



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

St James' School

March 2022

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School's Details

School	St James' School			
DfE number	812/6000			
Address	St James' School 22 Bargate Grimsby Lincolnshire DN34 4SY			
Telephone number	01472 503260			
Email address	enquiries@saintjameschool.co.uk			
Headmaster	Mr Stephen Thompson			
Proprietor	Alpha Schools Holdings Ltd			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	66			
	Day pupils	52	Boarders	14
	Seniors	56	Sixth Form	10
Inspection dates	22 to 25 March 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St James' School is a co-educational day and boarding school with a Christian ethos. In May 2021, the school was purchased by Alpha Schools Holdings Ltd, which appoints directors to oversee the governance of the school.
- 1.2 The senior department includes a small sixth form. Boarders are accommodated in one house, close to the school site. The majority are full boarders. Since the previous inspection, three different headmasters have been in post, with the current headmaster appointed in September 2021.
- 1.3 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school seeks to help pupils to maximise their potential through personalised learning in a caring environment, which is rich in opportunity. It aims to enable pupils to discover their strengths and talents in a setting that nurtures creativity, encourages flexibility and embraces independence.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils up to Year 11 is broadly average. In Years 12 and 13, the pupils' ability profile is slightly below average for pupils taking A-level courses.
- 1.6 Most day pupils come from professional families living within 15 miles of the school. Boarders originate from Asia, Europe, Africa and the UK. The school has identified 15 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia, dyspraxia and autistic spectrum disorder; all receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan with dedicated one-to-one support. English is an additional language (EAL) for 9 pupils whose needs are supported through specialist support alongside classroom teaching. Data have identified 15 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

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, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. 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, including the boarding NMS. 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.

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](#), [National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school does not meet all of the required standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, and associated requirements, and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2019 to 2021 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 Apart from relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers education, the curriculum is documented and supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils. The teaching in all other subjects enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources.
- 2.4 The school has consulted parents with regard to RSE and has published a written statement of its policy, but the policy and the schemes of work have not been implemented.
- 2.5 Pupils have not been provided with accurate and up-to-date careers guidance in line with the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education in paragraphs 1–4 relating to the curriculum, teaching and the framework for pupils' performance are not met.**

Action point 1

The school must ensure that pupils receive relationships and sex education in line with the relevant statutory guidance [paragraph 2A(1)(b), paragraph 3(a), (c) and (g), and paragraph 4].

Action point 2

The school must ensure that pupils receive accurate, up-to-date careers guidance [paragraph 2(2)(e)(i), (ii) and (iii)].

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.8 The standards relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 17 and 19 are met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; fire safety requirements are met; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; and admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family and access to a programme of activities. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.

- 2.11 Health and safety requirements are not met. A number of potential hazards to pupils' safety around the site were identified during the inspection, including trip hazards and other dangerous debris, and a failure to store hazardous liquids safely in the science laboratory. The school has not drawn up and effectively implemented an adequate risk assessment policy, and appropriate action has not been taken to reduce risks to pupils' safety. As a result, the school does not meet the standard for safeguarding as it is not promoting the welfare of pupils and boarders.
- 2.12 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety in paragraphs 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15, the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 (accessibility plan), and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 and NMS 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 15 are met, but those in paragraphs 7 [safeguarding], 8 [safeguarding of boarders], 11 [health and safety], 16 [risk assessment] and NMS 6 [safety of boarders] and NMS 11 [child protection] are not met.

Action point 3

The school must ensure that it complies with relevant health and safety laws by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy and, in particular, by the elimination of health and safety hazards around the school site and ensuring safe storage of hazardous liquids in the science laboratory [paragraph 7(a) and (b), paragraph 8(a) and (b) and paragraph 11; NMS 6.1 and 11.1].

Action point 4

The school must ensure that it safeguards and promotes the welfare of pupils at the school by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy [paragraph 7(a) and (b), paragraph 8(a) and (b) and paragraph 16(a) and (b); NMS 6.3 and 11.1].

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.13 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.14 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 14 are met.

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.15 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. Acoustics and lighting are appropriate, and water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.16 The premises are not maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety.
- 2.17 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation in paragraphs 22–24 and paragraphs 26–31 and NMS 5 are met, but those in paragraph 25 and NMS 6.2 (maintenance) are not met.

