

School inspection report

3 to 5 February 2026

Portsmouth High School GDST

25 Kent Road

Southsea

Portsmouth

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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. Collectively, leaders, the trust and governors ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently. The trust and governors maintain thorough oversight of the school. The processes for review are thorough and regular. They ensure that leaders are effective in fulfilling their roles. Leaders use a wide range of information to gain a detailed understanding of the impact of their work. They are highly reflective in their approach, always looking for areas of development. They are systematic in their approach to continued improvement.
2. The curriculum is well planned and provides pupils with a wide range of experiences, including through the co-curricular offer. Teachers have appropriate subject knowledge and use a variety of methods to deliver lessons that engage and enthuse pupils in their learning. Typically, pupils across the different phases learn effectively. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are given the support they need to fully access the curriculum. The oldest pupils achieve well in public examinations. However, in some lessons in Years 7 to 9, teachers do not use assessment with sufficient precision to adapt lessons for those who need help or those who are ready to achieve more. When this occurs, some pupils do not learn as effectively as they should.
3. Children in the early years are provided with a well-planned curriculum, adept teaching and a well-resourced learning environment. As a result of these things, children settle quickly, develop confidence and learn effectively. Staff model the behaviours that they want children to develop. They promote kindness and respect and teach children to think about the feelings of others and how to manage their own emotions. They enthuse children with a love of learning. Children are ready to transition into Year 1.
4. Pupils' emotional and physical wellbeing is very well supported. Leaders prioritise pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing through a culture of care and mutual respect. A network of adults and peer mentors provides pupils with pastoral and wellbeing support. Pupils know that their emotional wellbeing is of key concern to staff. Lessons in physical education (PE) and games sessions are effectively delivered to all pupils by teachers and coaches with high levels of expertise. Leaders have a thorough approach to managing health and safety at the school. Measures to mitigate risk are suitably implemented and reviewed. Fire safety protocols are well understood. First aid is readily available.
5. Through a wide-ranging programme, including personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), pupils develop a thorough understanding of important values such as respect, tolerance and equality. They develop a rich understanding of different cultures, traditions and beliefs. They consistently demonstrate the impact of this learning in how they treat each other and in their positive attitudes in school. They willingly take on a range of roles and responsibilities in the school and wider local community. They engage fully in the comprehensive careers advice and economic education so that they are well prepared for the next stage of their education, training and employment.
6. The leadership and management of safeguarding is thorough and robust. Leaders maintain accurate records, act promptly to support pupils and work closely with external agencies, when needed. They respond effectively to any concern about the conduct of adults and oversee appropriate pre-employment checks and recruitment procedures.

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:

- ensure that teachers use assessment information to precisely identify and support the pupils in Years 7 to 9 who need additional help or who are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Pupils' wellbeing and pastoral care are central to the school's ethos and practice. It is at the forefront of leaders' planning and decision-making, which has created a supportive learning environment for the pupils. Leaders make decisions and invest in provision that prioritises pupils' wellbeing. For example, they ensure that there is high-quality, wide-ranging pastoral care for pupils that provides for their physical and emotional wellbeing and mental health. Pupils and staff embrace this ethos, creating a welcoming, inclusive school environment.
8. The trust and the school's governing body are well informed about the school. They work collectively to oversee the work of leaders. They visit the school regularly and undertake a range of activities, including annual audits to help inform their policies and procedures. They receive regular reports from leaders and provide challenge and support, where needed. They ensure that all Standards are met consistently.
9. Leaders review a wide range of information to evaluate the effectiveness of their work. They take well-considered and decisive action to continue to improve the school. For instance, they have recently implemented improvements to monitor pupils' progress. They seek external expertise to check the quality of provision for pupils, including through specialist audits to assess provision for pupils who have SEND. Recent leadership decisions to raise the expectations of pupils in academic lessons and co-curricular activities are supporting pupils to develop critical thinking skills and their curiosity for learning.
10. Leaders work with external agencies in a timely and effective way. They work robustly with external agencies to safeguard pupils. They inform the local authority of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points or where there are concerns about pupils' absence. They work with the local authority specialist teams for pupils who have SEND. They ensure that the local authority is provided with the required information relating to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding.
11. Leaders in the early years are skilled and knowledgeable and have a comprehensive understanding of the needs of individual children. They provide children with a well-resourced and safe environment that supports their learning and development. They ensure that staff are well trained and provide a warm, attentive and thoughtful experience. Leaders ensure that children have a positive start to their education.
12. The trust, governors and leaders ensure there is a systematic approach to managing risk. Leaders and staff understand the contextual risks and, where needed, any specific risks for individual pupils. Leaders ensure that appropriate risk assessments are in place across a wide range of activities, including those on-site and off-site. Risk assessments are monitored and reviewed regularly.
13. All required information is made available to parents and other stakeholders. Parents are given regular reports on their children's progress. There is an appropriate complaints policy in place that is supported by effective processes. Records are kept and reviewed for any lessons learned. Leaders ensure that they meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. There is an appropriate accessibility plan in place that is regularly reviewed to ensure that the curriculum and site are accessible to all.

