

School inspection report

26 to 28 November 2024

RGS Dodderhill

Dodderhill Road

Droitwich Spa

WR9 0BE

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. Leaders foster a supportive environment that prioritises pupils' wellbeing and promotes the school's aims and values. Pupils are well known by leaders and staff, and this contributes to a positive culture in which pupils can thrive.
2. Governors actively support school leaders and monitor the effectiveness of their work through communication and visits to ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders and governors work together systematically to maintain an accurate awareness of the school's successes and weaknesses and to shape a development plan focused on supporting pupils' emotional and intellectual wellbeing. However, leaders' oversight of records of pastoral issues and actions taken in response to these is not as efficient as possible. This is because these records are stored in multiple locations.
3. Pupils experience a comprehensive curriculum, supported by consistently effective teaching and planning tailored to individual needs. This ensures that pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), receive a rich education that enhances pupils' achievement and enables them to make good progress and become self-motivated learners.
4. Effective leadership of the early years actively promotes children's wellbeing. Leaders and staff build positive relationships with parents which help children's individual needs to be met. An engaging curriculum covers all required areas of learning, with teachers delivering well-planned activities in a stimulating setting both indoors and outside. This is combined with kind and thoughtful adult support which helps promote a positive learning environment.
5. A broad co-curricular programme provides effective opportunities for pupils to enjoy time interacting with others and developing skills. Pupils discover new interests, whilst building self-confidence.
6. An effective personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme supports pupils' personal growth and development well. This is delivered by caring staff who foster pupils' appreciation of the need for mutual respect.
7. Relevant health and safety laws are complied with. First aid is administered promptly, and all aspects of fire regulations are effectively implemented. The premises are well maintained, and a continuous and systematic cycle of checks and maintenance is undertaken and recorded.
8. The careers guidance for senior pupils is suitable and effective overall. This guidance includes information presented by guest speakers, visits to careers fairs and access to a careers and personal development platform. There have been recent developments to the careers provision with the desired intention of preparing pupils better for the next stages of their education. However, it is too early to judge the effectiveness of the changes made, as they are not yet fully embedded.
9. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Governors maintain diligent oversight of safeguarding through regular discussions with the safeguarding team. Leaders collaborate effectively with relevant external agencies, such as children's services, when required.

