

School inspection report

7 November 2023 to 9 November 2023

Guildhouse School

43–45 Bloomsbury Square
London
WC1A 2RA

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 fulfil their responsibilities well and in line with the school's aims and ethos. They promote pupils' wellbeing effectively and are alert to the contextual risks associated with a school offering courses predominantly for sixth-form pupils and having a largely international pupil body.
2. The proprietor, through the governing body, ensures that leaders have the skills and knowledge required to manage the school well. The governing body oversees the effectiveness of leaders' strategic planning so that the needs of pupils are met. As a result, the school consistently meets the regulatory requirements.
3. Boarding is a central part of the school's provision. Leaders ensure boarders take advantage of the cultural opportunities afforded by the school's central London location. Suitable measures are in place to help boarders to stay safe and to understand and manage risk, so that they can benefit from attending external events and activities.
4. The curriculum is well planned and prepares pupils well for the university courses to which almost all apply. Teachers prepare pupils for their next stage of education, for example by providing suitable opportunities for independent research and learning. The programmes of study enable pupils to develop their linguistic and numeric, scientific and creative skills and pupils make good progress overall.
5. A large majority of pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). Leaders are alert to their needs, and pupils make good progress with their fluency in English due to well-planned support for this aspect of their learning.
6. Leaders also have effective processes to identify and support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), so that they make good progress.
7. The school has suitable assessment strategies in place. However, the use of this data to plan next steps of learning is not fully developed. Where this is the case, pupils progress is less consistent.
8. Leaders provide recreational opportunities to pupils, but these are limited in scope and variety. Suitable risk assessments are in place to manage those that take place.
9. Leaders promote pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing. They know pupils well as individuals. The school's aim that pupils should 'aim high' translates into encouraging pupils to set high standards for themselves. As a result, pupils are ambitious for their future and well motivated in their studies. Good behaviour is promoted effectively, and leaders ensure that the behaviour and anti-bullying policies are understood by staff and pupils and implemented fairly and consistently.
10. The role of the school's student council and boarding council is being developed. Pupils' views have limited input into leaders' decision-making, and pupils are not clear about changes that have been made in response to their suggestions.
11. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is delivered so that pupils are well informed and understand how to manage their lives and relationships in a positive way. Pupils interact with each other respectfully and with kindness within the school and make a positive contribution to wider society.

12. Pupils show respect for diversity and develop a social and cultural knowledge which reflects British values. Provision for careers is effective, through a well-structured and varied programme of events which pupils find useful when making decisions about their futures.
13. Leaders ensure that safeguarding measures are effective and reflect the most recent statutory guidance. Policies are suitably matched to the context of the school and are fully implemented. There are suitable recruitment procedures in place.

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:

- strengthen teachers' use of attainment data in their planning so that pupils make consistently good progress
- ensure that more pupils experience a wide range of recreational activities outside the classroom in order to support their physical health and wellbeing
- develop ways for pupils' views to be fully represented in the development of the school, and that they receive feedback on any subsequent changes.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Leaders ensure the school's ethos and provision reflect the needs of its mainly international pupil body. The school has a friendly and supportive atmosphere, in which pupils and their teachers interact positively and readily. Pupils are encouraged to be ambitious for their futures.
15. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They demonstrate a commitment to ensuring pupils' wellbeing, including for those pupils who board, is actively promoted. The regulatory standards are met consistently.
16. Governors are committed to a strategy for school improvement which is well planned and well resourced, reflecting secure strategic decision-making. For example, a new financial trading facility has been opened which enables pupils to replicate aspects of the financial careers to which some of them aspire. Access for pupils to receive counselling as appropriate has been introduced.
17. Governors have effective oversight of policies and keep up to date with changes to statutory guidance. Governors know the school well, and ensure that leaders and managers have the skills, knowledge and understanding to manage any risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing, so that action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. Risk assessments are suitable and in place, being thorough and reviewed regularly.
18. Suitable arrangements for the management of boarding are in place and are effective. Staff with responsibility for boarding have the skills and experience to fulfil their duties well and are suitably trained. Leaders take full account of the school's central London location. Appropriate measures are in place and are implemented rigorously to manage risks both on- and off-site, and to promote the wellbeing of boarders.
19. Policies and expectations are communicated to parents and understood by pupils, so that pupils learn in a positive and safe environment. Pupil progress is at the centre of the school's development planning, and there is an emphasis on effective teaching. Staff improve their skills through training externally and through the school's own professional development programme. However, the use of assessment data in the planning of teaching is inconsistent.
20. School leaders are visible and accessible, and they lead by example in setting standards of respect and application. There is an emphasis on effective provision for pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL), which is recognised by the diverse pupil body. Consequently, the school community is cohesive and supportive. Academic leaders actively promote the development of pupils' study skills and independent learning to prepare pupils for higher education.
21. A culture of safeguarding is embedded in the school. Regular reports to governors enable effective oversight. Leaders have effective links with external agencies to make referrals and provide support for pupils.
22. Leaders ensure there is suitable provision of information as required. An appropriate procedure for complaints is in place. Complaints are handled in accordance with this policy, and detailed records are maintained of outcomes and any actions required.

23. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are understood and followed. Leaders have drawn up an appropriate accessibility plan, which enhances access to the site as well as providing additional support for pupils with SEND.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Teaching offers suitable challenge to pupils of different abilities, typically taking care to explain nomenclature and terminology in the different subject areas to support pupils for whom English is not their first language. Pupils make good progress overall, achieving A-level grades in line with expectations based upon their assessed starting points.
25. The curriculum meets the requirements. Leaders take care to ensure it is suitably structured so that a high proportion of pupils who have EAL can achieve well academically. These pupils are assessed in English on entry and receive a study support programme in English alongside their chosen subjects as required. They usually make rapid progress with their English speaking and writing skills.
26. The recent introduction of standardised assessment testing allows teachers and curriculum leaders to monitor pupil progress and plan teaching activities that are matched to pupils' abilities. Leaders have trained staff in the use of pupil performance data. Teachers' use of the data to inform planning is not fully embedded. Where this is the case, pupils' progress is less consistent.
27. The individualised support SEND pupils receive from their teachers motivates them to learn. Teachers understand their needs, and take these into account in their planning. These pupils achieve results in line with their predicted grades.
28. A range of suitable classroom resources are available to support learning. Knowledge acquisition and the development of subject specific skills are core objectives in lessons. Teachers know their pupils well, and plan activities that engage pupils so that pupils are well motivated, and they engage with their studies with enthusiasm. This helps to promote positive learning and progress. Pupils show a determination to succeed in order that they can access university courses of their choosing. Many pupils go on to study business and finance degree courses with demanding entrance requirements.
29. Pupils receive helpful feedback which helps them to improve their work and make good progress. Half termly reports track pupils' progress over time. Where data shows more limited progress, personalised learning plans are put in place to support individual pupils' needs.
30. Leaders use reflection days effectively to enable pupils to have individual discussions with their tutors. This brings together academic and pastoral oversight, with the result that pupils have a clear route towards their target grades, and support can be provided as required.
31. Pupils enjoy their recreation time and develop new interests and skills through extra-curricular activities such as chess, mosaic and maths challenge clubs. However, they find the range of co-curricular clubs is limited and does not always match their interests.
32. Leaders' arrangements for boarding mean that boarders' recreation and study time is well managed, and boarders are able to keep abreast of their work commitments.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. A culture of respect and inclusivity where all pupils are valued is embedded in the school. Pupils have a sense of belonging and loyalty. Leaders provide an informative handbook for pupils which sets out information such as boarding routines and behaviour expectations. 'Reflection days' and progression discussions with tutors motivate pupils to do their best academically. Pastoral input from staff is tailored to individual's needs.
34. Through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme pupils' spiritual and moral understanding and knowledge is developed well. Pupils are actively engaged and with maturity in discussions with their tutors on moral and ethical topics. Pupils participating enthusiastically in events such as the whole school multi-faith week, and have respectful relationships with others whose faiths, cultures and backgrounds are different from their own.
35. Leaders create a positive learning environment for pupils so that their academic progress is unhindered.
36. Pupil behaviour is well managed, and leaders set high expectations for them. A clearly understood code of conduct in place encourages good behaviour. Pupils behave well and report that they are treated fairly. Effective anti-bullying measures are in place. Behaviour and bullying logs are well managed with appropriate information shared and discussed amongst staff so that any intervention takes effect quickly. In line with the age of the pupils, the school implements restorative processes where appropriate, with pupils expected to take responsibility for their actions.
37. Physical education is provided through access to a local sports and leisure centre. In addition, there is a suitably equipped gym in the boarding house. Many pupils also take advantage of opportunities to attend optional physical activities such as external basketball and football clubs and this enables them to stay physically active and healthy. However, the choice is limited and pupils would welcome the inclusion of additional sports in the programme.
38. Leaders make sure appropriate supervision is in place, and they are alert to the context of the school. They take due account of the age range of its pupil body and the central London location of the school. Remote supervision using a dedicated system enhances the monitoring of pupils off-site. Online communication is suitably supervised and well used by all in the school. It is an integrated part of the induction programme for new pupils. Arrangements take into account the stated objective of preparing pupils for life at university.
39. The admission and attendance registers are kept as required. Attendance is monitored and absences are followed-up. The required reports are made to local authorities when pupils join or leave the school.
40. Emotional wellbeing for pupils is a priority for the leaders and it is supported effectively by a pastoral care system across both the school and in boarding. School counsellors are available to see pupils, and there are staff trained as mental-health first-aiders. As a result, pupils' mental health is well supported.
41. Leaders provide a well-structured and age-appropriate RSE programme. It is delivered by personal tutors who know their pupils well, enabling topics to be openly discussed without embarrassment in

