

# School inspection report

4 to 6 February 2025

## **Withington Girls' School**

100 Wellington Road

Fallowfield

Manchester

M14 6BL

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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## Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors work closely with leaders and maintain close oversight of the school. They ensure that leaders are consistently meeting the requirements of the Standards and continue to act in the best interests of pupils by prioritising their academic progress and their physical and emotional wellbeing.
2. Leaders provide a warm, caring and supportive environment. The school has a clear sense of community.
3. Pupils experience a curriculum that reflects their age, aptitudes and needs. Teachers prepare lessons carefully to ensure effective teaching so that pupils make good progress. The support for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective, enabling them to make good progress. Links between the health centre, pastoral teams, the learning support department and the teaching staff create a responsiveness to need that promotes the effective learning of pupils who have SEND.
4. Well-trained staff give carefully targeted help to pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) so that they can access the curriculum appropriately.
5. Pupils develop strong moral values and spiritual knowledge. The curriculum includes age-appropriate programmes of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), including the requirements for relationships and sex education (RSE). Leaders effectively develop pupils' understanding of their social responsibility.
6. The physical education programme is extensive, enhancing pupils' fitness and levels of skill. Physical education in the sixth form is offered as an optional activity, but there is no strategic monitoring of participation, resulting in low levels of engagement.
7. Co-curricular activities are many and diverse. Pupils have the opportunity to experience a variety of physical, creative, fun and thought-provoking activities, enabling them to develop their talents and explore their interests.
8. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities for discussion and reflection in relation to their own and other cultures. Pupils develop respect and appreciation for different cultures. Leaders promote recognition and understanding of all faiths. This is a significant strength of the school.
9. Leaders support and encourage pupils to be positive citizens in British society. The curriculum teaches them about the importance of economic understanding, and principles such as the rule of law and democracy.
10. The school provides careers education that prepares pupils effectively for their next stages.
11. Leaders ensure that the school is well maintained and that all necessary health and safety checks are carried out. Arrangements and facilities for looking after pupils who are ill or injured are suitable. Risks, including those relating to fire, are suitably identified and mitigated.
12. Leaders fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding policy is appropriate. It is understood and fully implemented by staff.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- review the programme of activities in physical education in order to promote the physical wellbeing of sixth form pupils more effectively.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Regular visits, meetings, external evaluations and reports enable governors to play an active part in the successes and development of the school. Governors provide appropriate challenge and support to ensure that leaders take effective and timely action to make a positive difference to the school's provision for its pupils. Governors maintain appropriate oversight to ensure that the school's aims and ethos are promoted and delivered effectively by leaders who have the skills and knowledge appropriate to their role. Governors ensure that policies are up to date, are understood by staff and pupils and implemented effectively.
14. Leaders work together to support the physical and emotional wellbeing of pupils, creating a caring environment and ensuring that safeguarding is a priority throughout the school. Those responsible for safeguarding liaise regularly and effectively with external agencies, such as the local multi-agency safeguarding hub and Manchester safeguarding partnership, to promote the wellbeing of the pupils.
15. Leaders provide or make available the required information about the school through its website and a range of other documentation. Parents receive regular reports about pupils' progress, attitudes and attainment. Appropriate information is provided to external agencies. The school provides the relevant local authority with an annual statement of funds received and how they are allocated for any pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
