ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

# School inspection report

30 September to 2 October 2025

# Shrewsbury High School, GDST

32 Town Walls

Shrewsbury

SY1 1TN

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'.

# Contents

## Summary of inspection findings

1. The Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), the proprietorial body, ensures that school leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. The local governing board provides support and advice. Governors ensure that leaders have the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil their responsibilities so that regulatory standards are consistently met.

2. Leaders have a clear-sighted understanding of the school's performance. This underpins their strategic decision-making and the measures to check that all policies are implemented correctly.

3. The curriculum is broad and balanced. It is well-matched to pupils' needs and interests. Imaginative use of purposely dedicated time provides pupils with additional opportunities to develop a range of useful skills and knowledge so that they are well prepared for their futures. An extensive extra-curricular programme helps to bolster pupils' creativity as well as their physical and mental wellbeing.

4. Pupils grow in self-knowledge and self-esteem as a result of their school experiences. Pupils of all ages benefit from a well-structured personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), which includes relationships and sex education (RSE). Well-thought-out activities underpin the inclusive, supportive school community in which pupils' self-confidence is nurtured.

5. Teachers plan lessons effectively and manage their classrooms skilfully. They create an encouraging atmosphere in which pupils typically achieve well. On occasion, teaching does not extend some pupils' learning as much as it could because expectations are too low.

6. Pupils behave well and responsibly, knowing that bullying is unacceptable. Misdemeanours are rare and managed appropriately should they occur.

7. Leaders ensure that all relevant health and safety measures are followed. Premises and accommodation are suitable and well maintained so that they are conducive to pupils' learning and wellbeing.

8. The curriculum is effective in promoting pupils' awareness of social diversity and the importance of respect for individual differences in Britain's democratic society. Pupils develop a firm sense of responsibility. They are keen to take on leadership roles in the school.

9. Careers education encourages pupils to think widely about their futures. Pupils also learn how managing financial matters wisely is important both to society, and to their own lives.

10. Safeguarding is effective. Procedures for safer recruitment and the management of safeguarding concerns are rigorous. Staff are well trained. They know what to do when concerns arise about a pupil's safety or wellbeing. Leaders act quickly to address any gaps in staff's understanding as they arise.

## 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

The proprietor should:

- ensure that staff have consistently high expectations of what pupils can achieve in lessons so that pupils are encouraged routinely to achieve as well as they should across subjects
- implement systematic and ongoing checks to continue to ensure that all staff are consistently knowledgeable and confident to report minor concerns in line with national safeguarding expectations.

# Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Well-structured and effective processes monitor the success of the school and how well school leaders promote pupils' wellbeing. The local governing board members provide additional support and act as critical friends, drawing on their knowledge of the school and the local community. Designated representatives of the Trust establish close links with school leaders. They provide well-informed support and challenge. Information from visits and audits underpins their confidence that the school leaders have the knowledge and skills necessary to fulfil their responsibilities so that the Standards are met consistently.

12. School leaders undertake a rigorous self-evaluation of the school, which is shared with the proprietors and local governors. This clear-sighted understanding of what is going well and what needs to improve underpins all their strategic decision-making. This includes making difficult decisions at times, for example, in changes to the range of subjects offered. Leaders ensure that the school's aims and ethos are understood and work well in practice. These aims reflect the proprietorial mantra of 'girls first' so that supporting pupils' wellbeing is the prime consideration.

13. The Trust and school leaders have set in place suitable policies and rigorous systems to check that these policies are consistently well implemented. An appropriate policy ensures that any parental complaints are managed effectively. This is followed meticulously should a complaint arise. Parents are sent regular reports on their child's progress. A wide range of other material is readily available to them on the school's website.

14. Leaders ensure that the curriculum and school provision meet the needs of all its pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They provide local authorities with the required information relating to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders have a suitable plan for improving access to the curriculum and the school premises for pupils who have SEND. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met.

15. Specialist support is provided as necessary for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL).

16. Proprietors and leaders have a clear understanding of risk and risk management. Regular meetings of a health and safety committee consider any concerns arising. Mitigations to reduce risk are in place, for example, to minimise the impact of damage when the River Severn floods. Health and safety measures are robust. Consequently, the school provides a safe and secure environment. There is a standardised form to support staff in making comprehensive risk assessments for any trips outside of school. Proprietors conduct an annual audit to assess its effectiveness.

