



ISI

Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

St Aubyn's School

May 2022

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School's Details

School	St Aubyn's School			
DfE Number	317/6002			
Registered charity number	270143			
Address	St Aubyn's School Bunces Lane Woodford Green Essex IG8 9DU			
Telephone number	020 85041577			
Email address	school@staubyns.com			
Headmaster	Mr Leonard Blom			
Chair of governors	Mr Michael Foster			
Age range	3 to 13			
Number of pupils on roll	518			
	EYFS	123	Pre-Prep	126
	Middle School	187	Senior School	82
Inspection dates	24 to 27 May 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St Aubyn's is an independent co-educational day preparatory school for pupils aged between 3 and 13 years. It was founded in 1884 and became a registered charity in 1975, supervised by a board of governors who are trustees of the charity.
- 1.2 The school is divided into three departments. The pre prep includes children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) and pupils in Years 1 and 2. Pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 form the middle school and pupils in Years 6, 7 and 8 comprise the senior school. Most pupils live within a five-mile radius of the school.
- 1.3 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to support the academic and all-round development of every child, and has high aspirations for all. It seeks to enable pupils to become confident, enquiring learners, who are responsible, tolerant citizens with a clear moral framework who show consideration for others.

About the pupils

- 1.5 The school's own assessment data indicate that the ability of pupils upon entry in Reception is above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally, and in Year 3, when the composition of the cohort changes, their ability is broadly average. The school has identified 42 pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), 23 of whom receive additional support. No pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 244 pupils, of whom six pupils require additional support for their English. Where pupils are identified as being more able, the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

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

Key findings

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

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are

maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

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

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

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

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

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

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

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

- Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of academic achievement.
- Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning are excellent.
- Pupils' communication skills are outstanding.
- The successful manner in which ICT has been embedded throughout the learning culture of the entire school is outstanding.
- Evidence of pupils' ability to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise is less strong than their other skills.
- Pupils' attitudes towards learning are excellent.

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

- Pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem, self-confidence, self-discipline are excellent.
- Pupils' moral understanding and responsibility for their own behaviour are excellent.
- The lack of opportunities result in pupils being less adept at making decisions.
- Pupils' respect for diversity, and appreciation of their own and others' cultures, is one of their major strengths.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements:

- Strengthen pupils' range of study skills to develop their ownership of learning and higher-order thinking skills.
- Develop pupils' ability to make and influence decisions which positively impact their lives in school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils demonstrate high levels of academic achievement as a result of a nurturing pastoral care system and consistently high expectations. The commitment of governors to provide high-quality facilities and resources enables pupils to excel in various aspects of the broad education they experience. The vision and strategy of senior leaders, the excellent planning provided by teachers, and the targeted

interventions provided by support staff, ensure that all pupils, including those with SEND, EAL and those who are most able, attain excellent results in externally standardised tests and curriculum assessments. Pupils make excellent progress over their time in the school, in line with the high aspirations the school has for each pupil. Comprehensive tracking and monitoring systems, which focus on individual pupil's development as well as that of each cohort, enables teachers and senior leaders to identify relative areas of weakness in pupils' performance, leading to appropriate support being provided for them. Pupils with SEND and EAL make equally strong progress as a result of being fully supported in their learning through sensitive and well-developed identification and intervention processes.

- 3.6 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning are excellent. Their basic skills are exceptional and often well beyond the standard expected for their ages, aptitudes and abilities. Pupils are highly enthusiastic about acquiring new knowledge and skills, and respond effectively to support from teachers to improve their learning and guide them to deeper understanding, often using information and communication technology (ICT). They seamlessly draw upon previous learning and apply it successfully. For example, in Year 7 mathematics, pupils are able to demonstrate excellent prior learning by recounting to their teacher the properties of shapes including parallelograms and trapeziums, and defining terms such as perpendicular and right angles. In a Year 3 religious education lesson, pupils are able to draw upon their clear understanding of the water cycle and how rivers are formed from their previous learning in geography. Children in EYFS demonstrated outstanding dexterity and excellent fine and gross motor skills when handling brushes, hammering small pins into cork boards, and when following a music and movement activity. Detailed curriculum planning, assessment and feedback by all those with leadership roles as well as teachers, ensure pupils develop strong skills across the curriculum. Most pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire feel their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons, and that their teachers are supportive and know how to help them to learn. This view was strongly confirmed by observations during the inspection.
- 3.7 Pupils' communication skills are outstanding. They demonstrate highly respectful and focused listening skills from an early age and are abundantly enthusiastic and articulate speakers; they require little encouragement to contribute to discussions in lessons. For example, in art, Year 6 pupils are able to communicate very clearly with their teacher when describing their ideas concerning the embellishment of their masks. In a Year 2 lesson about social responsibility, pupils articulated a sharply focused response when considering a young boy working in a factory in India. They displayed an excellent command of language using complex and appropriate vocabulary to define their argument. From the earliest age, children love to read, as observed by their level of excitement when preparing to visit the library. As they move through the school, pupils develop strong comprehension and inference skills as a result of the challenging texts made available to them, and the organisation of reading challenges. Pupils' writing skills are extremely well-developed from an early age, often well beyond age-related expectations. For example, Year 2 pupils make acutely observant comparisons between the quality of medical care in the time of Florence Nightingale and the present day. Pupils demonstrated exceptional writing skills and shared stories based on the imagined visit to the school of the Queen (and a corgi). By Year 6, pupils' writing skills are highly advanced as seen in descriptive writing and discursive essays on *Macbeth*.
- 3.8 Pupils' application of their mathematical thinking, and knowledge of number work to solve problems, is excellent. Highly-developed numeracy skills were observed in EYFS where the children constantly use their knowledge of numbers when counting each other, and when they discuss the date. By Year 8, pupils show a clear and deep understanding of algebra complex for their age, and the importance of various rules and methods. Pupils can successfully apply their mathematical understanding in other areas of learning. For example, Year 1 pupils count up to ten, and in Year 2, pupils were clearly able to identify the number of years represented by silver, gold and platinum jubilees.