16. Governors and leaders ensure that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met. A suitable and up-to-date accessibility plan is in place which considers access to both the curriculum and the school's facilities. Teaching is inclusive and does not discriminate between groups or individuals. Staff are adept at providing work matched to pupils' needs in order to ensure that pupils make good academic progress as well as being able to access individual support.
17. Leaders manage complaints appropriately, in line with the time frames stated in the school's policy. Appropriate records are kept. Senior leaders review any patterns in respect of complaints received to establish whether there is any wider learning that they need to consider in future planning.
18. There is a robust and comprehensive approach to risk management. Risks, including those that are less apparent, are managed consistently and thoroughly, with regular review and assessment to mitigate as far as possible the risk of harm. Thorough risk assessments are completed for people at risk, school premises and activities that take place both on and off school site.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The curriculum ensures breadth and depth of provision and is appropriate to the ages and aptitudes of the pupils. Across all areas of the junior and senior curriculum, pupils are able to build on prior learning. Collaborative activities, such as practical tasks in science, enhance teamwork and communication, while in the arts and drama pupils creatively build confidence and technical proficiency. The curriculum focuses on developing problem-solving skills in mathematics, preparing pupils for real-world applications, and places an appropriate emphasis on elements of language proficiency, communication and cultural understanding.
21. A recent focus of the school has been on developing the use of research-based teaching and learning initiatives. Pupils benefit from their teachers having a secure knowledge and understanding of their subject. Teachers use resources and lesson time effectively, choosing appropriate and effective activities. They refine their planning so that pupils benefit from coherent schemes of work and lesson plans. Staff have in-depth knowledge of pupils' academic and pastoral needs, enabling them to plan for individual support. They manage behaviour effectively and motivate pupils to show interest in their learning. Pupils are therefore willing to apply intellectual effort and demonstrate high degrees of self-motivation. As a result, they make good progress.
22. There is an appropriate framework for the regular evaluation of pupils' work and performance. In both the senior and junior schools, staff use data effectively to provide pupils with feedback and specific support or challenge, as required, to enable them to make further progress. In the senior school, cohort trends and individuals' progress and attainment are monitored relative to national norms and the school's own expectations. The school's performance in public examinations is above the national average.
23. Support for pupils who have SEND is robust. Pupils are screened at key points in their development as well as when the need arises. Staff in the learning support department ensure that teachers across the school are aware of the adaptations required to meet the pupils' needs effectively, including those with EHC plans. Training is provided to teachers to ensure that they use the appropriate approach for each specific learning barrier. These approaches are acted upon, evaluated regularly and their effectiveness monitored.
24. Pupils identified as requiring learning support due to speaking English as an additional language (EAL) are referred to the learning support department who put in place appropriate support such as specific in-class guidance for technical vocabulary acquisition. Weekly one-to-one support lessons ensure that pupils who speak EAL and need additional support are able to access the curriculum appropriately.
25. In keeping with the school's aims and ethos, teaching promotes non-discriminatory values and attitudes. Leaders guard against the promotion of partisan political views through careful monitoring. Pupils are fully conversant with the values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. These elements are carefully interwoven into the curriculum at every opportunity and promoted through assemblies and events involving guest speakers, such as the police, or trips to the law courts.
26. The school seeks to make a wide range of challenging activities and support sessions available to all pupils, including those in the sixth form. These include clubs, societies, concerts, productions and

