



INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

ST MARGARET'S SCHOOL

STANDARD INSPECTION

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

St Margaret's School

Full Name of School	St Margaret's School		
DfE Number	881/6022		
EYFS Number	EY239580		
Address	St Margaret's School Gosfield Hall Park Gosfield Halstead Essex CO9 1SE		
Telephone Number	01787 472134		
Fax Number	01787 478207		
Email Address	admin@stmargaretsprep.com		
Principal	Mrs Bernice Boyton		
Chair of Governors	Mr Christopher Woodhead		
Age Range	2 to 11		
Total Number of Pupils	252		
Gender of Pupils	Mixed (123 boys; 129 girls)		
Numbers by Age	0-2 (EYFS):	19	5-11: 186
	3-5 (EYFS):	47	
Number of Day Pupils	Total:	252	
Head of EYFS Setting	Ms Louise Laurie		
EYFS Gender	Mixed		
Inspection dates	10 May 2011 to 11 May 2011		
	8 Jun 2011 to 10 Jun 2011		

PREFACE

This inspection report follows the STANDARD *ISI schedule*. The inspection consists of two parts: an INITIAL two-day inspection of regulatory requirements followed by a three-day FINAL (team) inspection of the school's broader educational provision. The previous ISI inspection was in June 2005.

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Government for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2010*. The range of these Regulations is as follows.

- (a) Quality of education provided (curriculum)
- (b) Quality of education provided (teaching)
- (c) Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils
- (d) Welfare, health and safety of pupils
- (e) Suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors
- (f) Premises and accommodation
- (g) Provision of information
- (h) Manner in which complaints are to be handled

*These Standards Regulations replace those first introduced on 1 September 2003.

Legislation additional to Part 3, Welfare, health and safety of pupils, is as follows.

- (i) The Special Educational Needs and Disability Act (SENDA).
- (ii) Race, gender and sexual discrimination legislation.
- (iii) Corporal punishment.

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

ISI is also approved to inspect the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), which was introduced in September 2008 and applies to all children in England from birth to 31 August following their fifth birthday. This report evaluates the extent to which the setting fulfils the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework published by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) and follows the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 as subsequently amended.

The inspection of the school is from an educational perspective and provides limited inspection of other aspects; though inspectors will comment on any significant hazards or problems they encounter which have an adverse impact on children. The inspection does not include:

- (i) an exhaustive health and safety audit
- (ii) an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features
- (iii) an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures
- (iv) an in-depth investigation of the school's compliance with employment law.

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1. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

- 1.1 The school's mission statement is to provide a secure and happy environment in which each individual is helped to fulfil his/her potential and to emerge with maturity, confidence and a sense of independence. The school's central aim is to give its pupils as many opportunities as possible for intellectual, physical and social growth within a structured, disciplined yet enjoyable, environment. Emphasis is placed on the development of the child as a whole person. At the same time the school recognises the individuality and uniqueness of each pupil.
- 1.2 The school was founded in 1946, and is situated on a seven acre site in Gosfield. The present principal took over the school in 1996 and it became part of the Cognita group in 2009, with the head teacher remaining as principal. The school caters for boys and girls aged from two to eleven, drawing pupils from a wide geographical area and from a range of socio-economic groups. The school continues to grow since the previous inspection in June 2005 and at the time of the inspection the school roll totalled 252 pupils. Of these 33 children are in the Early Years Foundation Stage which is made up of Nursery, Transition and Reception (EYFS). There are very few pupils from ethnic minorities or who have a first language other than English. There is no selection on entry to the school at the age of two, and attainment varies from year to year. Most pupils remain in the school until the age of eleven, but, when pupils of school age are admitted other than at the standard points of entry, broad criteria of academic and behavioural suitability are applied. There are two pupils with a statement of special educational needs and the school has identified twenty-seven pupils who require additional support. The ability range of pupils is wide, and though variations are evident from year to year, the majority of the school's pupils have gone to the independent and grammar schools of their choice.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection, there has been considerable change in the use of buildings. This has provided an art room, design and technology (DT) room, and more music rooms, along with four new classrooms.
- 1.4 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school.

