



**ISI** Independent  
Schools  
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports**

**St Margaret's Preparatory School**

**October 2021**

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### School's Details

<b>School</b>	St Margaret's Preparatory School			
<b>DfE number</b>	881/6022			
<b>Address</b>	St Margaret's Preparatory School Gosfield Hall Park Gosfield Halstead Essex CO9 1SE			
<b>Telephone number</b>	01787 472134			
<b>Email address</b>	admin@stmargaretsprep.com			
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Carolyn Moss			
<b>Proprietor</b>	Cognita Schools Limited			
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11			
<b>Number of pupils on roll</b>	201			
	<b>EYFS</b>	51	<b>Juniors</b>	150
<b>Inspection dates</b>	12 to 15 October 2021			

## 1. Background Information

### About the school

- 1.1 St Margaret's Preparatory School is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged between 2 and 11. It was founded in 1946 in the coach house and stable block of Gosfield Hall in Essex. The school became part of the Cognita group in December 2008, which is responsible for its governance. Since the previous inspection the school has created a digital discovery lab for coding, robotics and green screen work. A new head has been in post since 2020.
- 1.2 During the period March to May 2020, the whole school remained open only for children of key workers. During this period of closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils. The school organised a phased return to school from June 2020.
- 1.3 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.4 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.5 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.6 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

### What the school seeks to do

- 1.7 The school's objective is to provide a high-quality all-round education, in a happy and caring family atmosphere, so that each child is well prepared for the opportunities and challenges ahead. It seeks to enable every child to enjoy their learning journey, achieve their very best and to become responsible global citizens who can work together co-operatively and with respect for others.

### About the pupils

- 1.8 The pupils are drawn from small towns, villages and farms in a 15-mile diameter of the school. Nationally standardised tests indicate that, whilst the school supports a wide range of abilities, overall, the ability profile is above average. Currently, no pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. The school has identified 13 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and autistic spectrum condition, all of whom receive additional specialist help. English is an additional language (EAL) for eight pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. The most able pupils receive modified work within the curriculum.

## 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 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](#).

**COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.**

## 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 school. 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, from a wide ability range, all make excellent progress across the curriculum.
- Pupils demonstrate an exemplary attitude to their learning.
- Pupils develop excellent levels of subject knowledge and apply these to their learning in other areas.

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

- Pupils' relationships with each other and with adults are particularly strong.
- Pupils support and value each other and respect their differences.
- Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of their strengths and limitations and are able to articulate their progress over time.
- Pupils are supported to take increasingly more important decisions about their learning as they mature.

#### Recommendations

3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- Ensuring pupils consistently demonstrate independent learning skills through greater opportunities across the curriculum.
- Enabling the prep pupils to choose how and when to use their information and communication technology (ICT) skills to enhance their learning in other subject areas.

#### 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 of all ages and abilities make excellent progress from a variety of starting points. In nationally standardised tests, most pupils achieve results above the national average and a high rate of progress is maintained throughout the school. The school makes excellent use of standardised data and in all year groups pupils' progress is carefully monitored. Pupils with SEND make rapid progress due to the most suitable strategies being put in place and the high level of support they receive in lessons. Teachers ensure the pupils know how to improve their work and plan for daily successes. By the time they leave the EYFS, most children have reached a higher level of development than the national

average. More able pupils make excellent progress since they are appropriately challenged by their teachers through extension activities, targeted questioning and research projects. An overwhelming majority of the pupils who completed the questionnaire agreed that their teachers know how to help them learn.