publications, as well as participation in external tournaments and programmes such as computing competitions and linguistics Olympiads. The school provides subject extension sessions for sixth form pupils in addition to opportunities to learn about life skills such as finance and budgeting. These co-curricular activities support pupils' wellbeing and personal development, enabling them to acquire new emotional, intellectual, social, creative and physical skills and prepare them for their future lives.

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

**27. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

28. A broad and enriching curriculum enables pupils to develop self-esteem, moral values, spiritual knowledge and an understanding and respect for one another. Spiritual and moral knowledge and understanding are explored regularly in PSHE lessons, assemblies and form times. Pupils in the junior school have a well-developed understanding of themselves and are mature and confident, while showing empathy to those around them. They readily acknowledge their own areas for development and achievements and are rightly proud of their work and progress. They understand that progress is not confined to their academic development. Self-knowledge is prioritised throughout the school through regular reviews involving pupils, form tutors and pastoral leads and allocated time for self-reflection.
29. The physical education curriculum throughout the school offers a variety of activities, at different skill levels. This, along with numerous sports clubs and fixtures, enables pupils to improve their fitness and develop important life skills through practice and competition. In the junior school and Years 7 to 11 in the senior school, pupils thrive on physical activity. In the sixth form pupils are able to participate in a range of activities and sports as an optional activity. However, there is a lack of tracking of engagement, the uptake of physical activity is low, and pupils' physical wellbeing is consequently less well promoted.
30. The constantly evolving PSHE and RSE curriculums are relevant and up to date. Topics covered include building healthy relationships, reproductive health and online safety. The programmes equip pupils with knowledge and skills for personal development. The RSE curriculum fulfils the latest statutory guidance and meets the age-appropriate needs of the pupils. Leaders recognise the important role parents play by inviting them to attend age-specific talks and presentations over the course of the year.
31. A recently introduced code of conduct contributes to the high standard of pupils' behaviour. Pupils understand both the positive and negative consequences for behaviour through a system of house points, day books and sanctions and rewards relative to the level of behaviour.
32. The comprehensive anti-bullying policy is well understood by pupils, who are comfortable to report alleged incidents to staff. Bullying is discussed with pupils in assemblies, form times and PSHE lessons. Policies and procedures are adhered to by staff who are aware of their responsibilities. Bullying is infrequent but dealt with effectively when it occurs. Appropriate numbers of staff supervise pupils at all times of the school day, enabling pupils to feel safe around the site.
33. Admissions and attendance registers are suitably maintained. Absences are followed up appropriately and reported as required by statutory guidance to the local authority. The local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.
34. Health and safety procedures are thorough. The premises are well-maintained and in a way that mitigates risk and has a positive impact on pupils' welfare. Leaders follow specialist advice to help ensure that maintenance and security measures are efficient. Records are well kept and up to date. Appropriate precautions are taken to reduce the risk of fire. There is a suitable fire risk assessment in place which identifies effective control measures. Thorough fire safety training is provided for staff, and there are regular evacuation drills.



35. Well-qualified staff in the suitably equipped health centre provide appropriate care to pupils who are injured or unwell. Sufficient staff are trained as first-aiders, including those with specific paediatric training. Pupils are encouraged to eat healthily, and a suitable choice of well-prepared food is available at lunchtime and breaktime.
36. Leaders encourage responsibility during morning tutor time. The school has a range of opportunities for positions of responsibility, for example as sports captains, school council representatives or form captains. Pupils can also act as charity, eco or feedback representatives. The junior school's 'inclusion ambassadors' take pride in their roles and are proactive at breaktimes in supporting their peers and taking on responsibility to look after others.

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

- 37. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

38. Pupils respect, accept and celebrate differences, whether they relate to age, culture, disability or sex. All staff undertake equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) training and each form in the senior school has an EDI ambassador who works with other pupils and staff to plan whole school events and identify any EDI concerns among the pupil body. Pupils in the junior school have a mature understanding of one another and, through active discussion led by their teachers, they are aware from an early age that the spiritual and moral lives of their friends may be different to their own.
39. The school promotes cultural awareness through comprehensive programmes that extend beyond traditional classroom learning. Events such as 'Culture Day' and 'Feel Fab Feb' help to educate pupils about diversity. International trips and partnerships, ranging from NASA visits to sports tours in South Africa, and cultural education, for example Black History Month and the languages curriculum, provide pupils with a broad cultural understanding on a local, national and international level.
40. All faiths are recognised and accommodated through weekly faith-based and secular assemblies, as well as through regular inter-faith activities. Teaching pupils respect for their own and different cultures is done in a variety of ways. It includes the use of pupil mentors specific for the role, external speakers, self-reflection time for individuals and different groups, and the consideration of local and global events relating to culture. Leaders collect and analyse data and implement effective strategies to eliminate prejudice. This has led to a culture of respect and inclusivity in the school community, which reflects the school's ethos.
41. Pupils of all ages acquire different perspectives on democracy, constitutional law and government decisions. Democratic values are reinforced through school council elections and classroom debates, with pupils showing respect for candidates. In PSHE, pupils learn to understand how the law, crime and punishment are all related. External speakers give pupils the opportunity to learn to respect public services and the law. Older pupils explore the role of Westminster and devolved government, understanding how legislation varies across the United Kingdom. In understanding the rule of law as it applies to school life, pupils develop an appreciation of life in wider British society, the ability to distinguish right from wrong and the fact that laws are made to protect the population.
42. Pupils take ownership of their contributions to school life and wider society. For example, junior school pupils write letters to public figures addressing social and environmental issues, and friendship ambassadors take proactive roles in supporting their peers. A variety of pupil leadership groups include junior and senior school councils, eco society, and the school committee. Pupils' feedback is shared in these groups, as well as through regular surveys and reviews. Written feedback is also welcomed, which can be anonymous if pupils wish, in the 'Have your Say' and 'Chatter' boxes in the senior and junior schools respectively.
43. Pupils' sensitivity to and awareness of the needs of others are reflected in their voluntary work and community and fund-raising activities where they participate in local, national and international projects. There are also many projects in partnership with other schools, such as supporting the Booth Centre for the homeless, the Wood Street Mission children's charity and a school in The Gambia. Such initiatives reinforce pupils' sense of social responsibility and broaden their understanding of different socio-economic backgrounds.

