

School inspection report

11 to 13 March 2025

Wakefield Girls' High School

Wakefield Girls' High School

Wentworth Street

Wakefield

West Yorkshire

WF1 2QS

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 prioritise pupils' wellbeing. Leaders provide effective oversight of policies, staff training, and pupil welfare. Governors play an active role. They regularly support, check and challenge senior leaders in meetings and during reviews.
2. The school's ethos of 'together, empowered, and aware' informs planning across the curriculum, to the benefit of pupils. Leaders communicate regularly with parents and incorporate feedback received into their planning to enhance pupils' wellbeing.
3. School development planning is informed through leaders' and governors' effective self-evaluation. Governors review the development plan regularly. Leaders use regular health and safety assessments by external experts to prioritise school safety and arrangements are closely scrutinised by a dedicated governors committee.
4. A broad and progressive curriculum ensures academic development for pupils. Leaders review and change the curriculum to maintain its relevance. Pupils achieve well in the junior school. Pupils achieve above the national average in their GCSE and A-level examinations. The curriculum is broad to allow pupils to experience many diverse subjects before specialising in the sixth form. Pupils have many opportunities to develop their creative and technological skills.
5. Teachers use well-planned lessons and effective strategies to enhance understanding. Feedback is clear and supports critical thinking. As a result, pupils make good progress. In some lessons across the age range teachers do not fully consider pupils' prior attainment. This means that progress for some pupils is inhibited.
6. A robust assessment framework tracks pupils' progress and helps identify pupils who need further support due to their specific learning needs. Provision includes personalised support plans, regular monitoring, and staff collaboration. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
7. The extensive co-curricular programme enriches pupils' personal development, with activities ranging from debating to elite-level sports. The enriching and developing girls' education (EDGE) programme fosters life skills such as leadership and teamwork. Pupils demonstrate motivation, confidence, and mutual respect as they pursue new interests and achieve success.
8. Pupils engage in discussions about what makes people different from one another. Pupils discuss moral dilemmas and personal safety through personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons, assemblies, and themed days. The relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is age-appropriate and takes account of parental views. Physical and mental well-being are promoted through a suitable physical education (PE) curriculum, nutritious meals, and access to medical and mental health support.
9. Leadership opportunities exist at all levels, from junior school roles to senior prefects. Pupils' views are sought through surveys, councils, and committees and they influence school decision-making.
10. The site is well maintained, with robust fire and health and safety procedures. Leaders supervise pupils appropriately during unstructured times.

11. Leaders emphasise the value of diversity and inclusivity. Consequently, pupils are tolerant and accepting of each other. They behave well and incidences of poor behaviour are rare. Should they occur they are dealt with promptly and effectively.
12. Pupils participate successfully in cultural events, charitable initiatives, and programmes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE). Careers education is extensive, featuring one-to-one guidance, industry speakers, and alumni mentorship.
13. Safeguarding is embedded within school culture. Staff receive ongoing training, and reporting mechanisms are clear and used effectively. Digital safety education is integrated into the curriculum, with appropriate online filtering systems. Pupils know how to report concerns if they arise. Leaders act upon any concerns raised promptly and appropriately.

