

## School inspection report

23 to 25 September 2025

# **The Portsmouth Grammar School**

High Street  
Portsmouth  
Hampshire  
PO1 2LN

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. Governors work closely with leaders to ensure that the Standards are met consistently and that the school promotes a vision of academic and pastoral excellence. Pupils are at the centre of leaders' decision-making. Governors know the school well. They meet regularly with pupils and staff to take account of their views. Risk management is well understood.
2. The school's core values, such as compassion and collaboration, promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. These values underpin the school's positive atmosphere in which pupils flourish academically and enjoy the many opportunities available to them.
3. Safeguarding is a high priority. Leaders and staff are trained well to understand local safeguarding risks, how to mitigate risk and how to support pupils who may be vulnerable to harm. Pupils trust staff to support them if they need guidance.
4. The school works closely with external agencies. The safeguarding team knows when to refer concerns to other professionals and how to seek guidance when needed. Staff and pupils are confident to express any concerns as they arise. Leaders respond promptly and with care.
5. Pupils access a broad curriculum, which is ambitious, academically and personally challenging from the outset in the early years through to GCSE and A-level studies.
6. The curriculum is designed to meet children's and pupils' needs as they move through from pre-school into the junior school. Consequently, it develops curious and creative learners who are prepared well for the senior school.
7. Recent changes to checks on pupils' learning through the school's revised assessment framework ensure that, from the early years onwards, children's and pupils' achievements are closely monitored. Appropriate interventions ensure that any gaps in learning are filled quickly, so pupils make rapid progress from their starting points.
8. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive thoughtfully targeted interventions. Staff are well trained to adapt the curriculum to meet their individual needs using all available information.
9. Revised behaviour management systems ensure that good behaviour is acknowledged and that poor behaviour receives appropriate and proportionate sanctions. The school's revised approach is at an early stage of implementation. Staff are appropriately focused on improving the consistency of their application of leaders' expectations. Pupils welcome the changes made.
10. The school offers a broad range of recreational activities and sport. These activities contribute well to pupils' overall emotional and physical wellbeing.
11. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) is bespoke to the school and designed to meet pupils' needs in line with all regulatory requirements.
12. Pupils enjoy positions of leadership and service. These roles promote the school's core values effectively. Pupils welcome opportunities to be of service in the school.

13. Effective careers education is an important element of the school's offer. The diverse programme of careers teaching and guidance is appreciated. Older pupils value the opportunity to write to their older selves, reflecting on their hopes for the future. The careers guidance for younger pupils, however, is not as wide-ranging. Consequently, this limits the scope for them to make well-informed choices for the future.
14. Pupils enjoy opportunities to raise money for international projects and organisations. They also have a close relationship with the community beyond the school, supporting local charities.

## 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:

- continue to broaden the careers provision in Years 7 and 8 so that pupils are supported to make well-informed decisions about their future pathways
- consolidate the success of the new behaviour management system, so that staff are consistent in applying it and so routines are embedded effectively in daily school life.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Governors and leaders work together to create a nurturing environment. From their starting point in the early years, every pupil is known as an individual. The motivational and supportive early years setting, for example, allows children to explore their interests successfully. Pupils in the pre-school and senior school are encouraged to develop their interests and aspirations. They engage well with a rich extra-curricular programme, which promotes their physical, emotional and mental wellbeing.
16. Governors ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities have appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their duties effectively. They maintain close and effective oversight of the school and so ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Working together with other leaders, they provide appropriate scrutiny and support. Regular reviews of school policies ensure that regulatory requirements are met. As a result, governors are effective in their quality assurance of all aspects of the school's work.
17. Leaders create an environment in which pupils are happy, intellectually curious and creative in a school which values compassion and collaboration. Leaders put pupils' wellbeing and happiness at the centre of their planning and decision-making. They fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is in place. Protected characteristics, such as individual differences, are respected. Leaders ensure that teaching does not discriminate against pupils and that diversity is promoted throughout the school.
18. New leaders continue to improve the school. They evaluate a wide range of information, so they understand what is going well and where further changes are needed across year groups. They seek and welcome parents', pupils' and staff's views to inform their planning. Curriculum refinements, for example, in the increasingly incisive use of information from checks on pupils' learning and the renewed approach to behaviour management, promote pupils' wellbeing and their achievements.
19. Rigorous risk assessment is in place throughout the school. Staff have an appropriate understanding of risk and risk management, including on educational visits. Leaders are thorough and careful in implementing appropriate health and safety measures.
20. Admissions and attendance processes are effective and meet the requirements, including in ensuring that pupils attend school regularly. The local authority is informed about pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
21. Leaders makes all relevant information available to parents. Policies are clear, accessible and implemented effectively. The school's website includes an appropriate range of policies and provides suitable information for parents. The local authority receives details about the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
22. Leaders implement the complaints policy effectively. The complaints log is appropriately maintained and monitored regularly to ensure that any trends are identified. The school encourages parents to share their concerns. Leaders respond promptly and within the stated time.