- 3.9 From the youngest age, pupils use information and communication technology (ICT) fluently as an everyday learning tool. They seamlessly switch to using their devices as a resource as and when they feel it is appropriate. Outstanding use of technology was observed across all subjects and is part of the culture of the school; indeed, during the inspection, every classroom lesson observed involved meaningful and sophisticated use of devices. Examples of innovative use of ICT include recording monologues in English, creating artwork in EYFS, scaffolding research in ICT, sketching graphs in maths, streaming answers onto the class monitor in English and religious education, and controlling robotic devices in Year 1.
- 3.10 When given the opportunity to show leadership in their learning, pupils use a range of study skills and respond positively and creatively to tasks designed to improve their learning. For example, in art, Year 6 pupils are able to draw upon a number of resources and sources of inspiration in order to embellish their work with confidence, utilising a trial-and-error approach to further develop their creations. From the earliest age, children consider how to navigate their way through creative and innovative tasks as seen in the smooth transitions they make in the free choice activities in EYFS. Evidence of pupils' ability to analyse, hypothesise and synthesise further up the school is limited by the lack of more open-ended tasks. Some examples were seen in history, science and geography books in Year 6. When given more open-ended tasks, pupils enjoy developing their independent study skills and relish taking ownership of their learning. For example, Year 8 pupils were able to analyse text in order to form opinions of a specific character. Through collaborating in pairs, they shared these ideas to form their own hypotheses of how Shakespeare demonstrates emotion in his characters. However, this type of learning is less common as pupils move up through the school. Pupils' analytical skills are good, enabling them, for example, to confidently compare and contrast a range of sources about Victorian children. Pupils are encouraged to consider relative areas of weakness and have a sound understanding of how to go about addressing these in order to improve their progress, in response to regular and effective verbal feedback from teachers. Pupils' reasoning skills are good and where lessons are crafted to provide opportunities for them to explain their thinking, they rise to the challenge. In response to the questionnaire, most parents feel that the school equips pupils with the team-working, collaborative, and research skills they need in later life.
- 3.11 Pupils' achievements outside the formal curriculum are wide-ranging and of high quality. In music, drama, ballet, chess, and a broad range of sports, including cricket, football, netball, cross-country and table tennis, pupils are successful in securing awards and other accolades in school and in the local community. Individual pupils enjoy considerable success at county level in a range of sports including football, squash, tennis, gymnastics, cross-country, table-tennis and badminton. By the middle school, the majority of pupils play at least one musical instrument and gain success in external examinations and performances both in school and afterwards to parents. Almost all pupils in Years 6 and 8 successfully gain places at a range of local independent schools with competitive entry requirements. Year 6 pupils regularly win academic and other scholarships each year.
- 3.12 Pupils' attitudes towards learning are excellent. Pupils of all ages love to learn and want to find out as much as they possibly can whilst demonstrating a genuine desire to embrace challenge when opportunities arise. Pupils said the lessons they enjoyed most were those in which they were actively and physically involved. Children in EYFS engage with great enthusiasm and focus in a wide range of activities. Their approach to making choices is exceptional and they participate with a real sense of joy and delight. This was seen in a hunt for minibeasts, the creation of jubilee party invitations, and making flags. Pupils' conduct in the classroom and around the school is exemplary as a result of the high expectations provided by all staff. In response to the questionnaire, all pupils felt that their teachers are supportive, and most pupils feel their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' have excellent understanding of themselves. They know where their strengths lie and how to go about making the most of them. From the earliest age, children develop a balanced perspective of their successes and areas for improvement, partly as a result of the effectiveness of the pastoral care arrangements. As a consequence, pupils' self-esteem and sense of self is excellent; they know who they are. Children and younger pupils are able to identify and manage their own emotions. They gain an understanding of their place in the communities that make up their world, and how their actions and behaviour can affect others. Staff know the children extremely well across the school so pupils know they can freely approach adults for help and advice and do so comfortably. In response to the questionnaire, most pupils felt they were well-prepared and ready for their next schools.
- 3.15 Pupils understand that the decisions they make are important contributors to their own success and well-being. Pupils enjoy opportunities to contribute to decisions affecting school life through the school and eco councils, and in some practical subjects, although pupils felt they did not have similar decision-making opportunities in other areas of their learning. Children in the EYFS, whilst operating in a free flow environment, where the outdoor learning space is a significant feature, learn to make choices which develop their well-being. In art, pupils are able to consider health and safety rules when moving about the classroom with cleaning materials. Pupils are able to identify how their decisions impact on their health and well-being. For example, Year 7 pupils show a clear understanding of the consequences of their decisions when discussing drug abuse.
- 3.16 Pupils respond respectfully to regular opportunities to reflect on their own and others' faiths and spirituality. This is shown through highly engaged discussions in lessons, assemblies, and a range of annual events. Pupils regularly consider the values and virtues that help them to appreciate the non-material aspects of life through weekly themes, such as *why is nature special? what is wealth? and I speak for the trees*. They speak freely and with empathy when discussing these aspects. For example, EYFS children excitedly demonstrated a sense of awe and wonder when discussing aspects of the life of minibeasts, and Year 4 pupils openly discussed the non-material aspects of life for which they were grateful. The school is highly successful in its aim to develop its pupils as contemplative reflectors through active consideration of philosophical and ethical concepts, such as animal rights, human wrongs, drugs and religion, medical ethics, and equality and attitudes to poverty. Pupils relish opportunities to discuss these matters. In religious education lessons, pupils consider arguments for the existence of God, ideas of immortality, the problem of evil and suffering, as well as miracles and revelations. In junior choir, pupils participate with such joyful enthusiasm they are genuinely uplifted by the experience.
- 3.17 Pupils are consistently keen to maintain high personal standards of behaviour throughout the school in response to the clear expectations set by senior leaders. They distinguish between right and wrong, and they place great value on honesty and respect. The *St Aubyn's Promises* highly successfully embody the core values of bravery, faithfulness and happiness, and their constant presence in and around the life of the school helps guide pupils on the right path. Pupils take great pride in their school and are keen to do the right thing at the right time. They understand the importance of maintaining positive relationships with one another, and appreciating positive human qualities, and this aspect is regularly recognised, reinforced, and praised in assemblies. Pupils report they feel very well-supported by their teachers. In their responses to the questionnaire, most pupils felt that the school listens to what they have to say.
- 3.18 Pupils of all ages are socially aware and, when given the opportunity to do so, demonstrate excellent collaborative skills, which enable them to solve problems and achieve common goals. Middle school pupils are able to work effectively together as part of a team, interacting to achieve a common goal when representing their school in a cricket fixture. In Year 4 dance, pupils work highly effectively with