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

14. All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. Leaders have implemented a broad and balanced curriculum. Children in the early years study a curriculum which allows them to explore the world and develop essential skills through a range of activities. As they get older, the curriculum introduces pupils to increasingly demanding topics while maintaining breadth across a range of subjects. The curriculum supports pupils to build essential knowledge and skills in oracy, reading, writing and mathematics. For example, in English, the literacy curriculum is rich, well structured and ambitious, providing pupils with opportunities to engage with a wide range of challenging, age-appropriate texts across poetry, prose and drama. The curriculum supports the oldest pupils to study a broad range of subjects that cater well for differing aptitudes and abilities and lead to qualifications and accreditation.
16. Leaders in the early years implement a well-planned curriculum that supports the youngest children's learning and development. They use a range of planned and play-based activities that stimulate and interest children and motivate them to explore ideas. Staff are well trained to deliver this curriculum. They support children's language and communication by encouraging them to express their thoughts and develop their vocabulary. Staff teach children phonics adeptly, ensuring that children get off to a good start in their early reading and letter formation. They use a range of resources to help children develop an early understanding of number and counting. Leaders supplement the curriculum with well-planned activities in the outdoor environment and trips to other places of interest. As a result, children are ready to transition into Year 1.
17. Most teachers use a thorough knowledge of the subjects that they teach in order to plan effective lessons. They ensure that lessons build over time, allowing pupils to consolidate and recap previous knowledge before moving on to more complex tasks. Teachers provide pupils with clear explanations of tasks and new concepts. Many teachers identify pupils who need extra help and address any misconceptions in their learning quickly. Positive relationships between teachers and pupils foster an environment in which pupils are confident to ask for help when they need it.
18. Leaders have implemented an appropriate assessment system. Many teachers are using assessment information effectively, including in the early years. They adapt their lessons accordingly to support pupils who need it. They provide precise guidance and feedback to pupils about how to develop their understanding and improve their work. Many pupils are using this guidance to make real gains in their learning. Where needed, the oldest pupils in Years 10 to 13 are also gaining from more targeted intervention to support them to bridge gaps in their learning. Most pupils learn and achieve well over time, including in their GCSE and A-level qualifications.
19. Teachers' and leaders' use of assessment in Years 7 to 9 is not having as positive an impact as elsewhere in the school. Here, teachers are not routinely adapting their lessons with the same precision as they do with younger and older pupils. Resources and activities are not supporting pupils to make the same gains in their learning. Teachers' guidance and feedback to pupils in these year groups are not as consistently effective in helping them to understand errors in their work, or to apply their learning in more complex ways. As a result, these pupils are not always learning as well as they should in these lessons.
20. The school ensures that the needs of pupils who have SEND are comprehensively identified and effectively supported. Leaders provide teachers with information about how best to meet pupils' needs through pupil strategy sheets. Leaders ensure that staff are well trained to understand how

best to meet the range of pupils' needs in the school. They check that teachers are providing the support as intended. Leaders routinely monitor the learning and development of pupils who have SEND and adapt provision when needed. As a result, pupils with SEND typically access the curriculum effectively and learn well.

21. Several pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). However, very few pupils are in the early stages of learning English. Where needed, leaders undertake careful assessment of pupils' linguistic needs. Teachers regularly check how well pupils are faring and adapt lessons, where needed. Pupils who speak EAL access the curriculum and learn well due to effective support within lessons.
22. There is a comprehensive and wide-ranging co-curricular offer in which many pupils enthusiastically engage. School leaders have taken steps to diversify the co-curriculum to cater for as many interests as possible. For instance, a number of new clubs are initiated in response to pupils' suggestions. The breadth of opportunity in the co-curriculum encourages commitment from pupils of all ages and talents. A variety of trips and tours are also on offer. These opportunities are aligned closely with the curriculum to enrich pupils' understanding. It also provides pupils with opportunities to explore different cultures and countries.

