

Inspection of Stella Maris School

St John's Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 3BR

Inspection dates: 1 to 3 October 2024

Overall effectiveness **Good**

The quality of education **Good**

Behaviour and attitudes **Good**

Personal development **Good**

Leadership and management **Good**

Early years provision **Good**

Overall effectiveness at previous inspection Good

Does the school meet the independent school standards? **Yes**

What is it like to attend this school?

Pupils enjoy coming to this small and welcoming school. They value how the school size helps them to form close bonds with pupils of all ages. Pupils are polite and courteous to each other. They behave well. Pupils are safe and happy. They are looked after well by their teachers and staff.

As pupils happily enter the school building each morning, they walk through the Jubilee Garden. They tend to this space throughout the year, honing their gardening skills in the process. Outdoor learning is a prized aspect of the school's curriculum, with each class spending part of their curriculum time learning related skills in the nearby wooded area.

Social times are a hive of activity. Pupils have plenty to do from the minute they arrive, from board games in the morning to musical instrument lessons and art clubs at lunchtime and badminton after school. The school regularly refreshes its extra-curricular offer so that pupils can expand their talents and interests during the academic year.

The school is ambitious for all pupils. It is highly successful in supporting pupils to gain entry to their chosen grammar schools. Pupils achieve well in many subjects by the end of Year 6.

What does the school do well and what does it need to do better?

The school has a balanced curriculum in place that largely mirrors the expectations of the national curriculum. Within these subjects, the school has broadly identified what it wants pupils to know and do by the end of each year.

The school delivers much of its curriculum effectively. Where this is the case, pupils acquire a firm body of knowledge by the end of Year 6. That said, in some instances, the school does not deliver curriculum content as well as it could. This is largely because the school has not broken down its curriculum expectations into smaller, logical steps of learning. This sometimes hinders the school's ability to deliver content in a coherent way. In turn, this limits how well pupils deepen their understanding of some concepts and make connections with their prior knowledge.

Children in the early years make a strong start to their schooling. They quickly form supportive and trusting relationships with their teachers. Staff facilitate learning well and prepare children well for the demands of Year 1 and beyond.

The school uses assessment strategies well to quickly spot when a pupil needs help or has a misconception. Staff intervene swiftly to provide highly individualised modelling and support to help pupils address their errors. These approaches are particularly effective in phonics lessons which, in turn, helps all pupils to keep up with the expectations of the school's chosen phonics programme.

The school prioritises early reading. Children begin learning to read as soon as they join the school. Experienced staff deliver the phonics programme consistently well. Pupils read books that are well suited to their stage of learning to read. They quickly become fluent and expressive readers.

The school fosters a love of reading. For example, through the weekly 'secret reader' initiative, visitors, including parents and carers, often come into school dressed up as book characters to read to the children. Throughout the school, pupils enjoy reading widely and often. Older pupils enjoy learning poetry for recitals in the drama club.

The school has some systems in place to identify pupils with potential special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, these systems, along with the school's in-house expertise, are not as robust as they could be. Consequently, the school does not identify, and provide for, pupils' potential additional needs as early as it otherwise might.

The school caters for pupils' personal development well. Pupils go on various curriculum trips and a residential visit. They learn how to keep themselves healthy and safe. They also learn how to manage their finances in financial management lessons that take place in Year 6 as part of the school's high school transition and enrichment programmes. Pupils engage with local events and charitable causes. Older pupils take great pride in their roles around the school, particularly being 'buddies' for children who are new to the school. Pupils learn to be respectful and tolerant of people from different backgrounds. They are prepared for life in modern Britain.

Pupils conduct themselves very well around the school. They have positive attitudes to their learning and attend school regularly.

The proprietor meets its statutory obligations. For example, the proprietor carries out thorough checks to ensure that all staff are suitable to work with children. It also ensures that the school premises are well maintained. However, its systems for ensuring that all of the independent school standards ('the standards') are consistently met are not as rigorous as they could be. This occasionally limits its responsiveness to issues that might affect the school's ongoing compliance with the standards. For example, inspectors identified some minor issues with the school's attendance and admissions registers. However, these were rectified by the end of the inspection.

The school complies with schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010.

Staff are very happy at the school. They feel supported and valued by leaders. They appreciate the sense of teamwork and community within the school.

