage in carefully planned activities that interest them and encourage them to enjoy learning. As a result, they grow intellectually and emotionally while developing their creative, social and physical skills.

8. Health and safety and fire safety measures are comprehensive and effective. The school's premises and accommodation are well-managed, with facilities well-resourced and maintained. Leaders maintain effective oversight and records for all health and safety aspects are robust.

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 that reports to parents contain the same quality of information about their children's progress in relationships and sex education (RSE) as that about their progress in other subjects.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors regularly review the work of academic and pastoral leaders through discussions and scrutinising reports and presentations to ensure that the school promotes pupils' wellbeing effectively and that all-round outcomes for pupils remain high. They ensure that leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and that they work closely and collaboratively with one another to ensure that the Standards are consistently met.
10. Through the use of a comprehensive and ambitious development plan, leaders work together to ensure pupils' wellbeing is central to their planning and decision-making. Leaders identify areas for development and take actions to improve them. For instance, leaders have recently reorganised the responsibilities of pastoral staff and implemented a 'speak-up button' to enable pupils to report inappropriate comments immediately. The school is an inclusive and welcoming environment where pupils succeed academically and make the most of the extensive range of opportunities.
11. Leaders ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is in place and implemented. This plan identifies appropriate measures to ensure pupils can access the curriculum and premises effectively. For example, leaders have arranged the refurbishment of senior school science labs to create more accessible learning spaces and have developed a music space in the prep school with step-free access to the outdoor area.
12. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies. They maintain a positive relationship with various outside agencies, regularly contacting the local authority for support and advice, including, when appropriate, with regard to safeguarding concerns. This helps leaders keep up to date with current thinking about best practice in relation to the promotion of pupils' welfare. Leaders provide the local authority with the necessary information relating to any funded pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
13. Leaders apply a robust approach to risk management. For example, they monitor behavioural records to identify any trends and supplement these with surveys of pupils' experience so that they can identify any potential hidden risks. Leaders frequently consider strategic risks in meetings with governors and leadership, and in health and safety meetings. Leaders responsible for digital technology contribute to the school's strategic risk management, supporting the school to respond to changing online threats. Leaders maintain familiarity with any local agency advice about any potential contextual risks associated with the local area, liaising with local agencies where appropriate to mitigate these. Detailed and effective risk assessments for trips consider a wide range of potential hazards. Leaders regularly review the effectiveness of risk assessments, including those for educational visits off-site.
14. Leaders implement a clear and transparent complaints policy effectively. They respond appropriately and in a timely manner to any complaints submitted and keep suitable records of these, which they regularly analyse for any recurring themes.
15. All required information is readily accessible to parents via the informative school website or the school office. Parents receive regular information about their children's progress through ongoing updates and grade sheets throughout the term, as well as parents' evenings and detailed reports. However, these reports do not provide parents with the same quality of information about their children's progress in RSE as that about their progress in other subjects.

16. Early years leadership is effective, demonstrating an ambitious vision with high expectations for what children can achieve. Leaders provide children with a range of well-planned activities that develop their language and number skills effectively. There are clear strategies to develop concepts of fairness and working together. Consequently, children are engaged in their learning, make good progress and build secure relationships.

