



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

St Edward's School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	St Edward's School			
DfE number	916/6032			
Address	St Edward's School Cirencester Road Charlton Kings Cheltenham Gloucestershire GL53 8EY			
Telephone number	01242 388555			
Email address	reception@stedwards.co.uk			
Principal	Mr Matthew Burke			
Proprietor	Alpha Schools Group (A S Southern Limited)			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	302			
	Seniors	242	Sixth Form	60
Inspection dates	22 to 24 November 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St Edward's is an independent co-educational day school, situated on the outskirts of Cheltenham. Founded in 1987, following the merger of two Catholic grammar schools, it welcomes those of all faiths and backgrounds. The school became part of the Alpha Schools Group in January 2022. The group's directors provide governance of the school. The current principal was appointed in April 2020.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to encourage pupils to strive to be the best they can be, and to become positive and life-long contributors to society. It seeks to enable each pupil to feel valued within a caring community and to develop an enriching spiritual foundation and a strong moral code. It aspires to provide an educational foundation whereby pupils will always be ambitious for self-improvement and so develop beyond their perceived potential.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Most pupils live within a 20-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised data indicate that the ability of the pupils in the school is above average for those taking similar tests. The school has identified 118 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, attention deficit, hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Of these, 22 receive additional specialist help. No pupils have an education, health and care plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 31 pupils, 10 of whom receive additional support. Data used by the school have identified 107 pupils as being the most able, and the curriculum is modified for them and for 80 other pupils with special talents in sport, music, art and drama.

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. 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](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 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 GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2022 confirm 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 and sex education, 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'.

Key findings

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

- Pupils achieve good academic standards and are successful in a wide range of activities.
- Pupils are articulate and eloquent speakers and demonstrate confident communication skills.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are positive; they develop effective study skills for their age and abilities.
- Pupils make good progress relative to their starting points, but their progress is inconsistent because they are not always sufficiently challenged by the teaching they receive.

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

- Pupils' contribution to the school and wider community is excellent and made willingly.
- Pupils collaborate well, appreciating and making good use of the opportunities to do so.
- Pupils are highly aware of how to keep healthy; they understand that talking about concerns and opinions is helpful.
- Some pupils are reticent and lack confidence to communicate their opinions at school.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Improve the consistency of pupils' progress through providing varied tasks which are suited to individual pupils' abilities and needs, and by giving more effective feedback.
- Enable pupils to show consistently high standards of behaviour by ensuring that rewards and sanctions are seen as being awarded equably and fairly.
- Enable all pupils to have the confidence to voice their opinions at school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils are articulate, confident speakers who are able to express their thoughts with passion and clarity. They are encouraged to do so by senior leaders' encouragement to participate in dramatic productions and public-speaking competitions. Pupils contribute to class discussions with ease. They express their ideas and opinions clearly and enjoy the chance to share their views but opportunities to do so are not given consistently. Younger pupils develop assured speaking and active listening skills which are enhanced by the recently introduced foundation project qualification (FPQ) programme.

Sixth formers spoke eloquently as they delivered presentations as part of the extended project qualification (EPQ). Most pupils read fluently and show good understanding of texts. Pupils in Year 7 clearly explained their understanding of *Skellig* by David Almond, and how William Blake's poetry enhances the story. They referred to a word bank effectively in order to employ more mature vocabulary as they work to improve their verbal and written communication. The oldest pupils expressed their thoughts and opinions about the metaphysical poetry of John Donne confidently in English, using sophisticated vocabulary. Pupils' written communication is of a good standard. Most pupils use paragraphs and correct punctuation in their written pieces and employ a neat cursive script, as seen in extended work in English and history.