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

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

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

24. Leaders provide a supportive environment and ensure pupils value fairness and act with integrity, in line with the school's values. The curriculum promotes mutual respect and understanding of what makes people different from one another. Pupils engage in respectful discussions, appreciate diversity and participate in and support the school's approach to equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI). As a result, pupils contribute to a school culture where individuals are respected.
25. The curriculum supports the development of pupils' spiritual and moral understanding through activities such as yoga, outdoor learning and creative enrichment. Assemblies and whole-school events, such as the birthday services, welcome services and carol services in the local area, contribute to pupils' spiritual awareness.
26. Pupils' wellbeing is very well cared for. This starts with the youngest children, who are taught to understand their emotions and think about the feelings of others. As they get older, pupils are offered support through peer mentoring and school counsellors. Many pupils willingly take on roles and responsibilities to support the wellbeing of others. For example, Year 10 pupils visit the prep school as part of a mentoring programme, sixth-form pupils are mentors for younger pupils, and Year 13 wellbeing ambassadors are a welcome addition to the wellbeing service. The wellbeing centre offers a range of specialist support for pupils' physical and mental welfare. The medical officer liaises closely with pastoral leaders to ensure individual needs are understood and met.
27. The school provides a well-planned programme of PE and other activities. The youngest children benefit from weekly physical education lessons, specialist ballet lessons and a variety of outdoor learning. They learn about healthy foods and the importance of sleep. As they get older, pupils participate in a wide variety of sports across the curriculum and co-curricular provision. They develop an understanding of different sports through specialist coaching, such as trampolining and badminton. Through the trust network of schools, pupils participate in a range of sporting rallies and competitive sporting fixtures. As a result, pupils develop healthy habits and learn about the importance of maintaining their physical health and wellbeing.
28. The PSHE programme and relationships and sex education (RSE) across the school provide pupils with relevant, specific and age-appropriate guidance and information to help them navigate adolescence and prepare them for life after school. Pupils learn about important topics such as consent, healthy relationships and mental health. Teachers use a range of information to gauge pupils' understanding. Leaders and teachers use this information to review and modify the curriculum content to ensure it meets the needs of pupils.
29. An appropriate and effective behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy are in place and implemented effectively. Leaders and staff communicate their expectations through the curriculum, assemblies and form time. They promote good behaviour through awards assemblies. Pupils understand the sanctions-and-rewards system and take responsibility for their actions. Any incidents are dealt with effectively and consistently by well-trained staff. Leaders, supported by oversight from the trust and governors, review behaviour and bullying information regularly to see where they can be even more effective in supporting pupils.

30. Leaders ensure that there is a systematic and effective approach to all aspects of health and safety and risk management, including fire risk. The premises and accommodation are well maintained. Leaders ensure suitable levels of supervision for pupils at all times, including appropriate staff ratios in the early years. There are appropriately trained staff to meet pupils' medical needs, including in paediatric first aid. Records relating to first aid and medical needs are appropriately maintained and updated.
31. The school's attendance and admission registers are accurately maintained in line with statutory guidance. Pupils who need it are provided with support to help them attend regularly. Leaders and governors monitor any trends or patterns for absences and take timely action to resolve.

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

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

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

33. Through the school's curriculum, careers and PSHE programmes, visiting speakers and assemblies, pupils build a thorough understanding of important values. For instance, in the early years, children start to develop their understanding of voting and democracy by voting daily on the books they wish to read. In enrichment lessons, Year 7 pupils explore what it means to be British and learn about British values such as democracy, individual liberty and mutual respect. Pupils' views and feedback are well considered through school council meetings. For example, pupils have recently helped to review the food options for break time and lunch. As they get older, pupils studying politics attend lectures and listen to visiting politicians with a range of political views, offering a unique perspective on local politics.
34. Leaders promote an inclusive school culture. Pupils recognise that others may hold alternative views to their own. They listen to and engage respectfully in discussion with those who hold opposing viewpoints. The EDI forum offers pupils the opportunity to discuss key areas such as diversity, equality, belonging and inclusion. This is supplemented by the school's EDI week where pupils learn about wide-ranging cultures and societies, such as world cuisine, Arabic writing, an origami masterclass, a diversity fashion show and a celebration of Bengali culture. Pupils of all ages are provided with texts, at an age-appropriate level, which promote diversity and allow pupils to explore different cultures, promoting respect for equality.
35. There is an appropriate careers education provided to pupils, often through the PSHE curriculum and other dedicated events such as careers fairs as pupils get older. This education starts in the early years, when children learn about the different professionals who help people and public services such as the fire service. The curriculum is supplemented by impartial and individualised careers advice for pupils as they get older. The school's 'Girls Like You' week enriches pupils' understanding, where alumnae visit and speak to current pupils about their careers since leaving school. The careers education ensures that pupils feel supported at important transition points and are well prepared for post-16 and post-18 education, training and employment.
36. Teachers develop pupils' economic understanding effectively through PSHE. Pupils learn about a range of topics, including the role of bank accounts, interest rates, taxes and budgeting skills in an age-appropriate way. For instance, pupils in Years 4 to 6 study financial education, while pupils in Years 5 and 6 also participate in an entrepreneurial programme that requires them to write a business plan. Pupils use their learning about budgets, floats, profit and loss in many practical ways. For example, during charity days, pupils plan and run a stall at the summer fair.
37. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to take the initiative and contribute to the school, local and wider community. Leaders and staff foster community outreach through inclusive community events, such as the 'Jack Frost Winter Fun' afternoon and farm visits and eco-initiatives. Pupils access a leadership programme from Year 5, which offers opportunities to develop leadership skills as they prepare to apply for roles in Year 6. Pupils in Year 12 applying to become prefects write letters of application, take part in hustings and complete an interview before they can be offered a position on the sixth-form leadership team. The prefect team leads charity and fundraising activities and runs an annual charity week, during which the sixth form takes responsibility for the whole-school project.