17. The Trust exerts stringent oversight of the processes for assessing the suitability of staff to work with children. Leaders contact outside agencies, including the local safeguarding officer or the police, as necessary to promote pupils' safety and wellbeing.

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

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

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

19. Leaders have created a broad curriculum that reflects its aim to provide young women with the skills and knowledge they need to be successful in whatever future path they choose. This supports pupils' academic attainment alongside opportunities for creativity, initiative and character formation in and beyond the classroom.

20. In the Reception Year, the curriculum combines teacher-led and child-initiated activities well so that children meet their early years goals effectively. Children's communication and language skills, for example, develop well through carefully planned and purposeful activities. Children recognise the sounds that letter shapes make and start to write independently using phonetically plausible spelling. Pupils in the junior and senior schools have well-developed communication skills. They write confidently and offer perceptive comments, making shrewd deductions on the subject material presented. Their scientific and mathematical understanding develops well over time. Older pupils manage complex calculations confidently in mathematics and science lessons. Pupils of all ages use technology confidently to support their learning.

21. The curriculum emphasises the importance of creativity. Pupils experiment with colour and texture in art, producing thought-provoking and high-quality pieces. In music, they explore different musical traditions, play in a number of different bands and choirs and participate enthusiastically in productions presented jointly by the drama and music departments.

22. Teachers plan lessons carefully, drawing on their knowledge of pupils' prior attainment. Rigorous measures are in place to track pupils' progress effectively. Middle leaders share this information with their departmental colleagues. Most staff use this insight well to support pupils and to set targets for improvement. Pupils make good progress overall. In the junior school, pupils reach levels of understanding that prepare them well to move on to secondary education. Pupils consistently attain well in GCSE and A-level examinations. Sixth-form pupils move on to pursue degree courses or apprenticeships in a range of institutions.

23. The supportive, nurturing ethos of the school emphasises the importance of bolstering pupils' self-confidence. Often teaching combines this encouraging approach with boosting pupils' resilience, urging them to find the answer to a question or to make decisions for themselves. On occasion, however, the drive to boost confidence in pupils of lower prior attainment results in low expectations. Where this is the case, teaching does not encourage pupils to think deeply enough about the content they are learning. Consequently, this limits the progress of pupils of all abilities.

24. The needs of pupils who have SEND are identified swiftly by specialist staff when pupils join the school. Appropriate classroom strategies are shared with teachers, who employ them successfully in lessons. Teachers are skilled in adapting lesson plans to support pupils; for example, tasks are set with frameworks that divide the work into manageable and sequenced chunks. As a result, pupils who have SEND achieve well from their different starting points.

25. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) access support from specialist teachers if needed. However, almost all are completely fluent in English. As required, support staff work alongside pupils in the classroom to help them understand what is expected as they develop their fluency in English.

26. Teachers use a range of strategies to engage pupils' interest and to help them learn. For example, some teaching deploys video clips using characters from popular online games or uses dancing so that rhythm supports pupils in memorising subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers ensure that lessons affirm the importance of Britain's fundamental values of mutual respect for individual differences. They manage their classrooms adeptly so that they create a consistently positive environment in which all can learn.

27. Pupils are keen to learn and so approach lessons thoughtfully. They have responsible attitudes to learning and take pride in their work. They are self-motivated and think for themselves as they connect their learning between subjects.

28. Leaders have structured the curriculum to devote a weekly lesson so that pupils develop skills beyond the classroom, including building independence and a deep understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. The extra-curricular programme is extensive. It includes, for example, clubs at lunchtime and after school for sports, the arts, creative hobbies, music, drama and academic extension, which pupils support enthusiastically.

## 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. Pupils grow in self-confidence, self-knowledge and courage to pursue their ambitions. All pupils take part in a weekly period set aside for activities that move beyond the taught curriculum. These encourage the development of pupils' wider personal and life skills. For example, senior school pupils support junior school pupils in drama workshops. Whole year groups work together to plan charity fundraising activities, or on projects, such as planning a sustainable new town. Through these activities, pupils develop their leadership skills and their understanding of the need for respect and sensitivity, when collaborating with others to achieve success. Pupils' participation contributes well to the school's inclusive, respectful and mutually supportive school community.