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

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

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

24. Securing pupils' speech, language and communication skills development starts in the early years in the pre-school. More broadly, this focus is intrinsic to pupils' knowledge and skills acquisition across all year groups. Consequently, pupils achieve well. In the pre-school, high-quality daily interactions and structured activities underpin children's confident use of communication and language. This aspect of their learning is prioritised, so children are immersed in a language-rich environment. In the junior school, the importance of spoken English is emphasised, for example, in debates and discussions about current affairs. These are integrated well into the curriculum, so pupils' oracy, vocabulary and confidence continue to improve over time. Some pupils take roles as 'language ambassadors' to support their peers. Younger pupils collaborate with senior school pupils in activities such as reading mentorship programmes. Pupils enjoy the celebrations of international languages day. They engage in learning and teaching various languages, further enriching their linguistic experience.
25. Pupils build mathematical skills and knowledge through thoughtfully structured lessons. Teachers use questioning techniques effectively to deepen pupils' understanding. In the pre-school and junior school, mathematics is integrated into various subjects, such as music, science, and design and technology (DT). Pupils' transition into the senior school is well supported by close collaboration between school mathematics leaders. International Mathematics Day is celebrated with engaging activities that develop pupils' wider enthusiasm for mathematics.
26. Across the school, learning in science is enhanced through hands-on experiments and practical learning. In the pre-school, children consider thematic questions exploring, for example, 'What we can learn from the sky.' In the junior school, practical science areas in classrooms and subject specialist teaching reflect the importance of science knowledge and skills. Curriculum themes, such as women in science, help to inspire pupils and to encourage them to see themselves as scientists. The senior school offers a range of science enrichment programmes, including medicinal chemistry and marine biology, to raise pupils' awareness of careers in science.
27. The use of digital technology is embedded in the curriculum. Pupils develop relevant skills, including through coding and programming clubs. The school is also exploring the appropriate use of artificial intelligence (AI) in education. In the senior school, for example, pupils learn about the effective use of AI for research and coursework. They know that technology is used to supplement rather than substitute thinking.
28. Pupils enjoy creative subjects such as art and drama. The junior school offers various performances and productions to develop pupils' creative skills. Creative activities are integrated into daily lessons. Pupils have regular opportunities to develop their artistic skills. In the senior school, staff encourage pupils to debate and reflect thoughtfully on their learning, including in book clubs. The curriculum is age-appropriate and tailored to pupils' aptitudes and needs, with a focus on personalised pathways and learning.
29. Pupils achieve well over their time in the school. Outcomes in GCSE and A-level examinations continue to improve, including at the higher grades.
30. Pupils enjoy well-planned, well-taught lessons and interesting activities. Pupils build on secure foundations of knowledge and skills. They develop independence, intellectual curiosity and good

subject knowledge. As a result, they are well motivated and eager to learn, linking content across subjects as they consolidate previous learning. The well-planned curriculum and effective checks on learning ensure that pupils' individual needs are met.

31. In the pre-school, teachers and key workers ensure that children achieve well across all aspects of their early years learning. Sessions are well planned. Effective collaboration ensures that children are well supported. Teachers use their knowledge of what children know and can do, with well-chosen resources and activities, to ensure that children make the progress they should. Departments in the senior school achieve the strategic intent of delivering a curriculum to meet individual pupils' needs. Regular assessment, with supportive feedback from teachers, means that pupils understand how to improve their work. This gives pupils confidence that they are on the right track.
32. The revised assessment framework ensures that pupils' progress is closely monitored. The information gathered is used effectively to develop schemes of work, lesson plans and to provide carefully targeted support. Effective communication between departments ensures that staff know their pupils well and provide timely interventions, so pupils' progress continues to improve.
33. The needs of pupils who have SEND are identified through careful analysis of information, including from external professionals. This results in highly personalised support for each pupil. Consequently, they make good progress. Leaders with responsibility for pupils who have SEND have appropriate skills and knowledge. Staff are well-trained to adapt their teaching and so pupils' needs are well met. For pupils with specific needs, such as those with autism or impulse control needs, the learning support department provides tailored strategies, using specially designed resources. Other pupils respect individual differences in the collaboratively supportive environment.
34. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are well supported in their learning. English fluency is tested on admission and, if needed, additional support is provided.