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 recent developments in careers guidance to ensure that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education
- strengthen leaders' oversight of pastoral records to enable efficient review of any issues and the actions that have been taken.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders have appropriate knowledge and skills to ensure that the school consistently meets the Standards. They have established a harmonious community that promotes positive academic outcomes and supports pupils' wellbeing. Leaders consistently focus on developing pupils' key learning skills, as well as their resilience and curiosity, to help them to achieve well.
11. Governors monitor and review the school's provision and procedures effectively, challenging leaders about their decisions and actions appropriately. Governors set clear expectations for leaders and check that they fulfil their responsibilities. They keep informed about the school's effectiveness and any areas for development through regular reports, frequent visits, communication with pupils and robust discussions with school leaders.
12. Leaders' development plans are informed through well-considered self-evaluation. Leaders reflect on how they can improve the school. They welcome feedback from parents, pupils and staff to inform their development planning and risk management. Recent changes include revamping the early years classrooms and enhancing the digital learning programme. Both have had a positive impact on pupils' all-round educational experience. However, leaders' oversight of pastoral concerns and actions taken to respond to these is not as efficient as it could be. This is because pastoral records are not stored as accessibly as possible.
13. The school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010, including by effectively implementing an accessibility plan. Leaders ensure that pupils of different backgrounds are treated equally and are not subject to any discrimination against them. The school caters well for pupils with a range of different needs through effective pastoral care and an inclusive and supportive environment.
14. Leaders promote and communicate the school's aims effectively. They ensure that all required policies and other information about the school is accessible to parents via a comprehensive website. Parents receive regular and informative reports on pupils' progress and attainment. The school reports appropriately to the local authority with regard to pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Where necessary, leaders liaise effectively with relevant external agencies to ensure that pupils are appropriately safeguarded and receive suitable educational support.
15. Leaders take effective steps to manage risk. Risks are assessed, recorded and monitored appropriately. Staff are trained in the assessment of risk in their respective areas and in the writing of formal assessments. They are supported by an online system which is successfully monitored by leadership.
16. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure effectively. They respond in a timely fashion to any concerns raised, maintain appropriate records of complaints and regularly monitor these to identify any trends.
17. Effective early years leadership ensures that children are taught well. Leaders provide early years staff with support that enables them to develop their professional practice.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The varied curriculum is planned effectively and offers much flexibility and choice to benefit the individual needs of pupils. Leaders regularly review and adapt the curriculum to ensure that pupils are provided with a suitable range of subjects, including a wide offering of creative and performing arts. The curriculum is enhanced by theme days and educational visits, and an enrichment programme for pupils from Year 10. Opportunities to enjoy outdoor learning through activities in the woodland setting are carefully planned for pupils in the prep school.
20. Teachers impart their good knowledge of and enthusiasm for their subjects successfully, providing clear explanations and demonstrating concepts in a variety of ways. Lessons are characterised by work tailored to individuals, effective open questioning that builds on prior learning, and pupils working collaboratively. Well-planned lessons with activities that engage the pupils well, utilising high-quality resources, including, when appropriate, information and communication technology (ICT) and online sources of information, motivates pupils, fosters creativity and encourages them to think for themselves. As a result, pupils achieve well and make good progress.
21. A clear assessment framework is in place. Leaders and staff evaluate pupils' work and performance regularly and thoroughly. Staff involve pupils in discussions about their progress, ensuring they know their targets and how best to meet them. This enables pupils to work on areas of development that are individual to them. Teachers' marking and verbal feedback are clear and in-depth. They enable misconceptions to be rectified and learning to continue at pace. A clear reporting schedule is in place, and reports to parents are concise and informative.
22. Leaders provide effectively for pupils who have SEND. The well-structured programme includes a personalised and flexible approach to the curriculum, effective teaching and support for pupils that is well matched to their needs. Teachers regularly review and update specific targets for individual pupils and shape their teaching to enable pupils to meet these. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good and often rapid progress from their starting points.
23. The curriculum is adapted so that pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and need additional support for their English make good progress and become more confident and fluent in their use of English. Caring staff provide effective support for pupils who speak EAL and monitor their progress through regular assessments.
24. Early years children experience a wide programme of varied activities appropriate to their educational needs. Personalised and informed planning enables children to make good progress and meet their individual developmental goals. The language-rich interactions between staff and children help develop children's communication and language skills well. For example, children in Nursery listened attentively and answered questions confidently as they considered the signs of winter during an outdoor learning session.
25. The extra-curricular offering provides opportunities for pupils to develop existing skills and learn new ones. The diverse range of activities allows pupils to interact with a wide range of years and develop self-confidence and specific skills through clubs such as trampolining, baking, mindfulness and horse riding.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Leaders have successfully established a culture that values kindness and mutual respect, and pupils display these qualities from an early age. A carefully designed PSHE curriculum helps pupils develop a clear understanding of factors that can positively and negatively impact their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing.
28. Staff who know pupils well effectively deliver PSHE, which includes relationships and sex education (RSE). The curriculum successfully provides pupils with strategies to challenge discrimination and deepen their understanding of people's protected characteristics, such as disability and race. Through the RSE programme, pupils explore and learn about pertinent age-appropriate topics, such as puberty, consent and different types of healthy relationships.
29. The wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop new skills in clubs and experience new challenges such as through public speaking helps develop pupils' self-esteem. This is further enhanced through the many opportunities for pupils of all ages to take on roles of responsibility. 'Learning habits' such as risk-taking and resilience are displayed around the school, and pupils use them effectively. These well-embedded habits combined with a supportive community help pupils develop confidence in and understanding of themselves. Pupils from the early years upwards discuss their learning enthusiastically and display confidence with one another.
30. Leaders ensure that an effective anti-bullying strategy is in place. They provide regular training for staff and monitor behaviour carefully to address any concerns. Leaders respond swiftly to the rare incidents of bullying that do occur and support all pupils affected effectively.
31. Leaders ensure that pupils are effectively supervised on-site and during educational trips and visits. This is achieved through the suitable deployment of staff to ensure that they are always available to provide support when needed. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are maintained at all times in the early years.
32. Leaders promote good behaviour and encourage pupils to show kindness and support others. Pupils typically behave well. Posters outlining the suitable and proportionate sanctions are displayed in every room, which provides pupils with clear knowledge of the school's expectations of behaviour and the consequences if these expectations are not met. The many day-to-day interactions enable every teacher to know pupils as individuals and provide supportive personalised attention.
33. Staff encourage pupils to be active and promote pupils' physical health through a diverse programme of physical education (PE). Pupils participate well in PE lessons and develop their skills in different sporting activities. Pupils learn how exercise and physical pursuits can support a healthy lifestyle. The school's programme of all-round sporting experience develops collaboration and promotes individual physical health and wellbeing.
34. Teachers develop pupils' spiritual and moral awareness effectively by taking opportunities to explore issues in these areas across the curriculum. For example, in English, when studying *A Christmas Carol*, pupils explore ideas about justice and responsibility and the possibility of a higher power. In religious studies, pupils compare the principles of religions such as Hinduism and Islam. Spirituality is also developed effectively throughout the curriculum, including in art and music where pupils are