- 3.6 Pupils develop high levels of subject knowledge and develop excellent skills that they apply to their learning. They display a confident grasp of subject-specific vocabulary. Younger pupils gave a confident demonstration of this when describing vibrations and sound in a science experiment and the advanced musical skills of the older pupils were particularly evident in a scholarship preparation lesson. In the EYFS, the pupils were helped to understand the concept of relative sizes through a range of topically carved pumpkins and skilful questioning by their key person. The broad curriculum, and specialist teaching, ensure that pupils are able to develop their skills to an excellent level in the creative arts. These factors underpin the school's aim for all pupils to achieve their very best in all areas.
- 3.7 It is apparent that pupils relish the challenge of investigative and independent work. Prep pupils confidently tackle regular engineering, environmental and global research challenges and benefit from effective guidance to assist younger pupils as they develop their study skills. Pupils are encouraged to make links between subjects to further their understanding. Teaching is conscientious and positive, but on occasion the lack of opportunity to work independently limits the pupils' progress in independent thinking. In interviews older pupils spoke excitedly about projects they have worked on together, gathering evidence and deciding how to present their findings. In choir practice pupils demonstrated a good ability to analyse why they were completing a vocal warm-up and they accurately considered the links between their science, sports and singing knowledge.
- 3.8 Pupils have strong communication skills. They are confident speaking to children and adults alike. All pupils listen intently to both the teacher and their peers, and display a genuine interest in what others have to say. They are given many opportunities to present to their peers and to an audience in assemblies. For example, pupils in Year 6 spoke eloquently in an assembly about a number of famous black figures in history and the impact they have made on society. Pupils write effectively for a range of different purposes, producing interesting pieces of writing which they are keen to share with their peers and teachers. Through effective support for differing abilities, all pupils are helped to make excellent progress with their writing. By Year 6 they demonstrate a mature and thoughtful response to the task, writing with flair and technical ability. Many pupils are avid readers and this skill is nurtured by a well-stocked library and a variety of reading challenges which the children relish. Pupils in Year 4, for example, reported excitedly that they have been challenged to read so many Roald Dahl books over the half term that they can make a tower taller than them, and Years 5 and 6 are attempting to read from as many different genres as they can.
- 3.9 Pupils display excellent understanding of mathematical concepts and a strong grasp of numerical skills. These are well developed from the EYFS, where creative teaching embeds opportunities to accurately explore and master mathematical vocabulary. For example, a range of two-dimensional shapes were used effectively to help nursery pupils create facial representations and this prompted much mathematical talk as they worked. Pupils are given many opportunities to apply their numeracy skills across the curriculum, through careful planning and effective leadership and management of the subject. Older pupils use their well-developed numerical skills in a competent way to solve ever more challenging problem-solving activities. Year 4 pupils spoke knowledgeably about interpreting graphs in geography when comparing and contrasting countries, and finding averages in science experiments. From Year 3 the SEND pupils make good progress in line with their peers because they are taught in small groups for mathematics and the work provides suitable levels of challenge to match the range of ability.
- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate particularly strong ICT skills. The broad computing curriculum, with its emphasis on coding and presentation skills, enables them to develop a comprehensive set of competencies from an early age. Through a school-wide project, pupils from Year 3 now have their own electronic devices in school, though during the inspection little use of them was seen in subjects other than their

Computer Science lessons. In interview the older pupils spoke maturely about how their ICT skills help them to access information to help them learn. Younger pupils have access to tablet devices and their skills progress well with regular use. By Year 6, the pupils are confident and independent users of ICT. This was observed in a Computer Science lesson where pupils in Year 6 demonstrated a high level of technological understanding when using programming software to create a game with a number of prescribed features. More able pupils showed excellent coding skills, creating their own games using 'bang' and 'bomb' icons that had been coded on the screen to embed real time videos.

- 3.11 Pupils achieve considerable success in a range of academic and other achievements throughout their time at the school. The oldest pupils gain places at their chosen senior schools, being well prepared for their selection procedures. Some pupils are successful in attaining academic, music, drama, art and sport scholarships at a range of senior schools in the local area. Success in all areas of the curriculum is celebrated across the school through 'shout out cards', assembly mentions and headteacher's certificates. Music is a strength of the school. From Year 3 onwards, most pupils play an instrument or sing. They then benefit from joining a wide selection of musical clubs and activities, including, for the more able, a chamber choir and a music scholarship preparation group. The older pupils interviewed stated that they enjoy the extra-curricular clubs available at the school. However, a few parents of younger children felt that the school did not provide a suitable range of extra-curricular clubs. Inspection evidence found that the range of clubs is more limited for younger pupils.
- 3.12 Pupils of all ages are highly engaged, enthusiastic and committed learners. They are attentive and focused in lessons, actively listening to each other and their teacher. Collaboration is a particularly well-developed skill throughout the school, and this was observed in most lessons. Pupils enjoy an excellent rapport with their teachers. The pupils' attitude to their learning is decidedly positive and they are keen to see how they are progressing; this was demonstrated when they shared their work in English with inspectors and reflected on how it had improved over time. In questionnaires, an overwhelming majority of pupils confirmed that their teachers' feedback and marking helped them to improve.

### **The quality of the pupils' personal development**

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 The pupils' enjoyment of school life is evident in every aspect of their activities in and out of the classroom. This is a result of the high quality of pastoral care which, led by the school leadership team, and in accordance with the school's aims, focuses on the well-being of each individual to ensure they all flourish. School leaders work with a dedicated team of staff to ensure the best outcomes for all the individual pupils in their care. Pupils of all ages display excellent self-esteem and self-confidence. They approach adults with ease and speak of their achievements with pride and humility. They are clearly self-aware, being well supported to recognise their own strengths and to be aware of their limitations. Their self-confidence is strengthened through careful planning by teachers to ensure all pupils enjoy success in some area on a daily basis. Thorough marking and useful feedback ensure that pupils of all ages know how to improve. From a young age, pupils are encouraged to be resilient in their learning, from finding and correcting their own errors in Year 2 to working together to solve a challenging reasoning problem in Year 6. The vast majority of parents who responded to the survey agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent.
- 3.15 Pupils' abilities to make decisions are well developed as many opportunities are provided both in and out of the classroom. Choice is a common feature of many lessons, and this enables pupils to make decisions about their learning from a young age. In mathematics, pupils are encouraged to reflect on their own performance in a topic and to select a level of challenge that suits their ability. In sport, older pupils relish the fact that they are able to choose their sport for the term and then decide if they want to play for fun or competitively. The school encourages pupil-led projects wherever feasible, enabling pupils to appreciate that their opinions are heard. Recently, for instance, when learning to

write a persuasive letter, pupils in Year 6 wrote to the head with a variety of requests and were delighted when one was selected to become a reality. Pupils respect the school's systems of sanctions and rewards, recognising that these help them to make good choices regarding their behaviour and attitude.