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

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



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

36. The school's core values are curiosity, creativity, commitment, courage, compassion and collaboration. These values underpin the promotion of pupils' physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. The school places a strong emphasis on physical development and wellbeing through a variety of activities.
37. In the pre-school and the junior school, pupils develop fine and gross motor skills through a range of imaginative activities. These activities help children to manage their own behaviours and emotions. The junior school works closely with parents to ensure that pupils' physical development supports their overall academic progress.
38. In the senior school, a broad range of sports and physical activities are offered, including football, Combined Cadet Force (CCF), and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE). These activities promote physical fitness, as well as contributing to pupils' overall emotional wellbeing through opportunities for teamwork, leadership and personal growth. The school also has a comprehensive extra-curricular programme that includes volunteering and community service. The range of activities offer further support for pupils' wellbeing and character development. In the sixth form, the community action and workplace options include placements across activities such as early years support, junior school support, reading/literacy mentors and primary school ambassadors. This aspect of the curriculum encourages pupils' mutual respect for individual differences and empathy. These values are reflected positively across the school.
39. Pupils' wellbeing is developed through PSHE, RSE and character-building opportunities. In the junior school, pupils experience, for example, role-play and discussions, which develop their self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence. The junior school's PSHE curriculum is aligned with the senior school. Teachers are trained to deliver it effectively. The pastoral curriculum for older pupils includes regular assessments and surveys to ensure that pupils are taught age-appropriate content. The school emphasises the importance of fundamental British values, such as tolerance and respect, as well as pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) knowledge and skills development. These principles are well integrated into the curriculum and effectively promoted in all aspects of school life.
40. The values of compassion, curiosity and resilience are well embedded. These values are integral to the pastoral curriculum. Pupils are supported to organise their own clubs and societies, such as the classics society. University lecturers are invited to give talks on different courses. Past pupils are also invited to speak about their own careers with current pupils. As part of raising self-awareness, pupils are invited to write to their future selves at the age of 25. This personalised correspondence underpins the value pupils place on self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence, as well as on academic grades and individual school honours.
41. Pupils in all year groups, including in the early years are supervised effectively. They behave well and are polite and articulate. Reports of unkind behaviour or bullying are taken seriously by leaders and acted on immediately. New systems in place promote positive behaviour and attitudes to learning. Staff are trained to deal with poor behaviour. The school adopts a staged approach to sanctions. This approach is understood by pupils and regarded as being measured and fair. However, new

procedures are still being embedded. Staff are working to improve the consistency of their application of the changes.

42. Leadership opportunities across year groups allow pupils to contribute meaningfully to school life. They readily give their time to support others. Prefect roles and involvement in societies, for example, encourage responsibility and participation in decision-making. As a result, pupils accept accountability for their behaviour and show respect for others in formal and informal settings.
43. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely and work with local agencies as required. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulatory requirements.
44. Health and safety, first aid and fire safety measures are effective. Thorough risk assessments cover all the main areas of the school and daily safety checks are in place to ensure support for pupils are protected. Governors monitoring of this aspect of the school's work ensure that the regulations are met. Staff receive first aid training. On-site nurses respond to pupils' medical needs and monitor accident reporting appropriately.

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

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

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

46. Pupils develop social awareness, respect for diversity and an understanding of fundamental British values through pastoral programmes, assemblies and societies. All pupils learn about British law and democracy. In history, pupils highlighted key events which involved identifying political and economic warfare, discoveries and social events. The task led the pupils toward a greater understanding of the need for the rule of law and of respected government institutions. Pupils' learning is supplemented with a themed activity. This helps them to understand other countries and to place British institutions in a global context. Staff encourage respectful dialogue and promote respect for individual differences. Pupils are confident to express their views and to engage with different viewpoints. They appreciate their diverse school community.
47. In the pre-school, children are encouraged to work collaboratively. They learn to respect diversity and difference in society. They engage confidently in group learning, listening to one another, solving problems collaboratively and supporting peers. This contributes well to their mutual respect and their social development. Leaders set high expectations of how pupils interact with others. This results in a calm and caring environment.
48. The curriculum equips pupils with financial awareness. The junior school curriculum encourages pupils' enthusiasm and attention. Children apply themselves with commitment because they see the relevance of their studies in today's world. Through exposure to 'big questions', cultural stories and thematic projects, pupils are encouraged to link their learning to wider societal issues. They consider human diversity with empathy and respect. This includes in their understanding of economic problems and factors, for example refugee camps and the Amazon, and issues in society such as environmental, human and social matters. Junior school pupils learn enthusiastically about money, savings and investment through well-thought-out activities. Senior school pupils access preparation for life after school through the 'ignite' programme of lessons where topics include finance and banking. These experiences prepare pupils to lead meaningful, responsible and outward-looking lives within and beyond school.
49. Pupils contribute collaboratively to charity fundraising, including in events that support partnerships with local schools and a community in Uganda. They understand the social and financial impact of their involvement, linking economic contribution to wider responsibility. Pupils demonstrate these values through various activities and interactions. They show compassion by helping others in their school houses and wider school communities. Their projects often benefit the Portsmouth community, for example they provide the choristers at the cathedral, where they contribute to worship. They also attend Diwali celebrations in the docks and participate in charitable endeavours. The school's relationship with the city is valued.
50. Careers education starts in the junior school with themed days, supported by sixth-form pupils. In the senior school, pupils are encouraged to think about their future careers, as well as the subjects that will support those careers. Pupils in the sixth form receive advice and guidance on post-18 opportunities for study and work. Careers fairs and talks broaden understanding so pupils gain knowledge of routes into higher education and employment. There are clubs for aspiring medics and dentists, supported by initiatives such as 'ignite', a taught enrichment programme which extends learning to topics such as criminology, marine biology and film making. Leaders ensure pupils access work placements, including those tailored to support pupils who have SEND. Pupils in Years 7 and 8