44. Leaders equip pupils with the tools and knowledge required to make informed decisions about their next steps in life. Junior school pupils receive age-appropriate careers advice through events such as assemblies and workshops, and talks by parents. Leaders support all pupils with their choices throughout their school life, with close liaison between the relevant academic and pastoral leaders to enable pupils to access information and experiences relevant to a wide range of possible post-18 choices and careers. The 'Futures' programme provides impartial careers guidance for older pupils through exposure to careers fairs and alumnae networking
45. Economic education is embedded into core subjects across the curriculum in both the junior and senior schools, for example, in PSHE discussions encouraging reflection on financial wellbeing. Sixth form pupils undertake courses on costings, inflation and managing finance. Teachers enhance pupils' social education across the curriculum by encouraging respectful behaviour and embedding social skills, values and awareness into everyday learning experiences such as promoting collaboration and teamwork, encouraging debate, and involving pupils in social action projects. Pupils behave in a socially responsible manner.

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

- 46. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

47. Leaders have created a robust safeguarding culture amongst staff and pupils throughout the school. There is an appropriate safeguarding policy in place that prioritises the interests and safety of pupils and follows up-to-date statutory guidance. Comprehensive systems, reporting procedures and risk assessments are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils.
48. Staff see safeguarding as their principal responsibility in school and fulfil this duty diligently. They are well supported by training and guidance from the safeguarding team and are confident in their safeguarding roles. They are trained to identify concerns and understand when and how to report them. Staff receive annual safeguarding training, with regular additional updates on issues such as online safety, social media awareness and current pastoral concerns. Staff are vigilant to any concerns about pupils and report them appropriately. Leaders deal with any concerns effectively, sensitively and efficiently. They work closely with appropriate external agencies in a timely way to ensure that pupils receive the help and support they need.
49. Safeguarding procedures are known and understood by pupils. Pupils feel safe and supported because leaders provide suitable pathways for pupils to communicate safeguarding concerns, for example through access to trusted adults, a means of sharing concerns anonymously and via the learning support department. Well-being ambassadors and mentors are trained to support pupils and help them report concerns to staff if necessary.
50. The school ensures that online safety is taught across all age groups. The programme includes behaviour online in school and wider issues affecting pupils' wellbeing such as internet addiction and screen time. Leaders have implemented effective monitoring and filtering systems which safeguard online activities in the school. These systems are regularly tested and externally audited.
51. A thorough recruitment process is in place. All new staff and other adults are appropriately checked before they commence employment or engage with pupils, and records are carefully maintained in the single central record.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 52. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Withington Girls' School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	352/6033
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1158226
<b>Address</b>	Withington Girls' School 100 Wellington Road Fallowfield Manchester M14 6BL
<b>Phone number</b>	0161 224 1077
<b>Email address</b>	office@wgs.org
<b>Website</b>	www.wgs.org
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Governors Withington Girls' School
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Malcolm Pike
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Sarah Haslam
<b>Age range</b>	7 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	756
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	23 September 2022

## Information about the school

53. Withington Girls' School, founded in 1890, is an independent day school for female pupils. It is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. The school comprises a junior and senior school on a single site, across which some facilities and teaching staff are shared.
54. The school has identified 74 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
55. The school has identified English as an additional language for 153 pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to sustain an innovative and inspiring place of learning where pupils become independent lifelong learners who are resilient, curious and passionate about their world; to nurture its pupils' personal development and character, promoting respect, responsibility, confidence and compassion; and to support a diverse, inclusive and open-minded school community which works in partnership with local, national and international organisations for the benefit of its pupils.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

4 to 6 February 2025

57. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

58. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

59. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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