

# School inspection report

25 to 27 November 2025

## **St Joseph's College**

Upper Redlands Road

Reading

RG1 5JT

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 at all levels understand their responsibilities and have the skills to meet them effectively. They ensure that the school's ethos and values are understood and promoted in all aspects of school life. Leaders create suitable policies and monitor their implementation, so that the Standards are consistently met.
2. The curriculum exposes pupils to a breadth of subject material that is appropriate to the needs of all. Pupils acquire knowledge and understanding across a range of subjects. They learn how to use common applications in Information and communication technology (ICT). However, the school does not develop pupils' understanding of how ICT can be used to support their learning as effectively as possible.
3. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and have effective classroom control. Relationships between teachers and pupils are positive so that pupils feel supported in their learning. The vast majority of pupils are eager, motivated learners, determined to do their best. They achieve well and make good progress overall across the range of subjects.
4. The learning support department identifies effective strategies to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, teachers' planning does not consistently take into account the prior attainment and specific needs of all pupils, so there is inconsistent use of these strategies in lessons. Pupils with higher prior attainment are not always sufficiently challenged to make as much progress as possible.
5. Pupils develop a clear understanding of the importance of respect and consideration for all as a result of leaders' clear and consistent reiteration of the school's ethos and values. Pupils know they are valued as unique individuals and so grow in self-knowledge and self-confidence. The well-planned personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes support pupils' physical and mental health.
6. Pupils understand the behavioural expectations set by leaders and comply with them, behaving respectfully and responsibly. They learn that bullying is unacceptable and bullying incidents are rare.
7. Health and safety measures are robust. The site is well maintained, creating a welcoming environment conducive to learning.
8. Leaders ensure that pupils fully understand the importance of responsibility and inclusivity in their school community and in the wider world. Pupils know that their opinions are taken seriously by school leaders and that they can make a difference to their own lives and the lives of others. Pupils are keen to take responsibility in school and in supporting charitable causes.
9. The curriculum helps pupils to develop their financial understanding and provides them with helpful advice on future career paths. It prepares pupils well for the next stage of their education and lives.
10. Leaders have established a school culture in which the safeguarding of pupils is acknowledged to be everyone's responsibility. Staff at all levels are well trained so that they understand what to do should they have concerns about a pupil. Leaders ensure that all required recruitment checks are completed before individuals are allowed to start work at the school. The results are accurately recorded in a single central record of appointments (SCR).

## 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' planning consistently takes into account the prior attainment and specific needs of all pupils
- extend learning on the use of ICT so that all pupils learn to use digital tools effectively.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Governors and leaders at all levels ensure that the school's aims and ethos underpin all its activities. Central to this is a commitment to respecting the dignity and worth of each individual, so that the wellbeing of all is promoted. Leaders have created an environment in which the school's Catholic foundation and values are well publicised, clear and understood by all members of the school community.
12. Leaders and governors establish policies that enable the school to meet the Standards and relate these to the school's core values of respect, compassion and commitment to supporting the good of all. Leaders ensure that all staff understand the school's policies and implement them effectively.
13. Governors ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills they need to understand their duties and carry them out effectively. They interrogate written reports provided by leaders to assure themselves that leaders are acting in line with the school's ethos and agreed policies. They seek regular confirmation that the Standards are met.
14. Leaders at all levels have a clear-sighted awareness of risk. They conduct regular risk assessments with regard to the premises and activities that pupils engage in, ensuring that remedial action is swiftly taken so that the school is as free as possible from preventable risk. For example, improvements have been made to fire exit routes and procedures. Recent staff training focused on preparing risk assessments for overseas trips so that any specific individual needs of pupils are considered effectively in risk assessments for such events.
15. Leaders conduct effective self-evaluation of all aspects of the school's provision, including the curriculum and pastoral care. The leadership structure of the school ensures that individual leaders have clear responsibilities for evaluating specific areas of the school's provision. They take effective action when any area for development is identified. For example, a recently introduced framework for teaching and learning has resulted in shared practice in questioning technique.
16. Leaders liaise with external agencies, such as children's services and the police, as necessary. They are alert to potential challenges presented by the local area, such as when pupils travel to school. Leaders and governors work collaboratively with the local council, resulting in a pedestrian crossing being put in place close to the school gate to improve pupils' safety.
17. The school's website gives parents easy access to all the required policies and information about the school. Parents are provided with helpful information about their child's progress through regular grade cards and comprehensive annual written reports.
18. Leaders implement the robust complaints policy carefully and rigorously. The school maintains a suitable record of complaints submitted and actions taken as a result of these.
19. Governors pay particular attention to the monitoring of safeguarding. Governors have oversight of staff recruitment procedures so that they can be assured that staff appointed are suitable to work with children. However, governors' oversight is less detailed in some other areas, such as in interrogating leaders' progress in meeting the targets of the school's accessibility plan. The plan itself is appropriate, and the actions proposed and taken are suitable. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders ensure that pupils are not subjected to any discrimination.