receive careers education. However, the programme is not sufficiently explicit or cohesive in setting out the range of opportunities available to them.

51. Staff promote awareness of and respect for individual differences through assemblies and societies. Pupils discuss and appreciate others' viewpoints. Leaders ensure that diversity is celebrated and that dialogue is respectful. Pupils are supported to explore individual differences in a balanced way.

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

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

## Safeguarding

53. Governors are highly committed to keeping children safe. They know the school well and understand local safeguarding risks. They provide effective oversight of safeguarding and appropriate challenge and support for the safeguarding team. Leaders provide governors with regular updates, reports and audits. Governors monitor any safeguarding trends carefully and ensure that they are acted on. Records of safeguarding concerns are logged accurately and reviewed regularly.
54. The safeguarding team has a strong understanding of safeguarding and risk management. They work closely with external agencies and understand local referral thresholds. External advice is sought promptly when needed.
55. Across the school, staff demonstrate a risk-aware and responsive safeguarding culture. They understand regulatory requirements and broader contextual safeguarding issues. Staff know pupils well. They are confident to identify potential concerns quickly. Consequently, risks are managed well and pupils are protected from harm.
56. Staff with responsibility for recruitment have a secure understanding of the checks required during recruitment. They maintain meticulous records and files of their pre-employment checks. Leaders and governors audit the single central record of these checks regularly.
57. The safeguarding induction process for staff is thorough, with regular updates and reinforcement of information. Staff training is systematic, relevant and reinforced through weekly briefings. Case studies enhance their understanding of safeguarding responsibilities. The culture of openness and approachability further strengthens the school's capacity to identify and respond to safeguarding concerns promptly. All teaching staff and some support staff are trained on how to record concerns. The school conducts regular Prevent training, face-to-face and online. Consequently, staff are aware of the risks of radicalisation and extremism.
58. Weekly safeguarding meetings draw on a wide multi-disciplinary team, supported by the effective use of an online reporting system. This enables staff to record concerns, capture the child's voice and apply restorative approaches. Information is collated and shared efficiently, resulting in timely and well-co-ordinated support. The school maintains thorough and meticulous confidential records which are regularly scrutinised and monitored for trends. As a result, pupils know they are safe and that their views are valued.
59. Online safety is promoted through parent webinars, digital safeguarding platforms and robust filtering and monitoring systems. Pupils and parents are supported to understand online risks and access to inappropriate internet sites are restricted.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	The Portsmouth Grammar School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	851/6004
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1063732
<b>Address</b>	The Portsmouth Grammar School High Street Portsmouth Hampshire PO1 2LN
<b>Phone number</b>	023 9236 0036
<b>Email address</b>	info@pgs.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.pgs.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	The Portsmouth Grammar School
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Vivienne Chapman
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Wickes
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	966
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 to 29 September 2022

## Information about the school

61. The Portsmouth Grammar School is an independent co-educational day school, divided into pre-school, junior school and senior school. The school was founded in 1732 by William Smith. The chair of governors took up her position in September 2025.
62. There are currently 52 children in the early years setting, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
63. The school has identified 166 pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
64. The school has identified English as an additional language for 56 pupils.
65. The school's core values, curiosity and creativity, courage and commitment, compassion and collaboration are central to school life. The school encourages pupils to think not only about where they will be at 18 but where they aspire to be at 25. The school states its aims are for members of the school community to be happy and thrive, enjoy learning and pursue success to the best of their ability, be prepared for the changing world beyond school, make an active contribution and live purposeful lives, develop a sense of identity and to be their own person.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

23 to 25 September 2025

66. A team of 8 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. 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 head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education (PE)
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

68. 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)**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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

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