- 3.16 Collaboration amongst the pupils is excellent. Pupils relate to each other exceptionally well and are most caring towards one another. They show compassion for each other and readily celebrate each other's strengths and successes. Pupils understand the benefits of collaboration and teamwork as they work towards a common goal. Pupils with SEND are valued, included, supported and respected by their peers in clubs, lessons and playtimes around school. The oldest pupils explained that they played to their strengths when they organised the assembly for Black History Month since they all took different roles reflecting their individual abilities. In lessons, pupils eagerly contribute in partner talk or in a group activity when given the opportunity. In the EYFS, very young children are already able to take their turn and pupils in Year 5 are able to collaborate successfully to design science experiments. In book club, the children listened to the recommendations of others and gave critique and feedback that was thoughtful and respectful. In their response to the questionnaire, an overwhelming majority of parents agreed that the school helps their child develop strong teamwork and social skills.
- 3.17 Pupils display a strong appreciation of non-material aspects of life. They relish the time they spend in the forest, enjoying the physical nature of the activities in the local environment of the school. Pupils clearly understand the importance of protecting their own mental health and explained that they appreciate selecting a weekly well-being activity as they find it helps them to relax. Pupils are encouraged to be reflective and they respond enthusiastically to the weekly philosophical questions posed, often contributing empathetic and mature answers. The well-being area in the playground, and the sense of calm this creates, is appreciated by the pupils. Pupils demonstrate a respectful appreciation of the wider world through the opportunities they have to learn about and celebrate many religious festivals.
- 3.18 Pupils respond well to their teachers' high expectations, and excellent behaviour is evident across the school. They are well mannered in lessons and as they move around the school, smiling and responding politely to staff and visitors alike. Pupils have a strong understanding of right and wrong and respond well to the 'behaviour ladder' that is in place across the school. On the occasion that there is any poor behaviour, in questionnaire responses, the pupils are overwhelmingly confident that the school will sort it out. The pupils are proud of their school and have a strong desire to be responsible and caring members of the community. Anti-bullying ambassadors have introduced compliments cards which they regularly send out to deserving members of the school community. These cards have encouraged pupils to engage in random acts of kindness across the whole school community.
- 3.19 Pupils contribute positively to the school community; the older pupils are exemplary role models and enjoy the re-instated responsibilities and opportunities to help with younger pupils. They act as reliable and enthusiastic playground ambassadors, lunch table monitors or reading buddies. House captains make significant contributions to the organisation of charity events, that raise money for a selection of local and national charities. Pupils are delighted that they are once again able to support their local community by singing and playing at local events, participating in local sports and art competitions.
- 3.20 Pupils show respect and are inclusive of everyone in the school community. Those new to the school commented on how easy it is to settle in quickly due to the very welcoming behaviour that is prevalent. Pupils develop a broad knowledge of their own and other cultures through the religious education curriculum, assemblies, theme days and visits to places of worship. In a personal, social and health education lesson in Year 6, pupils engaged in a very mature and sensitive discussion about a video depicting the many different types of human love. Pupils have a well-developed understanding and awareness of British values. They regularly have the opportunity to engage in the democratic process by responsibly voting for the school charity or to select an animal to represent each house. In

their questionnaire responses a very large majority of parents agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of others with different faiths and beliefs.

- 3.21 Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including the need for exercise and of being mindful of their mental and emotional well-being. In a Year 5 personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lesson, pupils spoke confidently about the need for a healthy diet, exercise and sleep to keeping healthy. The pupils spoke knowledgeably in interviews about the newly developed healthy snack policy which was designed through consultation with pupils, parents and staff. They described how yoga and mindful colouring helps to clear the mind whilst engaging in a mindfulness activity. They feel safe in the school environment and assert that they are well looked after. An overwhelming majority of pupils in their questionnaire responded that they know how to stay safe online. E-safety is seen as an important and regular part of their curriculum, together with opportunities to embed their understanding through assemblies and tutor time discussions. Trained pupil e-safety ambassadors provide effective counsel to their peers who may be experiencing concerns about being online.

## 4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the education advisor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with other specialist areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

### Inspectors

Mrs Susan La Farge	Reporting inspector
Mrs Nathalie Roberts	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school)
Miss Claire Bailey	Team inspector (Headteacher, ISA school)