2. THE SUCCESS OF THE SCHOOL

2.(a) Main findings

- 2.1 Pupils in all parts of the school, including the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), are extremely well educated. They achieve excellent standards and achievement for many is exceptional. Pupils make rapid progress and achieve the school aims of fulfilling their full potential so that they emerge highly confident, articulate, independent learners, extremely well prepared for the next steps in their education. This is due to high-quality teaching, a stimulating and exciting curriculum and highly motivated learners. The school fulfils its aims that, within a happy environment, pupils are extremely courteous, self-disciplined and in all things demonstrate a determination to realise their potential.
- 2.2 The pastoral care is excellent and strongly supports pupils' excellent personal development. Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are polite, well-mannered and delightful. The pupils are self-assured, positive and responsible. Their excellent social skills are evident in all that they do and this includes the EYFS. The school has appropriate plans to develop the outside learning environment further. Pupils' awareness of others is well-developed through their charitable work and involvement in extra-curricular activities where they celebrate each other's successes. Excellent attention is given to pupils' health and safety, but there is limited choice for pupils to choose what they would like to eat at lunchtimes.
- 2.3 The school is governed well. Effective guidance from the education team at Cognita ensures that the school is well supported. The clear vision, high aspirations and dedication of senior managers motivate all to achieve. Efficient and well-organised curriculum management ensures pupils are challenged and stimulated to learn. Outstanding aspirational vision and clear ideas for development, putting the pupils at the heart of all that the school does, ensure that the school is extremely well led and managed. Excellent relationships with parents reflect the pupil's comments that the school is like a large family. The school has efficiently met every recommendation from the previous inspection, for example, in developing monitoring systems.

2.(b) Action points

(i) Compliance with regulatory requirements

(The range of the Independent School Standards Regulations is given in the Preface)

- 2.4 At the time of the initial visit, the school met all the requirements of the Independent School Standards Regulations 2010.

(ii) Recommendations for further improvement

- 2.5 The school is advised to make the following improvements.
1. The school must ensure that there is a wider choice of healthy foods on offer at lunchtime for its pupils.
 2. To improve further the high quality of its Early Years provision, the setting should explore further development to the outdoor environment.

3. THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC AND OTHER ACHIEVEMENTS

3.(a) The quality of the pupils' achievements and their learning, attitudes and skills

3.1 Pupils' achievement is excellent and in accordance with the school's aims. Well-educated pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding effectively within a happy environment. They make excellent progress in all areas of learning so that by the time they leave the school they reach outstanding levels of knowledge, understanding and skills most evidently in mathematics and science. Pupils achieve exceptionally well and reach standards well above those for their age. Standards reached in the core subjects for example, in speaking, listening, reading, and writing, are of a very high standard. They are highly confident and articulate speakers. Pupils are highly motivated and keen to participate in the excellent curricular and extra-curricular activities on offer. Pupils achieve very well in all subjects. Cross-curricular links are excellent, for example when researching information in history through information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. Pupils were able to use the computers successfully to support the way they found out information. The progress pupils make is outstanding, not only in individual lessons but also as they move through the school, building year on year on the excellent achievement and standards that they reach. The range of significant achievements is noted in academic distinctions, music, and sporting success and also in the number of successful scholarships to pupil's secondary schools of their choice.

3.2 All pupils are highly motivated learners. Their positive attitudes and outstanding levels of concentration enable them to reach the high expectations of their teachers. They are eager participants in all the activities on offer. Their written work is extremely well presented and they enjoy the subjects they study and the activities they do. In mathematics for example, pupils reach high standards and are able to work on solving mathematical problems well above what is expected for their age. They apply themselves very well both individually and when working with others. All are prepared extremely well for the next stage of their education.

3.(b) The contribution of curricular and extra-curricular provision (including community links of benefit to pupils)

3.3 The curriculum is highly effective in its coverage of the requisite areas of learning. Not only does it cover the core skills very well but pupils have the opportunity to follow a creative and stimulating curriculum, feeding their curiosity and thirst to learn. In Years 5 and 6, pupils have the opportunities to learn two languages, Spanish and French. Musical activities such as the rock music group in conjunction with the study of classical music pervade the life of the school. Alongside this, opportunities for sport to support a healthy lifestyle are also given a high priority. Time is built into the curriculum for pupils to review and reflect on their work and this supports the high standards that they reach. Pupils said that they really enjoyed learning and that their teachers made learning fun. The curriculum is suitable for all ages, abilities and needs and fully supports the aims of the school. The timetable is arranged so that older pupils' classes are split into ability groups in English and mathematics. Pupils benefit from these smaller groups and from working at a level and pace that is more suited to their individual needs.

3.4 The provision for personal social and health education (PSHE) is excellent. Teachers follow through issues raised and studied in other lessons. The study of

verbal and non-verbal reasoning supports pupils' logical thinking and problem solving. A strong focus on independent learning encourages pupils' to find things out for themselves. This has a very positive effect on their enjoyment of learning where pupils frequently follow through activities done in the curriculum at school by extension work at home, often on the computer and using the internet. This in turn promotes their individual ICT skills, research skills and knowledge and understanding of the world, resulting in not only an enjoyment of learning but enabling them to reach high standards. Excellent community links, such as joining in national sports activities and singing with other schools, enhance the curriculum on offer.

