



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Palmers Green High School

January 2022

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School's Details

School	Palmers Green High School			
DfE number	308/6001			
Registered charity number	312629			
Address	Palmers Green High School 104 Hoppers Road Winchmore Hill London N21 3LJ			
Telephone number	020 8886 1135			
Email address	office@pghs.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Wendy Kempster			
Chair of governors	Mrs Melanie Curtis			
Age range	3 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	267			
	EYFS	28	Juniors	118
	Seniors	121		
Inspection dates	19 to 21 January 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Palmers Green High School (PGHS) is a selective independent school for female pupils aged 3 to 16 years located in Winchmore Hill, North London. The school was opened by its founder, Miss Alice Hum, in 1905 and is a registered charity administered by a board of governors.
- 1.2 The school is organised into three departments: the senior school is for pupils aged 11 to 16 years, and the lower school is for pupils aged 4 to 11. The nursery for children aged 3 to 4 years is located in a separate building about a mile from the main site.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection the school has introduced GCSE Physical Education (PE) and a new chair of governors has been appointed.
- 1.4 During the period March to August 2020, the whole school remained open for vulnerable pupils in all year groups. From 01 June 2020 the Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 pupils returned for face-to-face lessons where the parents were confident for their children to return. During this period the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils who were not in school.
- 1.5 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.6 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.7 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021 the Nursery remained opened for face-to-face teaching and all pupils other than vulnerable pupils or the children of key workers received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.8 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. For pupils who would have been expected to take these examinations, centre-assessed grades were awarded in 2020 and teacher-assessed grades were awarded in 2021.
- 1.9 Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.10 The school aims to foster the individual development of each pupil enabling them to strive for academic excellence whilst equipping them with the skills and attributes required to take an active role in the 21st century. It seeks to provide a nurturing environment which develops pupils' emotional well-being and personal development, thus enabling them to become confident, independent and resilient young people who develop a lifelong love of learning.

About the pupils

- 1.11 Pupils come from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds which reflect the local community of north London. Pupils belong to families with a wide range of occupations. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the majority of pupils is above average. The number of pupils identified by the school as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is 42, all of whom receive support. For 32 of these, the primary area of need is cognition and learning. Two pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for

41 pupils but none require additional support. The school has a number of more able pupils whose needs are provided for within the curriculum.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and associated requirements and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the lower school, the school's own framework for assessment confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2020 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the lower school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- The pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are excellent.
 - The pupils, including those with SEND and EAL, maintain a high rate of progress throughout the school.
 - The pupils demonstrate highly effective communication skills both peer to peer and with adults.
 - Pupils of all ages show decidedly positive attitudes towards their learning including the ability to work collaboratively.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- The pupils' behaviour and their relationships with each other and their teachers is excellent.
 - The pupils are confident and have a strong sense of self-esteem.
 - Pupils are very inclusive of those from different backgrounds and value diversity within their community.
 - Pupils have a strong understanding of how to stay safe and adopt a balanced and healthy lifestyle.

Recommendations

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:
- Exploring ways in which older pupils are able to further develop their independent learning skills.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 From the evidence of performance in external examinations, lesson observations, pupil interviews and work scrutiny, the inspectors found that the majority of pupils of all abilities achieve an excellent standard across the curriculum throughout the school, including in the nursery. Using the national data for the years 2018 and 2019, which are the most recent years for which comparative statistics are currently available, the results in GCSE have been well above the national average for maintained schools. Results in both the centre-assessed grades in 2020 and the teacher-assessed grades in 2021 were similar, with the quality of online learning provided by teachers contributing to this success. The achievement of pupils with SEND and EAL is also excellent and is at least in line with their peers because

they are identified quickly by senior leaders and receive high quality one-to-one support in lessons. In line with its aims the school succeeds in striving for academic excellence.