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

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

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

21. The curriculum covers a suitable breadth of subjects. Children in the early years develop their communication and language skills in purposeful conversation with their teachers and their peers. The day for prep pupils begins with a 'big question' that stimulates the pupils' ability to articulate abstract and sophisticated ideas. Older pupils read and write with fluency. Numeracy skills develop well. Children in Reception confidently count up to eight and older pupils use mathematical skills adeptly in other subjects such as physics and food technology.
22. Pupils' aesthetic awareness is well developed through the leaders' creation of a curriculum and provision of many extra-curricular opportunities that encourage pupils to develop their interest in the arts. Knowledgeable teaching enables pupils to produce imaginative and skilful artistic and graphic work and sing tunefully and many are involved in various musical groups and activities. Pupils involve themselves enthusiastically in school and house drama productions.
23. Pupils in the sixth form use ICT confidently to research and produce work. In ICT lessons, pupils in the senior school learn how to use common programmes, for example to produce spreadsheets or text. Some pupils who have SEND use laptops to produce work. Otherwise, the pupils' use of ICT is limited, including in the early years. Teachers use ICT mostly as projection devices to support their teaching, rather than always developing pupils' own skills in the use of ICT. Pupils below the sixth form are not taught as effectively as possible how to use ICT to support their learning. This means that pupils' understanding of how ICT can be used is limited.
24. The majority of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are fluent in English and need little support. Extra guidance on subject specific vocabulary is provided as needed. When required, pupils who need additional support for their English are supported to develop their vocabulary and comprehension by the learning support department.
25. Teachers have confident subject knowledge and use this to develop pupils' learning effectively. Teachers are typically skilful in managing behaviour in their classroom, so that pupils can work without distraction. However, planning does not always take into account the needs of pupils who have SEND or of those with higher prior attainment. The learning support department identifies strategies to support pupils who have SEND, such as by providing writing frameworks when required. However, teachers' planning does not always incorporate these strategies. When such support is not provided, pupils become inattentive and their progress is slowed. Similarly, most lessons provide extra extension activities to challenge those pupils who complete a task quickly. However, on occasion, these pupils have to wait for others to finish without anything productive to do, with the result that their learning is not extended during these times. Overall, pupils make good progress. Most children in the early years reach age-related expectations by the time they finish the Reception year. Results at GCSE and A level have been consistently high over recent years. The majority of pupils in the sixth form receive offers from their first choice of university places.
26. Leaders have established robust and helpful processes to evaluate pupils' progress over time to inform teachers' planning. Teachers assess their pupils' understanding regularly. In most subjects, pupils are given clear and helpful feedback on how to improve their work, much of it verbal or drawn from peer assessment. However, this is not entirely consistent across all subjects.

27. Teaching motivates pupils and encourages them to take responsibility for their own learning. Pupils are keen to do their best and work hard to improve. They form positive relationships with their teachers. The vast majority of pupils are swift to become engaged in the topic of the lesson. Their behaviour in lessons is sensible and respectful of the rights of others to learn.
28. There is an extensive programme of extra-curricular activities that gives pupils opportunities to develop their skills and interests across a range of areas from music, sports and drama to global or economic issues. Pupils develop their talents, learn new skills and broaden their understanding of matters beyond the taught curriculum