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 teaching consistently takes account of pupils' prior attainment to further improve their progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing. They ensure that school policies and procedures are implemented effectively. Safeguarding is prioritised and leaders maintain rigorous oversight of policies, staff training, and pupils' welfare.
15. Governors regularly support, check and challenge senior leaders. They ensure that leaders apply their skills and knowledge to meet their responsibilities effectively. Annual reviews of leaders and regular committee meetings provide oversight. For example, middle managers present to the governors' education committee on careers and higher education.
16. Senior leaders ensure that the school's values of 'together, empowered and aware' pervade all aspects of the curriculum and co-curriculum. They model these values effectively themselves which helps pupils to understand their importance.
17. Leaders communicate with parents and pupils regularly and listen to their views, making changes when appropriate. Leaders have introduced an assessment calendar to support pupils' wellbeing.
18. The school's development planning is based on thorough self-evaluation. Middle leaders contribute to the process, ensuring staff perspectives inform future plans. The school development plan is reviewed regularly by governors and changed during the year as needed.
19. Leaders have forged positive relationships with many external agencies who provide professional advice to help leaders make informed decisions. For example, an external audit of SEND provision led to changes in policy so that pupils who have SEND are identified effectively and supported positively in their lessons.
20. Governors provide strategic oversight of risk management through a specific sub-committee, which regularly reviews a risk register. Risk assessment policies and procedures are drafted by internal and external experts and staff receive training in how to create risk assessments. Senior leaders check regularly that implementation is effective. Assessments of risk on local, national and international trips are thorough and are reviewed once the trip is complete. This is so that future trips continue to be well planned and safe.
21. The school has a suitable complaints policy. Correct procedures are followed for each stage of the process according to the policy. Trends or patterns are discussed with school leaders to identify and act on issues arising.
22. The school website provides all the necessary policies and information for parents and prospective parents. A news section provides further insight into the day-to-day activities at the school and is updated regularly.
23. Leaders have a secure understanding of the Equality Act, 2010. They ensure that the school meets its duties consistently. Leaders create an environment in which everyone is welcomed and valued, whatever their background or characteristics. They maintain a suitable accessibility plan, which they update annually. They continually seek to identify ways that the school can improve access to all aspects of school life for pupils who have SEND.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. School leaders have designed a cohesive and contemporary curriculum that ensures steady academic development as pupils advance through the school. They routinely review and refine courses in the senior school to ensure that they meet exam board requirements and are relevant to pupils' ages and abilities. The curriculum effectively prepares pupils for the next phase of their education. In the junior school, regular informal and formal assessments are used to measure progress. In the senior school pupils make good progress. In addition, pupils are successful in a range of local and national competitions, for example in design, in debating and in modern foreign languages.
26. The breadth of the curriculum allows pupils to experience a wide range of subjects and topics before specialising in the sixth form. Speaking and listening skills are enhanced through optional LAMDA lessons, as well as opportunities to present in assemblies and form periods. Pupils gain skills in musicianship and performance through learning a musical instrument and taking part in choral singing. The computing programme equips pupils with essential technological skills. In the junior school, a carousel of creative subjects such as design and technology, art, and robotics, fosters creativity and problem-solving.
27. Teachers prepare well-planned lessons and incorporate effective teaching strategies to enhance understanding. In Year 9 biology, an analogy of downhill skiing and motorised ski-lifts helped pupils understand the difference between the passive and active transport of molecules in living organisms. In Year 9 English, pupils analyse social media posts and text messages collaboratively to explore linguistic evolution effectively.
28. Teachers provide clear, actionable feedback. This enables pupils to understand the progress they have made and identify areas for improvement. Careful questioning encourages deeper learning and critical thinking. Pupils are highly motivated and enthusiastic about their learning.
29. In the junior school, teachers set challenging targets in lessons but occasionally some pupils need further support to enable them to make progress. In the senior school, some lessons do not provide opportunities for pupils to be sufficiently challenged in their learning. In these lessons pupils with high prior attainment make less consistent progress.
30. Teachers in the senior school create environments where pupils feel safe to ask questions, make mistakes, and learn from their experiences. This encourages a culture of curiosity and respect, where pupils are confident to express themselves and contribute to discussions.
31. Middle leaders have modified the curriculum to introduce pupils to emerging technologies which pupils will encounter in their future careers. In English, pupils use artificial intelligence and search engines to develop their creative writing, exploring whether technology aids or hinders creativity. Pupils engage with virtual reality technology in science lessons, providing a new approach to learning that enriches their understanding of complex topics.
32. Middle leaders track progress by using an effective assessment framework which enables them to organise targeted strategies to support pupils' attainment. An annual reporting cycle of grade cards and parents' meetings is in place to share pupils' progress with parents and guardians.

33. The provision for pupils who have SEND is comprehensive and includes personalised support plans, regular progress monitoring, and targeted strategies so that teachers understand how to meet the diverse needs of pupils who have SEND in their lessons. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
34. All pupils who speak English as an additional language are competent in written and spoken English. These pupils can access the curriculum fully and do not require extra support though this is available should they require it.
35. Leaders have developed a broad programme of extra-curricular activities that contributes to pupils' personal development. The 'enriching and developing girls' education' (EDGE) programme provides a diverse range of activities each week, such as dog training and food styling. Pupils can also pursue interests such as personal fitness, debating and creative arts. Some pupils compete in sport at an elite level with success at regional and national level. These activities not only encourage personal interests and wellbeing but also develop key life skills, such as leadership, teamwork, resilience, and problem-solving.