- 3.6 Pupils develop confident numeracy skills and can apply them across the curriculum. Year 10 pupils successfully applied mathematics skills to calculate the molar mass of elements and compounds. When studying electricity, Year 7 pupils applied simple graphing skills when analysing the effectiveness of different lengths and thicknesses of wire in conducting current. Pupils show secure mathematical knowledge and skills as they progress through the school. They are supported in this by being given work which provides appropriate levels of challenge for their ability. Pupils rise to problem-solving challenges with increasing confidence, employing acronyms to ensure a systematic process. They are confident when answering questions and self-assured when explaining their mathematical thinking to their peers. Older pupils instinctively draw upon and apply a variety of methods and reasoning skills to solve mathematical problems across a range of subjects. This includes economics, where Year 12 pupils complete effective analyses of consumer and supplier surplus.
- 3.7 Pupils of all abilities achieve good academic standards and most make good progress over time from their individual starting points. Their attainment shows overall success in realising the school's aim to encourage pupils to be the best they can be and to help them develop their untapped potential. The vast majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated their view that teaching enables pupils to make progress. Most pupils agreed. Inspection evidence shows that pupils' attainment in GCSE was consistently above the national average during the years 2019, 2021 and 2022 with four-fifths or more of results being at grades 7-9. Attainment at A Level in the years 2019 to 2022 was broadly in line with national averages. In 2021 attainment was above the national average with around half of results gaining centre-assessed grades of A or A*. Nearly all pupils gain entry to a range of universities in the UK to study a wide range of subjects. Pupils with SEND or EAL achieve results in line with those of their peers, benefitting from the expertise of learning support staff and the detailed analysis of assessments by senior leaders, which identify pupils' needs. However, although the relative strengths and weaknesses of all pupils are also identified, the progress of some pupils, particularly the more able, is slowed because tasks they receive lack appropriate levels of challenge.
- 3.8 Pupils develop good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding overall. They make rapid progress when they are enabled to apply their understanding or skills in a creative and imaginative way in their learning. In design and technology, Year 7 pupils applied with confidence their understanding that some shapes are better than others at absorbing loads as they designed and constructed bridges. The youngest pupils advance quickly to translation of simple phrases in Latin, French and Spanish. Some sixth formers are competent linguists in both ancient and modern languages. Pupils in Year 10 delivered spoken presentations about Qatar to their class in fluent Spanish, showing excellent language skills and knowledge of different cultures. Pupils make rapid progress in their acquisition of knowledge and understanding when lessons and activities engage them, and they are given detailed written feedback. These elements are not consistent features of all teaching.
- 3.9 Pupils make competent and adept use of information and communication technology (ICT). They employ portable devices and a range of programmes and learning platforms confidently in most areas of the curriculum, for a range of purposes. For example, those studying for physical education (PE) examinations use digital devices to record and evaluate physical skills. Pupils in Year 8 have successfully produced and edited a silent movie. When researching the background of *Macbeth*, Year 10 pupils successfully incorporated digital images into their work. Pupils throughout the school

undertake independent research online whilst working on individual projects. Pupils transfer between classroom resources and online platforms with ease.