- 3.5 The curriculum is supported by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities open to all pupils from Year 1 onwards. These include activities such as the gardening club (kitchen garden) where pupils not only learn how to grow their own salads and vegetables from seed but also cook with what they have grown, musical activities, sports activities, dance club, and art club. The extra-curricular activities are well planned and clearly identify good progression in the acquisition of pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding across all subjects and years.

3.(c) The contribution of teaching

- 3.6 Excellent teaching enables pupils to achieve exceptionally well. Teaching is a major contributory factor in enabling pupils to develop their academic potential in line with the school's aims. Since the previous inspection, the quality of teaching has improved, partly as a consequence of the introduction of effective monitoring systems. In English and mathematics for example, teachers know their pupils well and set clear detailed targets for pupils to help them to improve their work. Whilst targets are often set in other subjects, they are not in such detail as the emphasis is clearly given on supporting progress in these core subjects. All pupils that were talked to knew their targets very well and clearly understood why they were given them. Pupils were highly appreciative of the support and help that teachers give. Basic skills are strongly emphasised, enabling pupils to attain high standards by the time they leave the school. Pupils' creative, reasoning and sporting skills are equally well developed.
- 3.7 Teachers' subject knowledge is strong and they make good use of resources to assist pupils with their learning. In the best lessons, lively and enthusiastic teaching, a quick fast pace, which includes effective questioning techniques, enables all pupils to achieve very well. A real strength of the school is the way that the differing needs of pupils and the range of their abilities are skilfully catered for. Those who are identified as gifted or talented in a particular area are offered more challenge in their learning.
- 3.8 Praise and encouragement are used to good effect, adding to pupils' enjoyment of their learning. There are excellent opportunities to enable pupils to develop independent research and to think through problem solving. This was evident in the Year 6 forensic day where all pupils participated in trying to solve a murder. Cross-curricular links were highly effective in enabling pupils to use skills in one area of learning across other subjects.
- 3.9 Classrooms contain good resources and some have interactive whiteboards. These and other ICT resources contribute to stimulating lessons, and maintain the pupils' interest and enthusiasm.

- 3.10 Marking of pupils' work is excellent, containing both encouragement and practical suggestions for improvement. It is of a consistently high standard throughout the school. Pupils say that along with individual targets, they are often given verbal feedback, so that they know what they have to do to improve. Assessment data is compiled exceptionally well to verify pupils' progress and to analyse the progress of different groups within the school.

4. THE QUALITY OF THE PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

4.(a) The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the pupils

- 4.1 Pupils demonstrate excellent personal development. This is in keeping with the school's aim to provide a secure and happy environment in which each individual is helped to fulfil his/her potential and to emerge with maturity. Pupils throughout the school are open, friendly, well mannered, concerned for each other's well-being and strongly supportive of each other. Pupils display high levels of spiritual awareness and development. In conversation they place great value on loyalty, friendship, fairness and sharing. They openly celebrate the success of their peers. They have a strong understanding of themselves and their place in the school community. Pupils spoke enthusiastically about the charities they support. They show respect for the beliefs and traditions of different faiths.
- 4.2 Pupils show exceptional moral qualities. The school expects high moral standards and the pupils respond accordingly. Woven into the fabric of the school are clear expectations and boundaries, instilling in all pupils a sense of right and wrong. The absence of a record of any serious punishment in recent years reflects strongly that pupils' live according to the school's moral code. Pupils respond with great concern to the needs of their peers. They are interested in ecology and conservation and have also discussed the impact of modern technology on current world conflicts and how instant visual images of these may impact on families of service personnel.
- 4.3 Pupils develop at St Margaret's as exceptionally social individuals. They behave in an emotionally responsible manner. They work and play together with enjoyment of each other's company. They are highly motivated towards contributing to the community in which they live. Younger pupils respond willingly to the requests of staff for volunteers, while pupils in Year 6 are keen to carry out positions of responsibility, whether as prefects or captains of sport or houses, or lunchtime monitors. Pupils have a good working knowledge of public institutions and services through PSHE lessons. Pupils warmly supported the Friendship Bench and Friendship Tree which are available at break times. Pupils report that this bench is rarely used because such strong friendships exist amongst the school community.
- 4.4 Pupils show good cultural understanding. In art, they were using Aboriginal painting techniques, and openly discussed cultural aspects related to Aborigines. In religious education lessons, they displayed an understanding of cultures and faiths other than their own. Pupils are excited by and value the many opportunities they have to experience a diverse range of modern culture on school trips and expeditions. Pupils show profound respect to other pupils who may differ from them. Pupils perform in an extensive range of musical ensembles, bands and choirs, and orchestras perform in a variety of concerts. Numerous ambitious dramatic productions are staged, and pupils appreciate the music played by others.