Safeguarding

The arrangements for safeguarding are effective.

What does the school need to do to improve? (Information for the school and proprietor)

- The proprietor's approach to ensuring that the school consistently meets the standards is not as robust as it could be. This sometimes means that the proprietor does not act as swiftly as it could when there are issues that affect the school's compliance with these standards. The proprietor should improve its oversight of the school and the rigour with which it routinely ensures adherence to the standards.
- The school's systems and expertise to identify pupils with potential SEND early are not as strong as they could be. This sometimes means that the school does not respond as quickly as it could when signs of additional needs emerge. The school should ensure that it is equipped with the knowledge, skills and systems needed to identify pupils' additional needs in a timelier manner.
- In some subjects, the school has not broken down what it wants pupils to learn into smaller building blocks of knowledge. This sometimes means that, in these subjects, pupils do not learn new content in a coherent manner. This prevents them from making strong connections to prior learning and deepening their understanding of some fundamental concepts. The school should further review the design of these subject curriculums.

How can I feed back my views?

You can use [Ofsted Parent View](#) to give Ofsted your opinion on your child's school, or to find out what other parents and carers think. We use information from Ofsted Parent View when deciding which schools to inspect, when to inspect them and as part of their inspection.

The Department for Education has further [guidance](#) on how to complain about a school.

School details

Unique reference number	106154
DfE registration number	356/6016
Local authority	Stockport
Inspection number	10341993
Type of school	Other independent school
School category	Independent school
Age range of pupils	3 to 11
Gender of pupils	Mixed
Number of pupils on the school roll	33
Number of part-time pupils	0
Proprietor	Stella Maris School
Chair	John Sibbald
Headteacher	Norah Johnson
Annual fees (day pupils)	£9,300 to £9,500
Telephone number	0161 432 0532
Website	www.stellamarisschool.co.uk
Email address	office@stellamarisschool.co.uk
Dates of previous inspection	3 to 5 December 2019

Information about this school

- The school is registered to admit up to 71 pupils aged from 3 to 11. It is a non-selective school.
- The school operates from premises at St John's Road, Heaton Mersey, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 3BR.
- The school does not make use of any alternative provision.
- The school operates a free early morning drop-off supervision service and an after-school club.

Information about this inspection

Inspectors carried out this inspection under section 109(1) and (2) of the Education and Skills Act 2008. The purpose of the inspection is to advise the Secretary of State for Education about the school's suitability for continued registration as an independent school.

The school meets the independent school standards. These are the requirements set out in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014.

- Inspections are a point-in-time judgement about the quality of a school's education provision.
- This was the first routine inspection the school received since the COVID-19 pandemic began. Inspectors discussed the impact of the pandemic with leaders and have taken that into account in their evaluation of the school.
- Inspectors conducted deep dives in these subjects: history, early reading and mathematics. They met with subject leaders and teachers. They visited lessons, looked at examples of pupils' work and talked with groups of pupils about their learning. The lead inspector observed pupils read to a familiar adult.
- Inspectors reviewed a wide range of documentation, including that relating to the standards and the curriculum.
- During the inspection, inspectors identified minor issues relating to compliance with the standards. The school ensured that these issues were resolved by the end of the inspection.
- The lead inspector spoke with the chair of the proprietor body.
- Inspectors talked to staff about their workload and well-being.
- Inspectors met with the leaders who are responsible for attendance, behaviour and pupils' personal development.
- Inspectors spoke with pupils about their wider experience of school.
- Inspectors looked at a range of policies and documents related to pupils' welfare and education. They observed pupils' behaviour in lessons and around the school.

- To evaluate the effectiveness of safeguarding, inspectors: reviewed the checks that had been carried out on staff to ensure their suitability, took account of the views of leaders, staff and pupils; and considered the extent to which the school has created an open and positive culture around safeguarding that puts pupils' interests first.
- Inspectors took account of the responses to Ofsted's online survey for staff and pupils.
- An inspector made themselves available to talk to parents at the end of the school day. Inspectors also took account of the responses to Ofsted Parent View, including the free-text responses.

Inspection team

David Spruce, lead inspector

His Majesty's Inspector

Kevin Sexton

Ofsted Inspector

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