given opportunities to reflect on the beauty of sight and sound, and experience moments of stillness.

35. Adults support the mental and emotional wellbeing of children through warm and supportive relationships and detailed individualised planning. Children feel secure with familiar adults who provide help when required. Activities are planned to promote their physical development. For example, children's fine motor skills are developed when threading cereal onto pipe cleaners to make bird feeders. Specialist PE lessons improve stamina and help children develop their gross motor skills.
36. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor attendance and follow up on non-attendance swiftly. The local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
37. Leaders oversee a robust approach to health and safety, ensuring policies are implemented effectively. All necessary checks are undertaken regularly and systematically so that the premises are well maintained and any issues that arise are addressed promptly. Appropriate fire risk assessments, regular fire drills and effective maintenance of fire safety equipment are in place.
38. There is appropriate provision on the premises for any pupils who feel ill or become injured. Suitably trained staff administer any required first aid or medication in a timely and appropriate manner. Children in the early years are supported by staff trained in paediatric first aid.

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

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

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

40. Pupils gain a secure understanding of the importance of economics in their lives. This begins in Nursery through intentionally designed role play areas, such as a café. As pupils move through the school, they learn about managing money and how to open a bank account. Economic awareness is developed through the curriculum, particularly in PSHE and enrichment studies, where pupils reflect on what economic success looks like and how it could be measured. Pupils take part in a 'flourishing fivers' house challenge, which applies their developing financial knowledge and draws out their entrepreneurial skills. Year 11 organise and host a coffee morning on behalf of a cancer charity, which develops their understanding of planning within a budget.
41. Teachers develop pupils' moral sensibilities effectively by taking opportunities to explore themes as they arise across the curriculum, for example about making choices based on ethical principles and whether money brings happiness. As a result, pupils develop the ability to consider viewpoints other than their own. The teaching of comparative political models in Year 10 allows pupils to ask reflective questions about the political ideologies governing various societies. Staff ensure that any discussion with political elements is balanced and managed impartially.
42. Leaders and staff inculcate an ethos of mutual respect, which has helped to create a friendly community where pupils use affirmative language in discussions and respond to others empathetically. Pupils demonstrate an awareness of British values such as mutual respect, individual liberty and democracy. They are carefully interwoven through the curriculum and planned programme of assemblies. Pupils are taught about the judicial system in England and the elected Parliament's role in the law-making process.
43. Through the curriculum and drop-down days such as lunar new year, pupils develop their awareness of other cultures, festivals and faiths. For example, in music pupils gain an understanding of music from different cultures through a 'rhythm of the world' topic. Furthermore, leaders provide opportunities for pupils to speak in assemblies, such as Year 9 addressing issues of peace, poverty and the education of girls and women across the globe. Leaders encourage the celebration of different cultures. Pupils learn about the harm that prejudice and discrimination can do and are encouraged not to judge people by their appearance, but to respect their protected characteristics, such as race, religion and sex. Consequently, pupils develop cultural awareness and appreciation, which helps to prepare them for living in a diverse world.
44. Careers education is taught through PSHE and complimented by additional activities, such as one-to-one meetings for Year 11, and talks by representatives of different careers, such as the armed forces. Guidance has recently been developed following leaders' recognition that there needed to be a more coherent programme of careers advice. However, recent additional activities, such as an expanded guest speaker programme that informs the pupils of potential educational and career options, have not been in place long enough to become fully embedded, nor for their effectiveness to be judged.
45. Staff in the early years develop children's social skills well. They communicate high expectations and encourage children to co-operate effectively and listen appropriately. For example, in music, children worked together to play their shakers, with adults supporting them to take turns and be inclusive. As a result, children learn to play and learn together harmoniously.