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. Leaders implement a broad curriculum that develops pupils' knowledge and skills across all required areas. They carefully adapt it to meet the particular needs of the pupils. For instance, in the prep department, pupils learn science and English through the use of teaching methods that engage them and enable them to apply the skills that they develop. Studying an appropriately balanced curriculum continues through the senior school. Pupils in the sixth form maintain a broad knowledge base alongside A-level courses, with a general studies programme and discussion of a range of contemporary personal, social and moral issues.
19. The curriculum is planned carefully to promote inclusivity. Heads of department include their steps to make their curriculum inclusive in their annual reports. Teachers seek opportunities to widen pupils' outlooks. For instance, a broader range of authors is used in English to enable pupils to discuss themes of identity and social justice. In modern foreign-language lessons, pupils explore the experiences of people with different ethnicities and backgrounds, and in design and technology, time is spent looking at inclusive design. As a result, pupils are encouraged to analyse information critically and to develop an understanding of and empathy for others.
20. Pupils achieve highly in standardised assessments and public examinations. Leaders implement robust and detailed systems for monitoring results and progress throughout the year. Academic leaders use data to identify groups or individuals who need additional support and how well teaching in different subjects provides the support required. Effective written and verbal feedback enables pupils to identify successful features of their work and areas where further development is needed.
21. Teachers throughout the school set high academic expectations and use a highly effective variety of teaching methods and well-chosen activities to engage and motivate pupils. Teachers use their knowledge of their subjects and of pupils' abilities, needs and interests to enable pupils to build on prior learning well. All groups of pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL), make good progress from their starting points.
22. In the senior school, teachers use their good subject knowledge to engage pupils in highly sophisticated discussions, using probing questions to challenge their ideas and encourage scholarship and thought extremely effectively. This is further reflected in the additional activities, for example the 'independent learning assignment', undertaken by Year 12 pupils. Pupils regularly enter national essay competitions and have both won and received high commendations.
23. Regular monitoring of the progress of pupils who have SEND enables leaders to review the impact of strategies used to support them and revise these when necessary. Close links between the pastoral and academic teams and those responsible for the provision for pupils who have SEND enable teachers to provide these pupils with unified and coherent support. Pupils who have SEND are involved in identifying learning strategies which help them to become confident, independent learners.
24. Leaders and teachers support pupils who speak EAL through prompt identification of need and the provision of tailored teaching and additional support when required. The effective use of teaching

assistants and suitable resources, such as virtual dictionaries and vocabulary lists, where needed, enable pupils who speak EAL to make good progress with their English and access the curriculum.

25. An extensive range of co-curricular activities supports pupils in developing and pursuing their interests. Younger pupils participate in clubs in areas such as business, recycling and gardening, learning to collaborate while developing, for example, their creative skills and an appreciation for nature. Older pupils explore further opportunities in 'choices' sessions, fostering life skills and independence. This extends further into the sixth form, where many activities involve pupils collaborating with their female peers from neighbouring schools, for example when learning the history of card games or developing their ballroom dancing skills.
26. The early years curriculum enables children to learn effectively, including through creative play when appropriate, so that they demonstrate interest and make rapid progress across all areas of learning. Staff encourage high levels of oracy and the use of challenging and adventurous language. For example, children use terms such as 'palaeontologist' and 'recipe'.

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

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

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

28. Leaders prioritise and support pupils' physical, mental and emotional health well. They encourage pupils to recognise and reflect on their emotions and the impact they have on personal wellbeing. Leaders use a range of effective methods to track and evaluate pupils' emotional wellbeing and needs and implement effective pastoral strategies where necessary.
29. The school nurtures pupils' spiritual and moral development through regular trips to places of worship relating to different religions and articulate discussions within the religious education curriculum. Pupils engage in sophisticated discussions about the spiritual perspectives of different religions and how they relate to each other. For instance, senior pupils explore the idea of a 'golden rule' as a philosophical and moral principle and how this idea manifests itself across different faiths. Pupils can take advantage of a quiet room for prayer.
30. The curriculum builds pupils' confidence and self-esteem through a range of activities, such as involvement in assemblies and music and drama performances. Teachers' effective questioning and encouraging manner help pupils to develop confidence about expressing their own perspectives and opinions to those who may hold different ones.
31. The extensive physical education (PE) programme is taught by specialist staff. Teaching in the early years successfully develops children's fine and gross motor skills through regular physical activities. Specialist teaching enables pupils to develop a wide range of physical and sports skills. The PE programme promotes pupils' teamwork skills and encourages them to reflect on links between physical and mental wellbeing.
32. The suitable PSHE programme, which includes RSE, explores and revisits key themes in increased depth as pupils progress through the school. Guest speakers and focus days supplement teachers' delivery of the curriculum. Teachers encourage age-appropriate discussion of a wide range of topics, such as healthy relationships, identity, drugs and informed consent. Teaching is conducted in a way that encourages pupils to ask questions relevant to them personally in a supportive and non-judgmental environment. This is effective at preparing pupils to make informed decisions and contributes to pupils' understanding and respect for each other.
33. Leaders and staff promote pupils' good behaviour through consistent application of the school's behaviour policies. They communicate the school's behavioural expectations clearly and effectively and teach pupils about acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. When behavioural issues do arise, leaders and staff use proportionate sanctions and help pupils affected to communicate with each other to resolve differences.
34. Leaders ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is in place. They monitor detailed logs and provide regular training for staff and counselling for pupils. Pupils are educated effectively about bullying and encouraged to speak up if they witness anything. Leaders respond swiftly to the rare incidents of bullying that do occur and support both victims and perpetrators effectively.
35. Leadership opportunities begin in the prep school, such as sitting on the equality, diversity and inclusion council. Sixth-form prefects model the school's values to younger pupils. Pupils participate in the school council to represent their peers. Through engagement with the mentoring programme,