4.(b) The contribution of arrangements for welfare, health and safety

- 4.5 The school's arrangements for the safeguarding, welfare, health and safety of the pupils, including those in the EYFS, are excellent. This is in line with the school's aim of providing a safe and secure environment for the pupils. Throughout the school, class teachers are responsible for the welfare of the pupils in their classes.
- 4.6 Particularly good academic and pastoral records are maintained. Consequently, teachers have a good view of individual pupils' overall progress and development. Registration and form time are used well to address such welfare issues that arise. The head teacher's open door policy ensures that parents and pupils are free to express any concerns they may have. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent and pupils were clear that there were adults to whom they could turn. Pupils relate extremely well to one another and show real care for each other's well-being.
- 4.7 The school's anti-bullying policy is well constructed and compliant. Successful strategies are in place to reward good work and helpful conduct. Sanctions are rarely used, but when necessary are given according to clearly defined criteria. Pupils stated clearly that they regard these as fair.
- 4.8 The school's child protection policy contains all the necessary elements and is well implemented by the designated personnel. Regularly updated training for all members of staff takes place. The policy is available to parents and is properly publicised. Safer recruitment of staff is given high priority and the senior leadership team are fully trained in this. Procedures for checking all concerned are robust, and accurately recorded in the single central appointments register.
- 4.9 Fire precautions receive appropriate attention and fire practices are held regularly. Health and safety matters are given equally high priority, and policies are regularly reviewed and updated. Internet safety is given high priority and posters about it are displayed around the school. Opportunities for pupils to take physical exercise are excellent, and the school encourages a healthy lifestyle. The school currently does not offer a wide choice of healthy food for pupils at lunch time. The school is now addressing this issue and is intending to bring it into line with its concern for pupils to develop an understanding for the environment, for healthy living and for the development of healthy eating habits. Medical facilities for pupils who become ill are good. The attendance and admission registers are well maintained and suitably stored for three-year periods.
- 4.10 The pastoral care provided by the staff strongly supports the personal development of the pupils and enables them to grow into well-balanced personalities. Relationships between all constituents of the school, pupils, staff and parents are excellent. The school was described as like a second home.

5. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNANCE, LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

5.(a) The quality of governance

- 5.1 Governance of the school is good. The board of Cognita acts as the governing body but in fulfilling that task delegates responsibility through a team of education officers. They are highly committed to the school, to securing its aims, promoting its continuing success and maintaining the pupils' high standards, personal development and pastoral care.
- 5.2 The education officers have a good knowledge of school procedures as they are regularly in contact with the school, both by telephone and through visits. Their effective communication and good relationships with senior managers leads to a regular exchange of information. They support new initiatives and ensure the school maintains the quality of provision.
- 5.3 The education officers discharge their responsibilities regarding child protection, safeguarding children, welfare, health and safety suitably, using external consultancies when required.

5.(b) The quality of leadership and management

- 5.4 The school, including the EYFS, is extremely well led and managed, and those in senior positions are highly efficient and approachable. They are most effective in furthering the school's aims of helping pupils of all abilities to achieve their full potential. Middle managers are highly efficient and are empowered to develop their roles within the school. The school runs extremely well on a daily basis, and is very well maintained. The administrative staff are welcoming, efficient and supportive.
- 5.5 The success of the leadership and management of the school is clearly apparent in the excellent levels of pupils' personal development and in their high levels of achievement and the high standards which they reach. School improvement planning is excellent; all subject coordinators are involved and contribute to it. Relevant and realistic objectives are clearly identified. Other practices for monitoring are in place, and these involve both senior and middle managers in monitoring and observing teaching and in close tracking of pupils' performance.
- 5.6 The school takes particular care in the selection of high-quality staff. Professional development is well organised. Policies and procedures of high quality have been produced for all aspects of school life, and these are implemented consistently by the staff. Teachers, classroom support staff and other non-teaching staff are deployed appropriately and contribute significantly to pupils' learning and welfare, particularly those with special educational needs.