31. Pupils explore the moral codes of different religious beliefs, discovering similarities and differences. They are clear about the sorts of behaviour that are morally unacceptable. Pupils know that there are values beyond the material. Children learn, for example, to value the beauty and diversity of nature in their lessons outdoors. Pupils' appreciation of aesthetic beauty is encouraged by the curriculum's emphasis on creativity. In response, pupils produce high-quality artwork and music.

32. The PSHE and RSE programmes are well planned and age appropriate. From the Reception Year onwards, pupils learn the importance of sensitivity to others' needs and treating each other with respect, regardless of differences, such as in abilities or beliefs. Staff consistently model kindness, encouraging pupils to believe in themselves and to support their peers. In discussions, pupils' comments show their understanding that discrimination on the basis of race or gender is unacceptable. RSE sessions, taught in small groups, help pupils in the senior school to reflect on matters such as the dangers of alcohol or drug misuse. Pupils show a secure understanding of how to manage their personal safety and of the importance of making responsible, informed choices in relationships. They grow into confident, self-assured young women with a clear sense of their own worth.

33. Pupils understand what the school expects of their behaviour. These expectations are consistently met. Pupils are courteous and thoughtful in their interactions with each other. They behave responsibly in lessons and are respectful to their teachers and classmates. Pupils of all ages know that bullying is unacceptable, so bullying incidents are rare. Should they happen, they are managed appropriately in line with school policies.

34. Pupils understand that managing their physical health actively contributes to their mental wellbeing. Children in the Reception Year know the importance of personal hygiene and healthy eating. They develop their gross motor skills in using the challenging playground equipment as well as in physical education (PE) lessons. The PE curriculum is well planned. It offers pupils a wide range of sporting opportunities as they mature, including hockey, netball, lacrosse, cricket, football, rowing and dance. Pupils take part enthusiastically. They listen carefully to their teachers' feedback and coaching so that they routinely achieve well. Pupils who are unable to participate because of injury support their peers with encouragement and coaching advice from the sidelines.

35. Admission and attendance registers are carefully maintained and monitored. Prompt action is taken to follow up on pupils missing school. The local authorities are informed when pupils join or leave the school outside normal transition times.

36. Leaders ensure that relevant health and safety laws, including those relating to fire safety, are met. The school grounds and premises are well maintained. These offer a secure and pleasant learning environment in which all reasonable steps are taken to minimise preventable risk. Suitable numbers of staff are on supervisory duty throughout the day. Provision for first aid is appropriate and managed by trained staff.

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

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

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

38. The curriculum ensures that pupils learn about global issues such as imbalances in wealth distribution and the need for environmental action to counter climate change. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on the experiences of diverse social groups across the world, such as the misogyny experienced by girls of school age in some countries. They learn that negative attitudes to differences of race or sexuality can exist in this country and are unacceptable. Pupils' awareness of such matters has resulted in the creation of well-attended clubs such as the Model United Nations, Eco club and 'FemSoc'.

39. Children in the Reception class are encouraged to recognise that everyone is a unique individual and deserves respect. As pupils mature, this principle underpins their understanding of the basic values of tolerance and respect, regardless of differences such as faith or abilities. Well-planned lessons provide insights into other cultures. In the junior school pupils learn about a range of languages including Hindi, Spanish, Arabic and Mandarin, alongside half-termly celebrations of different cultural festivals. Older pupils also learn to appreciate different cultural festivals and musical traditions.

40. Pupils of all ages know the difference between right and wrong. In PSHE lessons, they gain insights into the rule of law and the social services. The programme for older pupils includes discussions linked to political debate and global conflicts. Leaders ensure that pupils are exposed to balanced views. Pupils discuss the importance of the democratic basis of Britain. They experience the process of democracy through school elections for pupil responsibility roles. Pupils know that the pupil council is an important and effective vehicle to share their views with school leaders. They know that their views will be taken seriously.

41. The PSHE programme and school ethos nurture pupils' sense of responsibility, so they are eager to take on leadership opportunities. Head girls, house prefects and pupil council representatives, for example, take their roles seriously and are keen to contribute to school life. Many pupils embark on The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, benefiting from the opportunities to develop their leadership skills and undertake service activities in the local community. Pupils take responsibility for planning and running fundraising activities in support of a range of national charities, raising a sizeable amount of money as a result.