Action point 5

The school must ensure that premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety [paragraph 25; NMS 6.2].

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.18 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.

2.19 The standards relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.20 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.

2.21 The standards relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 18 are met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.22 The proprietor has not ensured that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, because the standards relating to the provision of sex and relationships education, careers guidance, safeguarding, health and safety, the assessment of risk and the maintenance of premises are not met and they have, therefore, failed to promote the well-being of pupils.

2.23 The standards relating to leadership and management of the school in paragraph 34 and NMS 13 are not met.

Action point 6

The proprietor must ensure that school leaders demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their roles and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school standards are met consistently, and the well-being of pupils is actively promoted [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 13.3 – 13.5].

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

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

- Pupils have positive attitudes to school: they work hard, and complete with diligence the tasks that they are set.
- Pupils make good progress from their starting points, and achieve well in public examinations, both at GCSE and at A level.
- In lessons, pupils make consistently good progress in developing their skills, knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects.
- Pupils demonstrate good study skills, with many pupils able to think at a high level, to form hypotheses and to gather and evaluate information from a range of sources.

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

- Pupils display good levels of self-esteem and understand how to improve their work and performance.
- Pupils have a clear sense of right and wrong, as reflected in their excellent behaviour in lessons, in the boarding house and around the school.
- Pupils are very respectful of those with different backgrounds and traditions from their own.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements:

- Further develop pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- Improve pupils' collaboration and teamworking skills in a wider range of subjects and lessons.
- Develop pupils' ability to make decisions about their future relationships and careers.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils enter school with broadly average levels of attainment. Pupils' progress from Year 7 to Year 11 is good, and pupils achieve good GCSE results. In the years 2018 to 2019, GCSE results were above the average for maintained schools. The centre-assessed grades in 2020 and the teacher-assessed grades in 2021 indicate that this level of attainment has been maintained: almost three-quarters of results at GCSE in 2021 were at grades 9 to 6. Pupils in the sixth form make progress which is broadly as expected, and they achieve A-level results that are also good. In the years 2018 to 2019, results were

just above the average for maintained schools. The centre-assessed grades in 2020 and the teacher-assessed grades in 2021 indicate a similar picture, with almost half of A-level results in 2021 awarded at the highest A* and A grades. Although girls achieve a greater proportion of the highest grades than boys, and boarders achieve rather more highly than day pupils, there is little inconsistency in the achievement of different groups. Pupils with EAL and SEND and the school's most able pupils all achieve well. Boarding makes a positive contribution to this good achievement. The very large majority of pupils in the sixth form are successful in gaining a place at their chosen university, often at highly selective institutions.

- 3.6 Pupils develop good independent study skills during their time at the school. In a sixth-form history lesson, for example, good research skills were demonstrated by pupils working independently on their non-examination assessments. This is because pupils are used to carrying out independent research in history lessons throughout the school. Pupils can synthesise information and pull different strands of thought together to present a compelling case, in writing and verbally. In a GCSE geography lesson, for example, pupils displayed good analytical skills when identifying river erosion and its impact on deforestation, using appropriate geographical language to explain features of the river flow. Boarders told inspectors that they work harder and are able to concentrate more in the evenings and weekends, so they develop their skills more quickly.
- 3.7 Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They are keen to learn and work with diligence. In a mathematics lesson in Year 9, for example, pupils worked with good focus and concentration on a series of calculations involving averages. Pupils are able to work independently with relatively little teacher input. This was seen, for example, in a GCSE religious education lesson in which pupils worked individually on revision booklets, taking responsibility for their learning and involving the teacher only when needed. Boarders told inspectors that the experience of boarding helps them to become more independent in their learning. Pupils demonstrate considerable resilience. In a GCSE geography lesson for example, pupils identified topics that they had found difficult, including coastal management strategies, and explained in depth to inspectors how they tackled the issues through their effort and perseverance, and by carrying out their own supplementary research tasks.
- 3.8 Pupils' acquisition of knowledge, skills and understanding across a range of areas is good. In their response to the pre-inspection questionnaire, a very large majority of pupils agreed that their skills and knowledge improve in most lessons. This was seen, for example, in a GCSE Spanish lesson, in which a small group of pupils with EAL made rapid progress in their writing skills, using complex Spanish vocabulary, in what was their third language. In an art lesson, pupils in Year 8 produced portraits which showed a good understanding and application of their prior learning about portrait proportions, the use of a grid to draw accurately, and the effective use of tone and colour palette. The school is successful in its aim of enabling pupils to discover their strengths and talents in a setting that nurtures creativity, encourages flexibility and embraces independence.
- 3.9 Pupils develop good communication skills. They write with accuracy and speak with fluency. Pupils in Year 8 displayed excellent verbal communication in explaining confidently to inspectors the impact of emancipation on black US citizens in the 1860s. The explanations were balanced, coherent and persuasive. In a GCSE English lesson, pupils explained how they had produced multiple drafts in their response to a newspaper article about the use of cycle lanes. This showed clearly the development of their writing skills, in particular the improved use of structure and the use of language to support their ideas. Pupils' speaking skills are good. Pupils in each tutor group plan and deliver an assembly for their house, which helps to develop their confidence in public speaking.
- 3.10 Pupils develop their numeracy skills effectively in mathematic lessons, and outcomes are good. In 2021, all pupils gained a GCSE in mathematics at grade 5 or above. These skills develop further in their application in different subjects across the curriculum. For example, in a GCSE geography lesson, pupils confidently discussed their understanding of data, maps and pie charts using their previously learned numerical skills, in their study of tropical rainforests. Other applications of numeracy skills were seen by inspectors in a business studies lesson, where pupils were competent in handling data in bar charts