respectful and informative discussions. Additionally, there is effective use of local links, such as with a nearby university providing speakers to talk about topics such as consent and child-on-child abuse. This supports pupils in knowing how to stay safe.

42. There is no prefect system or equivalent, but a school council is in place, and alongside it a dedicated boarding council is being implemented. Leaders are starting to take into account the views of pupils in planning. The recently implemented electronic system to receive feedback on food is an example of seeking pupils' opinions. However, pupils feel they have a limited voice in the development and routines of the school and receive little feedback on their suggestions.
43. Leaders prioritise arrangements for health and safety, and they follow the relevant legislation. Fire safety and evacuation systems are implemented and compliant. Suitable records are kept and are up to date. The school's facilities are well maintained, including the challenges of maintaining the listed central London buildings. Boarding facilities are comfortable and spacious, with clusters of boarders' rooms each provided with a shared kitchen. There is a suitable shared common space including a quiet study area. On-site provision for laundry, and effective signing in and signing out arrangements are in place.
44. A suitable proportion of staff, including those with boarding responsibilities, are first aid trained. Suitable medical provision is available, and pupils can access assistance as necessary.
45. There is a varied lunch and dinner menu on a four-week cycle. There is a system in place to allow monitoring of pupils' use of the dining hall. The school places suitable emphasis on healthy eating.
46. Pupils know that staff are alert to their welfare needs and academic needs. They grow in self-confidence and self-esteem and understand their abilities and areas for development.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