- 3.10 Pupils develop effective study skills which they apply to their learning with confidence in the older years. Year 10 pupils made effective hypotheses and synthesised information as they considered a case study on a small business. Year 8 pupils showed good analytical skills when considering the characteristics of the rainforest. Inspection evidence shows that pupils developed their study skills more rapidly in lessons where there was an active approach to improving their learning skills, particularly in relation to their individual needs. Pupils developed independent thinking and the higher-order skills of synthesis and critical analysis more slowly when asked to complete worksheets or to focus solely on acquiring knowledge. Pupils' written work is capably organised and well-presented.
- 3.11 Pupils show a positive attitude to learning and want to improve. In their questionnaire responses a large majority of pupils agreed that lessons are interesting and their teachers' feedback helps them to improve. Inspection evidence shows that pupils show enthusiasm for learning and high levels of motivation when they are encouraged to show initiative and independence. For example, Year 7 pupils keenly applied their mathematical knowledge to calculations involving decimals. This is also notable in the sixth form, where pupils have been so stimulated by extracts that they have been asked to read that they have chosen to find and finish the whole book, then present their findings to the class. Most pupils show initiative in seeking support when they need it. They appreciate and are beginning to benefit from the guidance on positive learning behaviours recently introduced by senior leaders. Pupils work extremely well with others and recognise the benefits of being able to discuss their thinking and reasoning in group tasks.
- 3.12 Pupils are successful in a wide range of activities, responding positively to the encouragement of teachers to take part. Pupils are proud of their achievements, which include success in inter-school and regional sports fixtures, notably hockey and swimming. Some pupils enjoy high national rankings in javelin and swimming. Some pupils learn a musical instrument and those who work towards graded music examinations are successful, a few passing with distinction. Pupils who prepare for LAMDA examinations and local performing arts festivals are highly successful. Public speaking teams enjoy success in county and regional competition finals. Pupils are regularly successful in the UK Maths challenges and language Olympiads. A large number of pupils are successful in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) scheme, achieving at bronze, silver and gold levels.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 Pupils of all ages and abilities, including those with SEND and EAL, show good levels of self-knowledge, self-confidence, determination and resilience. Year 10 pupils worked eagerly and quickly to overcome their initial confusion when learning how to solve quadratic equations using the X method. Pupils accept that errors are to be learned from and most are keen to persevere. They understand how to improve their work through self-reflection and in response to feedback from their teachers. They accept responsibility for their learning as they reach the sixth form, recognising that more is expected of them as they get older. Pupils feel confident about and well prepared for life beyond school. In discussions, most pupils expressed confidence in their own abilities and said they feel happy to be themselves. Pupils contribute their thoughts and opinions in occasional school surveys and put forward ideas to the school council, knowing that their ideas will be considered by school leaders. However, some pupils are reticent to communicate their opinions about school life when they are at school.
- 3.15 Most pupils are confident decision-makers. They develop the knowledge of how to make informed decisions that will determine the quality and quantity of their achievements. They understand that by deciding to persevere they will achieve their best. In doing so they are encouraged by senior leaders'

and the proprietor's promotion of high-performance learning strategies and positive learning behaviours. This recently introduced approach was evident and used effectively in some subjects such as drama. Year 8 pupils responded positively when encouraged to make their own decisions as they created their own mini drama. Pupils described how feedback about their learning behaviours helps them to choose strategies for improvement. However, the new approach is not yet consistently embedded across the school. This causes some pupils to feel less confident in their decision making. Pupils consider thoughtfully who to elect for school councils, realising that their choice will affect how they are represented. As they approach the sixth form, pupils recognise the importance of making informed decisions relating to their future and do so confidently. They discuss options for subject choices, further education and careers thoughtfully with their teachers and listen to the advice available from the careers staff and visiting speakers.