and pie charts, and in a physical education lesson, where pupils used their numeracy skills to create hypotheses based on football league tables. In inspectors' scrutiny of pupils' work, they noted that in GCSE physics pupils had demonstrated a good ability to rearrange scientific equations to solve problems in the subject.

- 3.11 Pupils use ICT in some subjects to a good level, as a result of the school's 'bring your own device' policy. Good use was seen of mobile phones in an art lesson, and of laptop computers in GCSE history for independent research. In a photography lesson in Year 10, pupils explained how the work of a commercial photographer had been influential on their learning, using a variety of digital resources and tools to do so. In a physical education lesson, pupils used their laptops effectively to analyse their performance in a boxing activity. However, some pupils told inspectors that they did not feel competent in the use of ICT, and most could not recall being taught any such skills at school. The school does not currently teach ICT or have a planned approach for the further development of pupils' skills in this area. Opportunities for pupils to learn new ICT skills are, therefore, limited.
- 3.12 Individual pupils achieve well in a variety of sporting and cultural activities. Some pupils compete at county level in golf and are successful at international level in equestrianism. A number of pupils achieve highly in music and dramatic art, including success in LAMDA examinations at distinction level. Other individual pupils achieve highly in dance and in music, especially playing the piano, and singing. School leaders recognise that opportunities for pupils to take part in academic, sporting and cultural activities outside the taught curriculum are currently more limited than in the past. They acknowledge that many activities which promote such achievements, such as the UK Maths Challenge and Science Olympiads, were curtailed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and have been relatively slow to restart.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 Pupils are reflective learners who understand well their strengths and weaknesses, with high levels of self-understanding for their age. All parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school helps their children to be confident and independent. This self-understanding was seen, for example, in a Spanish lesson in Year 11 in which pupils were encouraged to reflect on their performance in recent mock examinations. They considered not only the marks and grades they achieved, but they also reflected on what revision techniques they had used, how well they had prepared for exams, including strategies to stay healthy, and what they will do next time. This results in pupils who are confident about how they will tackle challenges in the future. Teachers' marking gives pupils clear guidance on how to improve their work, and many examples were seen of teachers giving detailed one-to-one verbal feedback on pupils' performance, and how to improve in the future. This helps to build pupils levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, which are good.
- 3.15 Pupils' behaviour in lessons, in boarding houses and around the school is excellent. They have a strong understanding of right and wrong because the school's values are clear, simple, and regularly reinforced in assemblies, in lessons and in notices displayed prominently around the school. In a GCSE physical education lesson, for instance, pupils demonstrated good moral understanding in their discussions of drug taking in sport, and the issue of taking the knee before football matches. In a chemistry lesson in Year 11 in which petrol production was being discussed, pupils expressed their understanding and empathy concerning the current issues in Ukraine. Pupils accept responsibility for their own behaviour and treat each other, and adults, with courtesy and respect. This was noted, for example, in the kind and supportive way in which pupils behave towards each other at break and at lunchtime, and their good-humoured willingness to tidy away after lunch.
- 3.16 Pupils are highly supportive of inclusivity and diversity in this harmonious school community. Pupils make friends easily with people from backgrounds that are different from their own. The boarding experience makes a significant contribution in this respect. Boarders from many countries mix easily. There are overseas boarders in every year group. Given the small size of each year group, this