38. Leaders model how they want children to interact. They provide lots of support and guidance on social skills, such as listening and turn-taking. As a result, children develop a clear understanding of how to behave appropriately. They learn about right and wrong and the importance of taking responsibility for their actions.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

40. Leaders and governors work effectively to promote a positive safeguarding culture throughout the school. Written policies and documentation take the school's context into consideration and reflect the latest statutory and local guidance.
41. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and safeguarding team, which includes staff from the senior school, prep school and early years, are appropriately and regularly trained for their role. They ensure that all staff receive suitable safeguarding training in a timely and appropriate manner. This is further supported through the trust cluster groups and training sessions.
42. Staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities under the school's code of conduct. They understand the requirements relating to allegations against staff and report concerns appropriately. The headteacher keeps a detailed log of concerns and responds to issues quickly and effectively, including liaising with relevant agencies when needed.
43. The school maintains regular communication with the local authority. Records relating to safeguarding matters are clear and comprehensive and include the rationale for decisions made in response to concerns. Leaders review these records regularly, noting trends and planning appropriate action. The established close working relationships with external agencies ensure that pupils receive timely specialist support when they need it.
44. Appropriate pre-employment checks are completed for all adults working with pupils, and a suitable record of recruitment checks is kept. Records of these checks are also maintained on staff files. Trustees and governors check on the effectiveness of leaders' recruitment arrangements.
45. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including information about online safety and the careful use of social media, in an age-appropriate way. For example, Year 4 pupils receive lessons about trusted adults in relation to online activity, while older pupils learn about social media and strangers online. Arrangements for filtering and monitoring online activity in school or on digital devices are appropriate. Leaders act swiftly on any concerns that are raised.
46. The trust and the school governing body regularly review the school's safeguarding processes. These checks include on-site visits, review of records, discussions with pupils, monitoring trends and patterns, and an in-depth annual safeguarding audit. Through these activities, trustees and governors check on the effectiveness of leaders' work. Leaders act swiftly to implement any recommendations for further improvement.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Portsmouth High School GDST
Department for Education number	851/6003
Registered charity number	306983
Address	25 Kent Road Southsea Portsmouth Hampshire PO5 3EQ
Phone number	02392 826714
Email address	headsec@por.gdst.net
Website	www.portsmouthhigh.co.uk
Proprietor	The Girls' Day School Trust
Chair	Ms Vicky Tuck
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Parker
Age range	3 to 19
Number of pupils	438
Date of previous inspection	28 to 30 March 2023

Information about the school

48. Portsmouth High School is an independent day school for female pupils. It is one of a group of schools owned and managed by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST). The trust has overall responsibility for the school. There is a local governing body that provides advisory support to trustees. The school comprises two sections. The senior school and sixth form for pupils aged 11 to 19 are located at the school's registered address. The prep school, Dovercourt, provides for pupils aged 3 to 11 and is located on a separate site on the same road as the school's registered address. A new headteacher has joined the school since the previous inspection.
49. There are 25 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
50. The school has identified 92 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
51. The school has identified English as an additional language for 82 pupils.
52. The school states that its aims are for pupils to be motivated, to value fairness and act with integrity. It aims for pupils to take opportunities for leadership, to have confidence to go forward in a challenging world and to be critical thinkers and have a curiosity for learning.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 February 2026

53. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

54. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of co-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with a representative of the proprietor body, the chair of governors and safeguarding governor
- 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.

55. 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**.

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