46. Pupils contribute positively to the lives of those in the wider community. Each house, guided by pupil leaders, decides on a chosen charity and actively raises funds throughout the year. House assemblies take place across age groups and pupils work towards a shared purpose, such as collecting goods for a local food bank.

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

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

48. Leaders implement suitable safeguarding policies and procedures and effective training that protect the health and happiness of pupils and reflect the latest guidance. Governors provide diligent oversight of safeguarding, meeting regularly with members of the safeguarding team and checking that appropriate action is taken when needed. Consequently, safeguarding procedures are effective, and the wellbeing of pupils is promoted.
49. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are trained appropriately to carry out their duties. They provide effective induction training for new staff and volunteers and deliver suitable ongoing support and training for established staff. This, combined with making use of external training, results in staff being well prepared to identify and address any safeguarding concerns. For example, they are confident in knowing how to recognise and respond to any low-level concerns or incidents of extremism. Staff respond appropriately to any concerns about child-on-child abuse.
50. Leaders work collaboratively with relevant external agencies, such as children’s services and the police. The safeguarding team liaise with a range of agencies for support and guidance, referring concerns to them when necessary.
51. Pupils speak with confidence about the dangers faced online and how to keep themselves safe. Computer lessons, PSHE and assemblies all contribute to pupils’ understanding of online safety. Leaders ensure that the school has effective arrangements for filtering and monitoring, including timely notifications to the safeguarding team. A recent series of parental workshops focused on identifying risks surrounding online safety further supports pupils in using the internet and digital technologies safely and responsibly.
52. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share any worries that they might have. Pupils are clear on how to raise concerns, including confidentially through worry boxes. Staff respond appropriately whenever pupils raise any concerns.
53. Those responsible for safer recruitment are diligent in their roles. They ensure that all required suitability checks are completed before staff commence work and are accurately recorded in the single central record of appointments, which leaders monitor effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	RGS Dodderhill
Department for Education number	885/6057
Registered charity number	1120644
Address	RGS Dodderhill Dodderhill Road Droitwich Spa Worcestershire WR9 0BE
Phone number	01905 778290
Email address	dodderhill@rgsw.org.uk
Website	https://www.rgsw.org.uk/dodderhill
Proprietor	The Royal Grammar School Worcester
Chair	Mr Andrew Greenway
Headmaster	Mr Thomas Banyard
Age range	2 to 16
Number of pupils	168
Date of previous inspection	5 to 7 October 2021

Information about the school

55. RGS Dodderhill is an independent day school situated in Droitwich Spa, Worcestershire. It provides co-educational provision for pupils aged 2 to 11 years and caters for female pupils aged 12 to 16 years. The school merged with the RGS Worcester family of schools in May 2019 and became known as RGS Dodderhill. RGS Worcester is a charitable company limited by guarantee and incorporates four schools. There is one overarching board of governors for all four schools, who are directors of the company and trustees of the charity. The current headteacher took up his position in September 2023.
56. The early years setting comprises 22 children, who are taught in three classes.
57. The school has identified 52 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. English is an additional language for three pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to provide an excellent all-round education, supporting children in their passage to adulthood by developing character, intellect, physical wellbeing and aesthetic sense within a scholarly community. The school strives to empower young people to expand their aspirations and reach their highest academic level, developing leaders with integrity, and creative thinkers of the future.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

26 to 28 November 2024

60. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. 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.

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

63. The school was previously inspected by Ofsted. This is the first inspection of the school by ISI.

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**.

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