promotes routine mixing between day pupils and boarders of different nationalities, backgrounds, and beliefs. Boarders cook communal meals for each other in the boarding house to celebrate different cultural festivals. Pupils were very clear when they spoke with inspectors that this is a school where diversity is valued and where discrimination of any kind is not tolerated.

- 3.17 Pupils have a good understanding of how to stay safe and healthy. They are fully aware of the potential dangers posed by the internet because the school teaches them about this effectively and frequently. They understand the importance of maintaining positive physical and mental health and make good decisions in this respect, for example in making healthy choices at mealtimes. In their questionnaire responses, the very large majority of parents feel that the school encourages their children to adopt a healthy lifestyle, and a large majority of pupils in their responses agree with this view. Pupils are resilient and have a good understanding of how to maintain positive mental health. They readily seek help, particularly from the school nurse, if it is needed. However, the school does not currently provide a sufficiently wide range of co-curricular opportunities to ensure that all pupils can enjoy the benefits of regular and frequent exercise.
- 3.18 Pupils respond thoughtfully to the opportunities they are given in sessions on personal, social and health education, and in other lessons, to consider the non-material aspects of life, and to think about their own beliefs and perspectives. For example, pupils in a GCSE photography lesson reflected with some insight on the interplay of light and shade in a photographic image, and pupils in a GCSE geography lesson told inspectors of being awed by the sheer size and scale of the Hoover dam in the USA. Pupils display good development of their spiritual understanding in religious education lessons. Evidence in pupils' work demonstrates their mature consideration of moral and philosophical issues about the existence of God, the nature of good and evil, and issues such as euthanasia and abortion.
- 3.19 Pupils have a good understanding and appreciation of people less fortunate than themselves and take steps to support them. For example, they recently took the initiative in raising funds for the people of Ukraine, and they told inspectors they had participated with enthusiasm in Red Nose Day events. They get involved in charitable fundraising events for local causes. During the inspection, for example, enthusiastic and untiring pupils from Year 7 to Year 9 took part in a dance-a-thon in aid of a local hospice. Pupils initiate some of these activities themselves and are keen to become involved in planned future events. Members of the school council enjoy contributing to the development of the school and can point to changes in the school as a result of their involvement. Pupils in the sixth form and house captains willingly take on leadership roles of responsibility, acting as role models for younger pupils. Boarding prefects help to ensure the welfare of younger boarders and assist the housemistress with the organisation and day-to-day running of the boarding house.
- 3.20 Pupils understand that the decisions they make are important in determining their future success, and they display some strengths in making such decisions. In an assembly, pupils in Year 10 demonstrated good decision-making skills in choosing events in order to raise funds for their chosen charity. In a sixth-form history lesson, pupils demonstrated good decision-making skills in selecting topics for their non-examined assessment, and in deciding how to research their chosen topics. However, some aspects are less strong. Older pupils told inspectors that they had received very little structured advice on their future educational options. The lack of relationships and sex education and of careers advice in the school means some pupils are not fully equipped to make important decisions about their future.
- 3.21 Pupils' social development is good in some respects, especially in contexts beyond those of formal lessons. Pupils are sociable individuals, and they develop productive relationships with each other. The diverse range of backgrounds of boarders helps pupils to develop tolerance and to respect diversity. Pupils form friendships beyond their year groups, and older pupils help younger ones. When given the opportunity, for example in Young Enterprise activities, they enjoy working together, but such opportunities are relatively limited in some classroom subjects. Pupils told inspectors that in some subjects they rarely work together, and they could recall few opportunities to develop teamworking skills outside a sporting context.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited boarding houses and the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Michael Phipps	Reporting inspector
Mrs Benita Ogg	Compliance team inspector (Bursar, IAPS school)
Dr Marie Bush	Team inspector (Former deputy headmistress, GSA school)
Mr Richard Feldman	Team inspector for boarding (Former housemaster, HMC school)