5.(c) The quality of links with parents, carers and guardians

- 5.7 The school's outstanding relationships with parents, carers and guardians reflect its aims and contribute effectively to pupils' personal development. Responses to the parental questionnaire indicated very high levels of support for the school, and genuine appreciation of all that the school does for their children. These views are confirmed by inspection findings. New parents expressed appreciation of the progress made by their children since joining the school.
- 5.8 The open door policy of the school means that there are good clear channels of communication between home and school. Parents receive useful information about the school. When children first start, not only do parents receive all the information required for a smooth transition but every child receives a pack written by the older children in the school explaining what they can expect and what they need to know about the school's website written from a child's perspective. Comprehensive information concerning school policies, the governing body and the curriculum are available on the school website. The prospectus states the school's aims and ethos clearly. The school has provided a useful handbook and DVD for parents. Parents have regular opportunities to meet and discuss their children's progress with staff and are encouraged to contact the school at any time. Parents receive helpful, regular information about their child's progress, targets set and the work they have covered each term. These offer targets for improvement with information on how they can be achieved, thus enhancing the links between home and school. The school procedure for the reporting of parental concerns and complaints is followed correctly and with due care. There have been no formal complaints.

What the school should do to improve is given at the beginning of the report in section 2.

6. THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE

6.(a) The overall effectiveness of the early years provision – how well the school meets the needs of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.1 The effectiveness of the setting is outstanding. Staff meet the needs of all children through exemplary attention to a comprehensive knowledge and understanding of each child's development. This is achieved in the provision of a caring and nurturing environment, both for those under three and for the older children, and this promotes high levels of independence and achievement in learning and well-being. Comprehensive arrangements for the safeguarding of children are in place. Staff work together in a shared commitment to constant improvement of the setting through reflection and self-evaluation. This is evidenced in the many changes and developments made across the Foundation Stage some of which were as a result of the previous inspection.

6.(b) The effectiveness of the leadership and management of the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.2 The leadership and management of the setting are outstanding. Extremely strong relationships exist with parents who, in discussion and in the questionnaires, showed high levels of appreciation of the provision and of their children's progress. Strong links with parents help to support an outstanding start to the children's education. All records, policies and procedures necessary for the efficient management of the setting and safety of the children are in place and implemented well. Excellent practice promotes equality and eliminates discrimination. Staff are well qualified and deployed effectively. The quality of self-evaluation is excellent. A willingness to refine and improve practice is evidenced by the implementation of extremely detailed and rigorous assessment and planning strategies and systems. Resources are used creatively to promote learning across the age groups.

6.(c) The quality of the provision in the Early Years Foundation Stage

6.3 The quality of the provision is outstanding for all children. The key person approach is used effectively with all staff sharing in the responsibility for the care and welfare of the children. Curriculum planning, geared to the needs of the unique child is of an exceptional quality. Observation and assessment are used extremely well to guide practice. There is an excellent balance between adult led and child initiated activities with a high priority given to learning through play both in and outdoors. Nursery and Transition classes have access to their own outdoor areas and Reception classes share outdoor space. Plans are in place to extend the outdoor provision. Healthy meals and snacks are enjoyed. Children's welfare is effectively promoted across the setting.

6.(d) Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

- 6.4 The outcomes for children are outstanding. Children make very good progress in the Early Learning Goals from a wide range of starting points and capabilities. They are active, independent, creative and enthusiastic learners. They are confident to make choices in an environment which recognises the need to offer the space, time and opportunity to facilitate these skills and which promotes the idea that learning is fun. Children of all ages engage effectively in discussion with peers and adults. They are proud of their achievements which are valued by staff. Opportunities for practical maths are excellent. Children in Nursery and Transition were observed reinforcing number concepts through cross-curricular practical activities. Reception children are keen to use the skills learned in phonics lessons to write their own words and sentences. They use a range of ICT resources in their learning and are confident in their use. A safe and secure environment supports excellent relationships between staff and children. Opportunities exist to develop an understanding of the benefits of physical activity through the routines of the setting. Children show care and concern for each other and this is nurtured in an environment which listens to and values children. They understand about hygiene. Children are very well behaved, friendly, kind and show respect for each other's differences.

Compliance with statutory requirements for children under three

- 6.5 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.

Complaints since the Last Inspection

- 6.6 Since the last inspection, there have been no complaints made to Ofsted that required any action to meet national requirements.

INSPECTION EVIDENCE

The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with senior members of staff and with education officers. They observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions. Inspectors visited the facilities for sick or injured pupils. The responses of parents and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined regulatory documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Sue Vale

Reporting Inspector

Mrs Linda Griffith

Head of Junior school ISA

Mr Stephen Duckitt

Head of a SHMIS school

Mrs Jane Short

Early Years Lead Inspector