sixth-form pupils develop their sense of responsibility and community service. Pupils who act as mentors provide helpful guidance to others to help them develop their self-confidence.

36. Staff in the early years form nurturing relationships with children and encourage them to identify their feelings through various strategies, including a daily emotion 'self-check-in' and the use of a 'colour monster'. They learn to collaborate confidently, follow rules and take turns.
37. All school premises contain suitable facilities and are maintained effectively. Staff ensure that all relevant checks and servicing of equipment are carried out, including through the use of external specialists, and maintain clear records of these. Fire safety measures are effective. Regular fire evacuation drills ensure that pupils know what to do in the event of a fire, how to safely exit buildings in an emergency and where to assemble when they do so.
38. The school provides appropriate first aid facilities and first aid that is delivered in a timely and compliant manner. There are a sufficient number of staff trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid, to meet pupils' needs.
39. Leadership ensures that pupils are supervised effectively through the appropriate deployment of staff. There is a culture of teachers being readily available to support pupils during breaktimes. This contributes to positive and inclusive behaviour from pupils throughout the school.
40. The school maintains appropriate admission and attendance registers. Leaders promote and monitor attendance rigorously, contributing to high attendance rates. They inform the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.

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

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

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

42. Activities throughout the school, including a 'money matters' element of the tutorial programme, develop pupils' economic understanding effectively. This begins with the youngest children learning about money and continues with older pupils exploring topics such as banking, cryptocurrency and mortgages. Staff teach pupils about practical financial and budgeting skills and the possible implications of financial choices and situations, such as the dangers of gambling and dealing with unexpected hardship.
43. A strategic intent of the school's leaders and governors is to develop an inclusive environment where diversity is celebrated. This is embodied in day-to-day actions where tolerance, kindness and mutual respect pervade every aspect of school life. The pupil-led equality, diversity and inclusion group, which holds a prominent position within the school, organises events and represents the views of their peers well. Leaders regularly review the curriculum and co-curricular activities to ensure that they enable pupils to develop awareness of and sensitivity towards diversity. Teaching across different subjects explores the contributions of people representing different cultures ethnicities, genders and abilities. Pupils learn about the fundamental rights and freedoms that belong to every person, regardless of their background, and about the harm that prejudice and discrimination can do. This results in a highly positive and inclusive learning environment where pupils are mutually respectful and successfully prepared for interactions in British society.
44. Lessons enable pupils to develop a substantial appreciation of and respect for different cultures. Teachers guide pupils in sophisticated discussions about the importance of mutual respect and the appreciation of diversity. This approach helps pupils reflect on their assumptions about societal roles and stereotyping of cultures. As a result, pupils learn to thoughtfully consider and appreciate perspectives that differ from their own. This appreciation is further enhanced through co-curricular activities, international links and tours. The assemblies programme explores pertinent themes such as discrimination and its impact, positive masculinity, and healthy and respectful relationships. This culminates in a community in which pupils have a profound appreciation for diversity.
45. The careers guidance programme is comprehensive and well planned. It provides pupils with up-to-date guidance on a broad range of educational and career options. Support for prep pupils includes introducing study skills and current affairs for pupils as they end their time in the prep. For older pupils, a series of seminars runs throughout the academic year, including advice about applying to university and degree apprenticeships. Further support includes work experience, career conventions and regular meetings with pupils to discuss their aspirations, skills and potential next steps.
46. Staff in the early years support children's social development well by encouraging them to listen to one another, share resources and wait for their turn. This includes shared experiences, such as World Book Day, which is shared not only with the rest of the pre-prep but also with a neighbouring school for female pupils. Guidance and support from staff enable children to develop their ability to play and collaborate with others in a friendly manner. Children also develop social awareness through mealtime conversations and engaging with real-life age-appropriate scenarios such as shopping with money and cooking together from a recipe.