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

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

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

30. The curriculum and schemes of work draw on the school's core belief that all individuals are equally worthy of respect, irrespective of differences such as background, belief or sexual orientation. This conviction, consistently emphasised by leaders, underpins all aspects of school life. Pupils learn of the injustices of the past such as the slave trade and discriminatory attitudes towards homosexuality so that pupils develop a clear understanding of the importance of respect and empathy in creating a just world.
31. Leaders have created an environment that encourages pupils' understanding of the importance of the non-material aspects of life and the values of compassion and empathy. Pupils' spiritual awareness is actively encouraged by leaders who support it by making the chapel constantly available. Daily assemblies and form times are used for reflection about and discussions of moral or spiritual issues. Pupils' knowledge of the beliefs and traditions of a range of faiths, including Judaism and Islam, is deepened through religious education lessons.
32. Leaders encourage pupils' understanding of the importance of being honest with themselves, as a step towards personal development. As a result, pupils grow in self-knowledge. Children in the early years learn to understand their emotions and how to play happily with others. Pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence grow because of leaders' consistent reminders that everyone is unique and intrinsically valuable.
33. Through their everyday experiences and the PSHE programme, which incorporates RSE, pupils learn to reflect on the importance of tolerance and understanding of others. They learn about the physical changes that come with puberty and to reflect on what makes for healthy relationships. Teaching on sex education provides pupils with the information they need to protect themselves and their sexual health. It also encourages reflection on values such as trust and faithfulness.
34. Pupils learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle, nutritious food and how exercise can contribute to their mental as well as their physical wellbeing. Children in the early years develop their gross motor skills in using outdoor equipment for balancing, climbing and ride-on toys. In physical education (PE) lessons they learn how to warm up before exercise and start to develop skills such as throwing and catching. Older pupils engage enthusiastically in PE lessons, in which their specific skills such as in basketball, football and rugby develop well as a result of skilled coaching.
35. Leaders set high behavioural expectations of pupils, with clear procedures for rewarding good behaviour. Staff provide role models of considerate, courteous behaviour and the vast majority of pupils are sensible and respectful. When pupils find it difficult to meet the school's expectations, appropriate sanctions are applied with the aim of improving behaviour.
36. Leaders and staff make it clear that bullying in any form is abhorrent and not to be tolerated. Pupils understand that actions that are intended to isolate or humiliate others, in person or online, are cruel and unacceptable and, as a result, bullying behaviour is rare.
37. There are suitable numbers of staff present to supervise children in the early years at all times. Levels of staff supervision of older pupils outside lesson time are appropriate, including for those in

the sixth form. Staff are alert to any indication of unkindness and step in sensitively to help resolve situations before they can escalate.

38. Admissions and attendance registers are suitably maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders analyse attendance data and work supportively with parents should their child find attendance difficult. The school informs the local authority whenever any pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
39. Leaders have a thorough approach to all matters of health and safety and those responsible for leading in this area have the skills and knowledge required. The estates team carry out required checks and maintenance effectively, including those relating to fire safety equipment. However, health and safety records have not always been stored systematically or coherently, making it more difficult for new leaders in the area to monitor actions effectively. Action is being taken to address this.
40. There is suitable provision for first aid to be administered as needed. All staff have some first aid training and those who work in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid. The first aid room has appropriate facilities to cater for pupils who feel unwell or become injured, including for the safe storage of medication and first aid supplies.
41. The premises are well maintained and contain suitable facilities. The attention to health and safety creates an environment that is conducive to learning and in which pupils feel safe.

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

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

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

43. The school's ethos actively encourages pupils to consider their responsibilities to each other and to the wider world. The curriculum effectively combines teaching on key values that support British society, such as mutual respect, with Catholic teaching on social responsibility that emphasises human dignity and that rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. As a result, pupils have developed their understanding of people's rights and of the unacceptability of discrimination based on differences or disagreement about lifestyle choices.
44. Leaders approach inclusivity as an essential value and teach pupils to be active in promoting this. They encourage the activities of the pupil-led equality, diversity and inclusion society that recognise the range of backgrounds and beliefs in the school. These activities include a cultural day focussed on the traditions and cultures of other societies and a modern languages day. Large number of pupils join Model United Nations activities, deepening their understanding of the social and economic issues that shape people's lives across the globe.
45. Pupils develop a broad general knowledge of the political and legal systems of modern Britain through the PSHE programme. Occasional visiting speakers further enrich this understanding. Leaders ensure that when political issues are raised there are balanced discussions. Pupils in the sixth form have a particularly firm grasp of the importance of exercising their right to vote and participating fully in Britain's democratic society.
46. Leaders have created a number of means for pupils to voice their opinions and to take responsibility in the school. Pupils respond positively to these opportunities. Pupils in the sixth form compete to be selected to join the team of head pupils. These pupils are expected to establish a theme for their year in office and to generate activities to promote it. Other committees include an eco-committee, an enrichment committee and a chaplaincy and charities committee. Head pupils chair the school council that meets regularly to gather pupils' suggestions and take these to senior staff.
47. Pupils are actively involved in charitable outreach and activities. House captains gather suggestions for good causes for pupils to support, the final decision being decided by pupils' vote. Pupils raise money for local, national and international charities, their choices covering support for the disabled, mental health charities and charities working with homeless people or refugees.
48. The curriculum supports the pupils' financial and economic awareness. Children in the early years learn to recognise the face value and economic value of British coinage, learning about the types of things they can buy for certain amounts of money. Older prep pupils learn about the dangers of fraud, gambling and the difference between wanting and needing money. In PSHE lessons, pupils in the sixth form learn about themes such as rights of tenants and how to apply for student loans.
49. Careers education begins in the prep school as pupils are alerted to a range of careers and encouraged to recognise and challenge stereotypes about career options. Older pupils extend such understanding and are encouraged to link their choices of GCSE and A-level study to their career ambitions. The school provides older pupils with comprehensive support and advice on possible pathways for their futures, including with regard to applying to universities, apprenticeships or going straight into employment. They are well prepared for the next stage of their lives.