- 3.6 Pupils make excellent progress overall with many teachers providing support outside lessons, a view supported by the pupils through questionnaires and in discussions. For example, in a Year 6 class, pupils improved their punctuation and the accuracy of their work by using the highly effective feedback given by the teacher and the class teaching assistant within the lesson. Year 7 pupils also explained that teachers were able to quickly identify areas where they needed extra support and would either give them one-to-one help or suggest they attend a subject surgery outside the lessons to help them progress.
- 3.7 The knowledge, skills and understanding of all pupils is excellent for their age and abilities across the whole school. For example, in a Year 10 chemistry lesson the pupils knew the different properties of chemical elements and by working collaboratively they were able to group them correctly. In Year 7, pupils displayed excellent creative awareness and an understanding of key musical terms to aid their practical work on the *'Promenade Theme'* by Mussorgsky. Pupils also demonstrated well-coordinated physical movement in an after-school dance club where they were learning the Charleston and were able to increase the difficulty by spontaneously adding more complex hand and arm movements. Pupils' excellent scientific knowledge of space and the solar system was observed in a Reception class when drawing an alien and designing rockets focused on literacy, numeracy and art.
- 3.8 Pupils demonstrate excellent oral and written communication skills. Very confident speaking and listening skills were observed in a Year 3 science lesson where the pupils, organised into groups, read aloud with fluency and accuracy in order to clarify their thinking as they explored the concept of magnets and the earth's magnetic force. In a Year 11 Spanish class the pupils displayed very effective listening and writing skills when selecting the instances of conditional sentences in response to the Spanish song *La Vida Tombola* and Year 6 pupils used specific vocab such as nocturnal and mucus when describing the habitat of the woodlouse. Year 11 pupils were able to demonstrate excellent and extensive French vocabulary in a fast paced and challenging plenary exercise on 'le petit dejeuner'. Very fluent writing skills were evident in the Year 11 English mock examination where pupils demonstrated advanced writing skills by using a large range of vocabulary in addition to complex sentence construction.
- 3.9 In all lessons observed the attitude of the pupils was excellent and they respond eagerly to meticulously prepared activities and carefully crafted teacher questioning. For example, pupils showed a general desire to succeed when working through a French text to find mistakes under timed conditions and were able to critically reflect on the knowledge they gained. In a Year 9 history lesson the pupils were engaged and actively involved in the lesson as they successfully hypothesised when thinking through the possible leadership attributes of Charles I. Pupils were quick to recall relevant information, made perceptive links and were very supportive and respectful of each other's questions in a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lesson where through effective collaboration they learnt some of the myths surrounding contraception.
- 3.10 Pupils throughout the school have good numerical skills which they apply well across the curriculum. For example, pupils in the nursery demonstrated exceptional skills by arranging beads into geometric shapes with a single line of symmetry. Through the use of an interactive whiteboard Year 1 pupils were able to place counters into equal groups successfully in order to complete questions on division. In the sciences older pupils also use their mathematical skills appropriately, for example in chemistry when calculating relative atomic masses.
- 3.11 The information and communication technology (ICT) skills of the pupils throughout the school are good. In lessons Year 4 pupils used spreadsheet formulae successfully to adjust financial summaries and Year 9 history pupils used the graphing software to reflect the ups and downs of life in the trenches. In Year 10 ICT students demonstrated excellent database design skills by creating relational databases in order to produce reports from their own well-defined queries. Pupils commented on how

during the recent period of online learning the school had supported the strengthening of their ICT skills and how that had led to more independent learning; however, since the return to school these skills have not been used as extensively.

- 3.12 Pupils have good study skills and interpret information from a range of sources very effectively. In work scrutiny, Year 11 pupils were seen to have a high degree of analytical skills when identifying Shakespeare's use of language by explaining how, in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare uses trochaic tetrameter for the witches' dialogue and contrasts this by the use of iambic pentameter reserved for more noble characters. Year 9 pupils were able to synthesise the evidence for both the prosecution and the defence of the soldier Harry Farr, who was put on trial for abandoning his post without permission, and hence draw well-reasoned conclusions. Through well-planned and diverse lessons younger pupils were able to demonstrate a high degree of independence and inquisitiveness in their work. In lessons further up the school, however, the pupils focus more on preparation for exams and opportunities for wider independent learning were less common.
- 3.13 Pupils achieve at a high level beyond the classroom in a range of suitable activities that develop their own character, strengths and interests. In the questionnaires a small minority of pupils and parents expressed the view that the school does not provide a large enough range of extra-curricular activities. However, the inspectors felt that by offering activities such as choirs, the chess and puzzles club, cooking club, sports practices and fixtures and debating, the school offers a good provision in this area both in terms of quality and quantity. There has been notable success beyond the classroom with pupils having national representation in show jumping, karate and ju-jitsu and pupils regularly performing at the highest levels in LAMDA exams. Pupils have also competed successfully in a humanitarian rights competition and when they leave some are awarded scholarships, most notably in art.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.14 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.15 The pupils are very self-confident and exhibit high degrees of self-esteem, self-reliance and self-discipline. Pupils throughout the lower and senior schools demonstrate excellent levels of confidence and resilience when analysing their test scores, learning from tests in which they underperform and seeking ways to improve. In physical education (PE), Year 5 pupils demonstrated high levels of self-esteem by sharing feedback with their peers, responding positively and reflecting in a mature way so as to enhance their future performance. In modern foreign languages pupils regularly show self-reliance and self-reflection when recording themselves speaking in a target language and then critically listening back to improve their accent. The pupils in discussions felt they are well prepared for the next phase of their education which was supported by the vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire.
- 3.16 Pupils' behaviour in and around the school is excellent and they are clearly able to distinguish between right and wrong as indicated by the few sanctions that they receive. Pupils are polite, hold doors open for the staff and each other, respect the school rules and greet visitors, including the inspectors, with a cheery welcome. Pupils challenge misbehaviour and unkindness when it occurs and are keen to try to resolve situations at an early stage before they escalate. There is no tolerance for bullying in the school and pupils show initiative when addressing issues. For example, Year 6 pupils explained how they resolve disputes by holding a class meeting without the teacher, listening to different points of view, and made use of an object that the current speaker holds to avoid talking over each other. In all observed lessons, the pupils are very well behaved and show a great deal of respect for their teachers by listening attentively to instructions and asking questions in a courteous manner.
- 3.17 Pupils form excellent and productive relationships with each other which the school facilitates through strong pastoral leadership, the PSHE curriculum and educational visits. Year 7 pupils spoke enthusiastically about a team building residential that enabled them to welcome new pupils to their