47. Leaders effectively promote their aim of creating a community which strives to be welcoming, caring, collective and kind. Pupils understand and respect British values. Pupils, including boarders, respect each other and take a genuine interest in the world around them.
48. A thorough and informative induction programme is in place so that boarders integrate well and feel a valued part of the school community. Pupils respect diversity in their own community and the wider world and recognise the need to contribute positively to the lives of others.
49. Social and cultural understanding is reinforced by initiatives such as Black history month, which is widely promoted both in school and in the boarding environment. The international context of the pupil body makes for a rich diversity of race, nationality and language. There is an appreciation of different cultures which are acknowledged and celebrated. The pupil-led cultural section in the weekly news bulletin enables pupils to see themselves as global citizens.
50. Pupils learn about the role of institutions and public services in Britain through a programme of talks, as well as taking independent advantage of the cultural opportunities of their central London location.
51. There is a well-structured careers education programme, including university fairs which occur twice annually. A programme of subject specific talks and masterclasses follows the school's vision of educating pupils to acquire entrepreneurial spirit. Learning opportunities with a focus on business and enterprise include specific topics on finance and economics. As a result, pupils are well prepared for taking decisions about university and other courses, and for life beyond school. Pupils are ambitious for their futures and go on to study across a wide range of areas including science-based courses, the creative arts, architecture and the film industry.
52. The PSHE programme also enables pupils to know the difference between right and wrong and to respect the law. For example, pupil feedback through their personal journals led to additional sessions on the laws around smoking, so that they understood the UK law compared with those of their home countries. Pupils are well prepared for life in society, and benefit from the school's approach which treats them as young adults preparing for the world they will join.
53. Pupils demonstrate awareness of their social responsibilities and engage with the local community. Recent initiatives include Year 13 pupils helping at a local primary school as well as litter picking with the Friends of Bloomsbury Square group.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

54. Arrangements for safeguarding are well planned and implemented effectively. Governors conduct an appropriate review of safeguarding on behalf of the proprietor.
55. Staff are suitably trained and understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff designated with safeguarding lead responsibilities receive the requisite additional training. Leaders are alert to safeguarding risks, including those related to boarding, and take effective measures to protect pupils from harm.
56. The safeguarding policy meets requirements and is regularly updated in line with changes to statutory guidance. Implementation of the policy is thorough and effective. A suitable system is used to ensure safeguarding records are maintained properly and securely. These records are also used effectively to track concerns.
57. Leaders act upon safeguarding concerns promptly, including external referrals to children's services or the local authority designated officer. Staff are alert to risks relating to extremism and child-on-child abuse. Pupils feel safe at school and feel confident to share any concerns with leaders.
58. Pupils understand how to stay safe online and are aware how to manage any risks they may encounter, including the safe use of social media. There are suitable processes to filter and monitor the use of the school internet systems.
59. The school meets the requirements relating to the suitability of staff, volunteers and governors. Safer recruitment checks are conducted as required, and a single central register of appointments is suitably maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Guildhouse School
Department for Education number	202/6000
Address	43–45 Bloomsbury Square London WC1A 2RA
Website	guildhouseschool.com
Proprietor	CEG Colleges Limited
Chair	Mr Christopher Stacey
Headteacher	Mrs Carmel O’Dolan
Age range	15 to 24
Number of pupils	197
Number of boarding pupils	121
Date of previous inspection	24 to 26 April 2019

Information about the school

60. Guildhouse School London is part of the CATS Global Schools Group and was previously known as CATS College London. Located in central London, the school is co-educational. The pupil body is predominantly international, with around forty different nationalities represented.
61. The school educates pupils in Years 11, 12 and 13. The majority of its pupils move on to British universities. Since the previous inspection, as well as the change of name, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2023. A new chair of governors has been appointed.
62. Most pupils are boarders, accommodated in a single boarding house located near to the school.
63. The school has identified 10 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are no pupils in the school who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
64. English is an additional language for 187 pupils.
65. The school states that its aims are for its pupils to aim high, work hard and be kind. The school adopts an international sixth-form college approach, following a stated vision that the school is an immersive environment for ideas and creativity, where pupils are empowered to make a positive impact on our world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 7 to 9 November 2023

66. A team of 3 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
67. Inspection activities included:
- learning walks with school staff
 - lesson observations
 - discussions with school leaders, staff and pupils
 - reviewing pupils' work with leaders and with pupils
 - discussion with safeguarding governor
 - a tour of the site
 - visit to the boarding house, and discussions with boarders
 - observation of activities, including sport, break and lunch times, PSHE and tutor time.
68. 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

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