47. Teachers stimulate pupils' social and political understanding through assemblies and lessons focusing on social responsibility. The school develops pupils' sense of justice and appreciation of the differences between right and wrong from an early age, including through discussion and debate about complex issues. Pupils engage with themes such as the situation in particular parts of the world and the impact of extremism and populism. Pupils are taught about respect for democratic processes and the rule of law as part of the curriculum and in assemblies. They learn about the judicial system in England and the elected Parliament's role in the law-making process. Democratic processes are actively applied when pupils vote for prefects, conduct debates modelled on British Parliament, and participate in Model United Nations conferences. Teachers ensure that any discussion of political themes or content is conducted impartially and without bias.
48. Leaders provide a variety of opportunities for pupils to contribute to the lives of others both within the school and in the wider community. The school council has influenced decisions such as adaptations to the school uniform and the introduction of a 'buddy bench'. Outreach work includes reading poetry at a care home and raising funds and awareness for people experiencing homelessness through involvement in a 'sleep out'. Such activities help inform pupils' understanding of society and enable them to contribute positively to the lives of others.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. Leaders have established a robust safeguarding culture across all parts of the school. The safeguarding policy and procedures reflect current statutory guidance. Governors conduct regular reviews of safeguarding, providing diligent and effective oversight. During monitoring visits, they meet with leaders and scrutinise their reports to accurately understand issues, monitor any trends and check the effectiveness of the school's actions.
51. Safeguarding training, including that for all staff as part of their induction, is comprehensive and suitable. All staff receive regular online and in-person training as well as frequent updates from the safeguarding team. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding issues and understand the appropriate action to take when any potential concerns are identified. Leaders and staff respond appropriately to any safeguarding concerns, including any relating to child-on-child abuse, and understand the risks associated with extremism.
52. Leaders encourage pupils to raise any worries they might have with trusted adults. Pupils understand how to share concerns and are confident that issues will be dealt with appropriately. A wide range of staff, including counsellors, are available for pupils to speak to, and pupils feel well-supported in school.
53. Leaders work collaboratively and effectively with relevant external agencies, such as children's services and the police. They refer concerns onwards to relevant agencies when appropriate. Leaders keep appropriate records of safeguarding concerns and the school's responses to these.
54. Suitable filtering and monitoring systems are in place and routinely checked by the safeguarding team. Pupils receive extensive guidance on staying safe online and understand what they have been taught.
55. Leaders conduct suitable recruitment checks on governors, staff and volunteers before they begin work. Relevant staff are thoroughly trained in safer recruitment practices. Leaders and governors regularly review the single central record (SCR) of appointments to ensure it is accurately maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Royal Grammar School (RGS) Guildford
Department for Education number	936/6534
Registered charity number	312028
Address	High Street Guildford Surrey GU1 3BB
Phone number	01483 880600
Email address	office@rgsg.co.uk
Website	http://www.rgsg.co.uk
Proprietor	Royal Grammar School Guildford
Chair	Mrs Sarah Creedy
Headteacher	Dr Jon Cox
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	1306
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 February 2022

Information about the school

57. Royal Grammar School (RGS) Guildford is an academically selective independent day school for male pupils. The school was founded in 1509 and received its royal charter in 1552. The school occupies two sites which are both close to the centre of Guildford. It comprises the preparatory school for pupils aged 3 to 11, which includes the early years, and the senior school, for pupils aged 11 to 18. The school is a registered charity and a limited company overseen by a board of governors.
58. There are currently 43 children in the early years setting, comprising one Nursery class and two Reception classes.
59. The school has identified 214 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 (EHC) plan.
60. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for 137 pupils.
61. The school states its aims are to provide an excellent education for pupils by developing character and intellect within an atmosphere that encourages scholarship for all and in which each individual is cared for and valued equally. It seeks to encourage the growth of intellectual curiosity, creativity and habits of learning and the opportunity to establish important life skills through a wide range of extra-curricular activities. The school intends to foster self-discipline, responsibility, a high moral code and a sense of service to the local and wider community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 January 2025

62. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. 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.

64. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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