- 3.16 Pupils' spiritual awareness is good. They demonstrate a secure understanding and appreciation of different faiths and beliefs and the nature of existence. In doing so they gain much from religious studies lessons, assemblies, visits to different places of worship and overseas trips. Pupils show a good understanding of the non-material aspects of life. They described them as things in the world around them that make them feel happy, such as their artwork, drama productions and musical performances. Year 9 pupils showed a reflective approach, cognisant of the non-material aspects of life in sketch books and commentaries on the work of Edward Munch. Pupils speak of the beauty of outdoor spaces and appreciate the beauty of the school's grounds. They were affected by outdoor adventures on school trips.
- 3.17 Pupils show a good level of moral understanding, confident in the difference between right and wrong. They understand the importance of good citizenship and recognise the school's expectation of good behaviour. Most accept responsibility for their own behaviour. When examples of poor behaviour occur, pupils understand that the school's clear range of sanctions and rewards is there to encourage them, although some perceive that the school's new system of consequences for actions is not always fairly or consistently applied. In their questionnaire responses most parents and pupils agreed that the school takes any incidents of bullying seriously and deals with them effectively. Inspection evidence supports this view. In discussions, pupils clearly stated that they would not tolerate bullying of any kind and are confident in the part they can play in stopping it if it were to occur. All pupils are confident and polite when meeting new people and show excellent manners.
- 3.18 Pupils collaborate well with each other in lessons and are supportive of each other in group tasks. For example, in a drama lesson Year 7 pupils ensured that less confident peers felt included and played roles with significant status. Pupils appreciate the benefit of collaboration and spoke of how discussing their thinking and work with others helps them to achieve more. Year 10 pupils helped each other to complete a crossword on the New Deal successfully when studying the initiatives of Roosevelt during the Great Depression. Year 8 pupils worked effectively with others to consider the reasons for the sinking of the *Mary Rose*. Pupils relish opportunities to develop team-building skills. They achieve common goals well, such as when organising charity events, successfully completing expeditions and activities as part of the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) or when working towards the DofE. The high number of pupils that are part of the CCF and who successfully complete the DofE award is testament to pupils' enjoyment of working together effectively.
- 3.19 Pupils show respect to each other, regardless of their background or role, reflecting the school's Christian values and its aim to build a caring community. They are inclusive of those from backgrounds different to their own, mixing readily with pupils of other nationalities, backgrounds and beliefs. They welcome the annual visits of Japanese pupils and talk enthusiastically about the school's annual International Week. In discussions, pupils showed that they are keen to promote understanding of different backgrounds and those with protected characteristics. Some contribute to a school international magazine which promotes the understanding of its authors' cultures. Year 10 pupils showed strong empathy for other cultures as they responded in written work to divisions in Ireland reflected in Seamus Heaney's poem *Storm on the island*. They showed secure development in their

understanding of other historical events and cultures in their study of poems such as Shelley's *Ozymandias*. In their responses to questionnaires, the large majority of pupils stated that they believe that pupils are kind and respect each other for who they are. In discussions, pupils expressed their respect for diversity and appreciation of the richness that different cultures and traditions bring. Inspection evidence confirms that pupils show great interest in the beliefs and traditions celebrated by others and respect the Catholic foundation of their school.

- 3.20 The way in which pupils contribute willingly to the school and wider community is excellent. They are socially aware and keen to support those less fortunate than themselves. This fulfils the school's aim to ensure pupils are ready to become positive and life-long contributors to society. Sixth-form pupils organise the distribution of food hampers to needy people in the local area and the school choir has sung to pupils at a local school for children with disabilities. Pupils relish the opportunity to develop their leadership skills and make good use of the opportunities to do so afforded by taking up roles such as heads of house, senior prefects, school council members and CCF cadets. Members of the school council play an effective role in representing the thoughts of all pupils in order to effect change for the benefit of others. From the youngest years, outreach work is embedded in school life and pupils participate successfully in a variety of local and national initiatives and events. Pupils take the lead in charity fundraising activities through the recently created roles of charity ambassadors.
- 3.21 Pupils recognise the value of a balanced lifestyle and are very aware of how to keep healthy and safe, both physically and mentally. This includes staying safe when online. In discussions, pupils showed that they are aware of the benefits and enjoyment to be gained from physical activity and confirmed their understanding of a nutritious diet. In their questionnaire responses, the large majority of pupils agreed that the school encourages them to be healthy and the very large majority of parents agreed that the school encourages pupils to adopt a healthy lifestyle. Inspection evidence confirms these views. Pupils make sensible choices from a range of nutritious lunches and actively participate in a diverse weekly programme of physical exercise. Pupils benefit from the expertise of qualified medical and wellbeing staff, reflecting the leaders' and proprietors' commitment to ensuring they are safe and well. Pupils realise the benefits of talking if they have concerns or anxieties.

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 the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assembly. Inspectors visited 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

Mrs Penelope Austin	Reporting inspector
Mr Daniel Wilson	Compliance team inspector (Assistant principal, SofH school)
Mr Richard Dain	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Miss Sarah Hughes	Team inspector (Head of seniors, GSA school)