others, hand-jiving in unison. In response to the questionnaire, almost all parents felt that the school helps their children to develop strong teamwork and social skills.

- 3.19 Pupils wholeheartedly embrace the opportunities provided by the school to take responsibility for aspects of school life and seek further opportunities to do so. They are proud to be elected members of the school council, are eager participants in music and drama productions, relish their membership of competitive sports teams, and love their paired-reading experiences with younger pupils. Through the *Make a Difference Challenge*, pupils raised money for Ukraine refugees. Such events clearly have a strong influence on the development of their self-esteem and self-confidence. The younger pupils clearly appreciate seeing their older peers around school and look up to them as role models.
- 3.20 Pupils show an excellent understanding of the importance of a healthy diet and physical exercise. Pupils appreciate the wholesome meals at lunchtime and enjoy the days when the menu is different, for example, meat free Monday and fish Friday. They understand the value of a balanced plate and what types of food it should contain. Pupils speak confidently about how to stay safe online as a result of the school's clear guidance and the procedures in place to protect them when online. For example, Year 5 pupils demonstrate excellent understanding of how to identify risks associated with online chat functions, and whether children can trust each other online. During a debate about a boy in India, Year 2 pupils raised the issue of the boy's identity being compromised and that it would be better if he remained anonymous. In assemblies and PSHE lessons, pupils regularly address aspects of physical and mental health, which strengthens their understanding of the importance of a balanced lifestyle. Pupils spoke confidently that they knew how to report anything untoward to their teachers or parents. In response to the questionnaire, children felt that the school was a safe place to be.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent, and hugely positive, understanding and appreciation of people of faiths and cultures other than their own. Pupils regularly act as 'experts' when discussing their own cultures or faiths in lessons. Pupils' contextual understanding of these aspects within British society is clear when they discuss issues and create displays in their classrooms. Pupils are well aware of how important it is not to discriminate against others because of their appearance or background, and this manifests itself in a clear cultural cohesion. Respect and tolerance are natural, everyday hallmarks of life at St Aubyn's.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

Mr Alexander Mitchell	Reporting inspector
Mr Mark Hammond	Compliance team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Miss Penelope Kirk	Team inspector (former Head, IAPS school)
Mr Mark Wallace	Team inspector (Head, ISA school)