year group. Here they were keen to support each other in outdoor pursuits such as Jacob 's Ladder and they encouraged each other to reach greater personal heights. The pupils also make very positive contributions to the lives of others. Through the house system pupils work together towards a common goal such as when designing a poster to promote the values and ethos of the school and Year 7 pupils commented on how well the year 10 mentoring programme supports them throughout the year. Pupils also reported that if they feel upset in the playground a prefect will be there to support them and if they have no-one with whom to play, they can stand at the 'friendship stop' and someone will ask them to join in with their activity. In addition, pupils up to Year 8 engage and enjoy collaborating with other local schools for example in Design and Technology days and study skills workshops. Whilst at the school, the inspectors noted how the whole community showed respect for each other and had at the heart of their everyday business the school motto, By Love Serve One Another.

- 3.18 Pupils demonstrate a high degree of awareness of the culture and religious beliefs of others. The diversity society provides a warm and friendly environment where those who feel underrepresented such as the LBGTQ+ community are able to meet. In discussion, members of the diversity society said that the whole community including teachers and governors were very supportive of this new pupil-led initiative and it has provided an opportunity for questions to be explored and understanding increased. In lessons pupils showed a good understanding of different races and cultures. In an English assignment, Year 11 pupils understood very well the difficulties facing the black characters in the novel *Of Mice and Men* and when studying Black History Year 4 pupils showed great maturity and understanding of the views of others in their answers to complex questions and issues.
- 3.19 The pupils are very aware of those less fortunate than themselves and are very keen to raise money and donate to charity. Through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme pupils volunteer to help in the local community and offer support in more tangible ways such as working in charity shops, care homes, sports' clubs and libraries. Pupils are further able to support the local community during the year by singing at a number of events. The charity prefects gain leadership skills in helping to organise donations for the local soup kitchen as well as whole school charity events such as Children in Need and Jeans for Genes Day.
- 3.20 Pupils have a good understanding that the decisions they make are important. For example, pupils consider carefully which GCSE subjects to choose after listening to advice given by their teachers. In mathematics the pupils are adept at choosing the level of difficulty of the questions they attempt in order to find the right level for their ability and to seek help if they need it. They also consider their options carefully when electing other pupils to positions of leadership and trust such as the school captain and vice-captain.
- 3.21 Pupils have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. Nursery pupils showed great delight and appreciation when exploring autumn leaves as part of their exploration of nature on a visit to Capel Manor woods and Year 7 pupils reflected thoughtfully in form time when considering whether a piece of music can be a piece of music if it has been composed but never played. In Year 6 pupils exhibited excellent spiritual understanding when thinking about what influences their beliefs.
- 3.22 Pupils throughout the school have an excellent awareness of staying safe, including online, with younger pupils learning, through ICT lessons, how to keep personal information private when for example using social media. Older pupils have a good grasp of the concepts of consent and grooming through the PSHE curriculum. The pupils have a good understanding of how to eat healthily and the importance of mental and physical well-being. The overwhelming majority of pupils who responded to the questionnaire said they are encouraged to eat healthily and in discussions pupils explained how the school contributed to this with the introduction of no-meat Monday which they welcomed. In Year 5, pupils were able to express a range of emotions and articulate the importance of words in order to effectively express their state of mental health. The pupils stay physically healthy by being active, something the PE teachers help them to do by, for example, promoting the couch to 5K challenge,

initiated during lockdown. Throughout the inspection visit the pupils demonstrated high levels of resilience as they know who to turn to for help if they or any of their peers need advice or support.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Dr Andrew Storey	Reporting inspector
Mrs Jacqueline Shackel	Compliance team inspector (Head of prep school, HMC School)
Mrs Emma Hattersley	Team inspector (Head, HMC school)
Mrs Jane Prescott	Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)