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

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

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

37. The school's ethos of 'together, empowered and aware' is apparent as pupils show leadership and a sense of purpose in the way they interact and work with each other. Pupils demonstrate mutual trust and respect for staff and their peers throughout their formal and informal activities.
38. Pupils learn about the ways in which they are different from each other in PSHE lessons and through assemblies, themed celebration days and school displays. Leaders' promotion of the school's inclusive ethos means that pupils accept and celebrate each other's differences.
39. Pupils develop spiritual and moral understanding through the PSHE programme. For instance, pupils learn about different religious festivals and plan events to celebrate them. Annual cathedral services feature interfaith readings, ensuring that different religious traditions are represented and respected. Assemblies are carefully constructed to highlight current moral dilemmas which are then discussed by pupils with their form teachers. Pupils take part in robust discussions and are open-minded to others' opinions.
40. Leaders promote pupils' physical and mental wellbeing through a broad and well-developed physical education curriculum. Younger pupils learn movement skills and develop physical co-ordination through a variety of ball games. Senior pupils have opportunities to develop their personal fitness through individual programmes. Healthy living and nutrition are also incorporated into PSHE and food science lessons, reinforcing positive lifestyle choices. The food council allows pupils to give feedback on meal options.
41. The RSE curriculum is adapted to suit pupils' needs. Parents are provided with opportunities to review resources and engage in discussions about the curriculum. This ensures transparency and understanding of its purpose. Some RSE lessons are delivered by external specialists, allowing pupils to receive expert guidance on contemporary issues.
42. Pupils develop strategies to stay safe both physically and online. Thoughtfully planned PSHE lessons address topical and sensitive issues. For example, discussions on forced and arranged marriage deepen pupils' understanding of personal rights and cultural contexts. The curriculum is proactively adapted in response to emerging concerns, such as the inclusion of vaping education in Year 8.
43. Leaders regularly review the behaviour and anti-bullying policies and involve pupils when making changes. Pupils of all ages behave well and bullying and behavioural incidents are few. When they do occur, pastoral leaders respond appropriately and keep accurate records. Any trends are discussed by pastoral leaders so that school-wide actions can be taken in response. Younger pupils are motivated by house points and 'star of the week' awards, reinforcing positive behaviour strategies.
44. Leaders create structured opportunities for pupils to voice their opinions and contribute to decision-making. These include pupil surveys, meetings with governors, and initiatives such as the food council and house committees. Pupils know their opinions are taken seriously and that leaders will take account of their views when making strategic decisions. Pupil wellbeing ambassadors provide peer support and promote mental health awareness across year groups.

45. Leaders have developed a comprehensive supervision system, involving staff and senior prefects. This ensures that pupils in the junior and senior schools are safe and well-supported during unstructured times.
46. The site is maintained to a high standard. Systems and procedures for fire and electrical risk assessments are robust. Fire drills are held regularly, and reviews are completed after each drill to highlight any areas for improvement. Annual external fire risk assessments are carried out and all recommendations promptly actioned.
47. There is a suitable health and safety policy which is well implemented. An estates team ensures that any issues found are efficiently managed and addressed. Frequent checks are conducted on equipment, which is repaired or replaced as necessary.
48. The medical room provides good support for pupils who feel unwell. It is staffed by experienced healthcare professionals. First aiders receive regular training. Medicines are securely stored. Information about pupils' healthcare needs is shared appropriately with relevant staff to ensure continuity of care. Pupils' mental health is a priority. Senior pupils and staff receive training in how to support pupils, and a counsellor is available if needed.
49. The school keeps effective attendance records and admission registers. Trends in attendance patterns are discussed by senior leaders and a tiered approach is used to improve a pupil's attendance if required. Staff understand their responsibilities concerning children missing from education. The school informs the local authority if pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of the school year.

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

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

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

51. Leaders ensure that the school's ethos and values are embedded in the curriculum. In lessons and enrichment opportunities, staff actively promote fundamental British values. As a result, pupils are culturally aware, respectful and socially responsible. Pupils are confident in expressing their identities and celebrate their heritage in an inclusive and supportive environment. Leaders provide opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to develop a secure understanding of their local community, British society, and global affairs. This equips them with the knowledge and skills to contribute meaningfully to society.
52. Leaders work collaboratively to create a wide-ranging life skills education programme. Pupils receive early exposure to essential skills such as financial literacy, problem-solving, and decision-making. In Year 11 PSHE lessons, pupils learn about budgeting. Learning through practical experiences is offered as part of the EDGE programme. For example, Year 9 and 10 pupils engage in real-world applications of criminal and civil law. This reinforces their understanding of justice and the legal system.
53. Leaders emphasise distinguishing right from wrong. For instance, co-curricular sports programmes provide valuable lessons in respect for officials, fair play, and teamwork. Pupils also develop a sense of civic duty and governance. The school council's visit to Wakefield District Council provides a first-hand experience of local governance and democratic decision-making.
54. Pupils develop a clear understanding of their role in society and the impact they can have through charitable work and community initiatives. Pupils actively engage in both local and global initiatives and thus develop an understanding of people whose lives are very different to their own. Year 10 pupils develop business and entrepreneurial skills through fundraising projects, raising money for a local hospice and food banks. Programmes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme promote community service, leadership, and personal development. Pupils in the sixth form act as mentors for Year 5 and 6 pupils from local primary schools to the benefit of those pupils as well as themselves.
55. Leaders have developed a comprehensive future education and careers programme. For example, on 'World Book Day' pupils in the junior school explore future aspirations by coming to school dressed as people from various professions. They then engage with texts that highlight different career paths. One-to-one careers sessions are offered, starting in Year 10. They provide guidance to pupils through their GCSE, A-level and career pathway choices. Pupils benefit from engagement with external speakers and alumni, gaining insight into diverse professional journeys. Initiatives such as 'From Classroom to Careers,' The Hepworth Lectures, and themed assemblies introduce pupils to varied career fields and industry professionals, broadening their aspirations. The school's alumni network, including social media mentoring and career talks, plays a crucial role in preparing students for life beyond school.
56. Opportunities for leadership are available in every year group. For example, in the junior school pupils may apply to be eco-monitors, digital champions and language ambassadors. Senior pupils applying to be a prefect develop their own manifestos. They participate in hustings, which gives them first-hand experience of democracy and public speaking. Younger pupils engage in school elections, reinforcing decision-making skills and civic responsibility.