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

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

## Safeguarding

51. Leaders have established a robust safeguarding culture within the school. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities are trained appropriately for their role. They are proactive in seeking further opportunities to enhance their awareness of safeguarding issues that could impact on the pupils. Governors are trained and alert to their responsibilities in this matter. They review the policy and the annual safeguarding report compiled by the school thoroughly so that they can be confident that procedures are being correctly followed and the wellbeing of the pupils is protected.
52. The safeguarding team ensure that all staff receive suitable safeguarding training on joining the school. This training is updated annually and at regular intervals. As a result, staff have a secure understanding of the procedures to follow and who to contact should they be concerned about a pupil. The safeguarding team checks that staff have appropriate knowledge and understanding of safeguarding, including through regular short quizzes that are analysed so that any gaps in understanding are swiftly remedied.
53. Staff know the importance of referring any low-level concern or allegation about adults to the head. They are confident to pass on any such concerns about behaviour of other adults or themselves that could be misinterpreted.
54. The safeguarding team maintain useful relationships with local agencies and work in collaboration with local safeguarding partners as necessary. Safeguarding matters that arise within the school are recorded fully in confidential systems. Records specify actions taken and the reasons for these. Leaders review the records to identify any emerging patterns of safeguarding trends, such as mental health concerns.
55. Robust internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place. These are monitored and reports provided to governors, so that they can be confident in the effectiveness of the measures to protect pupils from inappropriate online material. Pupils are well trained in how to avoid dangers when online, to be discerning in sharing personal information and the importance of protecting their online profile.
56. There are thorough staff recruitment systems in place. All required checks are completed before an individual is allowed to start work in the school. The outcome of the checks is recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR), the accuracy of which is regularly checked by leaders and governors.
57. Pupils are informed how to pass on concerns about themselves or their friends by talking to adults in the school. There are also anonymous means for them to raise issues. Staff take appropriate action to support pupils when any safeguarding concerns are raised.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	St Joseph's College
<b>Department for Education number</b>	870/6002
<b>Registered charity number</b>	277077
<b>Address</b>	St Joseph's College Upper Redlands Road Reading Berkshire RG1 5JT
<b>Phone number</b>	0118 966 1000
<b>Email address</b>	mailbox@scjr.or.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.scjr.or.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	St Joseph's College Reading Trust
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Hilary Buckle
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Laura Stotesbury
<b>Age range</b>	3 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	521
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	10 to 13 May 2022

## Information about the school

59. St Joseph's College is an independent co-educational day school located in the suburbs of Reading. The school was founded 130 years ago by the Order of St Marie Madeleine Postel. It is a registered charity and is overseen by governors who are the trustees. The current chair of governors took up her position in January 2024.
60. There are 24 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
61. The school has identified 202 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
62. The school has identified 15 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
63. The school states its aims are to inspire, challenge and support pupils to fulfil their potential in a warm and inclusive community founded on Catholic Christian values. It intends that its pupils grow in self-knowledge as they work to realise their ambitions. The school emphasises the importance of respect, collaboration and compassion.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

25 to 27 November 2025

64. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days

65. 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.

66. 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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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)