42. Pupils' education on economic matters runs throughout their time in the school. Children in Reception manipulate toy coins in lessons and activities, learning the value of money. Elements of financial planning are built into year-group projects. Units on financial planning, cooking on a budget and student finance help sixth-form pupils to feel well prepared for the practical issues they will encounter in the next stage of their lives.

43. The curriculum encourages junior school pupils to be aware of potential careers, with units in PSHE on the world of work and mock interviews. Projects for pupils in the senior school are specifically tailored to encourage them to think in terms of future employment possibilities. Biannual careers fairs are open to all pupils. These provide opportunities for them to meet employers as well as representatives from higher education providers. Pupils in the sixth form access online conferences with presentations from successful women in a range of businesses and careers. This broadens their thinking about future pathways and careers. Pupils are linked to staff mentors matched to their

career plans. They are supported when making applications to universities or employers as appropriate. The thoroughness of the careers programme helps pupils to take confident steps towards fulfilling their ambitions for the future.

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

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

# Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding is of central importance in the school's culture. Those with prime responsibility for safeguarding are well trained. They provide regular formal training as well as informal updates for all staff. This ensures that staff are fully aware of their responsibilities for protecting pupils who may be at risk of harm. Overall, they have a confident understanding of the processes to follow should they have concerns about a pupil's wellbeing or safety, so that overall safeguarding is effective. However, some staff are less confident than others in articulating the detail of processes to follow. Leaders act quickly to address any potential gaps in staff knowledge and understanding.

46. Proprietors and governors are well trained in safeguarding matters. They receive regular anonymised reports of any issues that have arisen in the school. Proprietors carry out a rigorous annual audit to confirm that the robust measures indicated in policies are consistently well implemented. Designated safeguarding leads take swift and appropriate action when concerns arise. They keep comprehensive records of concerns and of the action taken. They liaise with members of the local safeguarding partnership, challenging them as necessary to share information so as to ensure that there is a detailed and clear understanding of the measures needed to protect vulnerable pupils.

47. Scrupulous arrangements are in place to check the suitability of individuals to work with children, and these are carefully followed. All required checks are completed before an individual is allowed to start work in the school, with the outcomes meticulously recorded on a single central record of appointments.

48. Rigorous internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place to protect pupils from inappropriate material accessible online. Any attempt to circumvent safety protocols is swiftly identified and managed. Pupils learn how to protect themselves when navigating the virtual world. They know to be careful when evaluating the trustworthiness of online sources, to be wary of disinformation or misinformation, and how to protect themselves from exploitation.

49. Pupils know that they can report any concerns via an anonymous link on the school intranet or approach a staff member with their concerns. They share worries about friends readily with staff, including members of the welfare team. Pupils are confident that such concerns are managed promptly and sensitively. They trust their teachers to support their wellbeing. This confidence helps to shape a secure and happy school community.

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

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

## School details

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| **School** | Shrewsbury High School, GDST |
| **Department for Education number** | 893/6018 |
| **Registered charity number** | 306983 |
| **Address** | Shrewsbury High School, GDST<br>32 Town Walls<br>Shrewsbury<br>Shropshire<br>SY1 1TN |
| **Phone number** | 01743 494000 |
| **Email address** | enquiries@shr.gdst.net |
| **Website** | www.shrewsburyhigh.gdst.net |
| **Proprietor** | The Girls' Day School Trust (GDST) |
| **Chair** | Mrs Vicky Tuck |
| **Headteacher** | Mr Darren Payne |
| **Age range** | 4 to 18 |
| **Number of pupils** | 308 |
| **Date of previous inspection** | 15 to 17 November 2022 |

## Information about the school

51. Established in 1885, Shrewsbury High School is a day school for female pupils aged 4–18, situated on the banks of the River Severn in the town of Shrewsbury. The school is owned by the Girls' Day School Trust, which has overall governance responsibility. A local school governing board provides extra support for the school leaders.

52. There are five pupils in the early years setting.

53. The school has identified 44 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

54. The school has identified English as an additional language for 18 pupils.

55. The school states its aims are to provide an education that allows female pupils to learn without limits. It intends to create a purposeful, inclusive and caring school community in which pupils can develop the strength of character and determination that will enable them to achieve beyond their expectations.

# Inspection details

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| **Inspection dates** | 30 September to 2 October 2025 |

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

57. 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 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.

58. 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**

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