57. The school celebrates cultural diversity, fostering an inclusive and accepting community. Events such as Culture Day combine charity fundraising with cultural appreciation. Pupils share food, music, and traditions from different backgrounds. Pupil-led groups meet regularly to promote awareness and inclusivity across the school.
58. Pupils are taught balanced perspectives on political and social issues. Staff guide discussions on challenging viewpoints respectfully. The principle of 'challenge the view, not the person' is reinforced. Critical thinking and respectful debate are also encouraged to reinforce the importance of being open-minded.

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

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

Safeguarding

60. Leaders ensure that there is a secure culture of safeguarding throughout the school. Clear policies and procedures are in place to protect and promote pupils' welfare. These are consistently followed by staff. All staff and governors receive appropriate face-to-face and online training. They understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Leaders assure themselves of this through the use of quizzes and organise additional training where necessary.
61. Staff with specific safeguarding responsibilities undertake additional, comprehensive training in line with local authority guidance and to address identified needs. They are aware of the contextual risks pupils face, such as online radicalisation and are proactive in mitigating these. The safeguarding team works collaboratively across the foundation. They adapt existing risk strategies, particularly where these concern harmful behaviours and attitudes. There is a healthy 'it could happen here' approach. Staff are vigilant and quickly report any concerns.
62. Safer recruitment guidelines are followed. Pre-employment checks are conducted and recorded appropriately on the school's single central record of appointments, including for those who work across the foundation. These are regularly reviewed by the safeguarding governor.
63. The importance of open communication and collaboration in safeguarding is understood among the staff. They know how to report concerns about pupils and other adults. They are encouraged to self-report for low-level concerns. Staff are confident that any concerns they do raise will be acted on promptly and proportionately. Safeguarding records are well maintained and securely stored. Information is shared appropriately within the school through regular meetings between pastoral staff. Additionally, safeguarding leaders engage with external agencies such as children's services, the police, mental health services and the local authority's children missing in education team. A cross-foundation safeguarding group meets on a termly basis. Senior safeguarding staff meet with the safeguarding governor each half-term. They report to the governors' education committee on pastoral issues and trends, and to the full board on safeguarding.
64. Junior and senior school pupils can name several members of staff they can talk to if they have concerns, whether for themselves, or others. In the junior school, concerns can be reported anonymously via worry boxes. Senior school pupils know how to make an appointment to see the school counsellor directly. They also have access to peer support groups run by Year 12 pupils who are trained by external specialists. Pupils understand that any concerns they raise will be taken seriously and addressed appropriately.
65. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online in PSHE and computer science. Heads of year engage parents in conversations about online safety. Appropriate filtering and monitoring systems are in place on the school's internet and when pupils' laptop computers are used outside the school. The systems are tested to ensure they are robust.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Wakefield Girls' High School
Department for Education number	384/6114
Registered charity number	1088415
Address	Wakefield Girls' High School Wentworth Street Wakefield West Yorkshire WF1 2QS
Phone number	01924 372490
Email address	wsoffice@wgsf.net
Website	wgsf.org.uk
Proprietor	Wakefield Grammar School Foundation
Chair	Mr Martin Shevill
Headteacher	Dr Richard Brookes
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	673
Date of previous inspection	15 May 2023

Information about the school

67. Wakefield Girls' High School is an independent day school. It is registered as a single-sex school for female pupils. The school is owned and governed by the Wakefield Grammar School Foundation, which comprises this school, a senior school for male pupils and a co-educational pre-preparatory school, all located in Wakefield. The school has two sections, a junior school for pupils aged from seven to eleven and a senior school for those aged 11 to 18, which includes a sixth form. Since the previous inspection an executive head of the foundation has been appointed.
68. The school has identified 131 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are no pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
69. English is an additional language for 110 pupils.
70. The school states its aims are for pupils to be empowered, together and aware; to be outward looking, motivated to support each other and ready to make a difference; proud to be part of a warm and caring community; future ready with a strong sense of social responsibility; and intellectually curious.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

11 to 13 March 2025

71. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

72. 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.

73. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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