



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

St James Senior Girls' School

October 2019



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School's Details

School	St James Senior Girls' School			
DfE number	205/6399			
Registered charity number	270156			
Address	St James Senior Girls' School Earsby Street London W14 8SH			
Telephone number	020 734 81777			
Email address	schoolsec@sjsg.org.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Labram			
Proprietor	Independent Educational Association Ltd			
Age range	11 to 18			
Number of pupils on roll	261			
	Seniors	210	Sixth Form	51
Inspection dates	8 to 10 October 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 St James Senior Girls' School is an independent day school for pupils aged between 11 and 18. It is registered as a single sex-school for female pupils.
- 1.2 The school is part of a charitable trust, administered by a single board of governors which oversees all the St James' Schools. The schools were founded in 1975. St James Senior Girls' School has been located at Olympia since 2001 and shares a building with St James Preparatory School. The main school site accommodates Years 7 to 11. Years 12 and 13 are based in a separate sixth-form centre nearby.
- 1.3 Since the previous inspection, there has been refurbishment of some school facilities, including the IT suite and the drama studio.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school's aim is to provide a curriculum which enriches intellectual and emotional development, expanding understanding, wisdom and creative potential. The objective is that pupils develop an extensive appreciation of the potential of human existence and an awareness of the emotional, intellectual and spiritual aspects of life. It seeks to develop qualities that will enable pupils to lead happy, generous and dignified lives.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils' families come from a range of professional backgrounds and from different cultures, mostly living within central London. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified 56 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, 31 of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for seven pupils, six of whom receive additional support in school. Data used by the school have identified 23 pupils as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for one other pupil because of her special talent in a sport.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was 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 report of which appears later in this document. The 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 regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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 full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#).

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 At GCSE in the years 2015 to 2018, performance has been well above the national average for maintained schools.
- 2.3 In the sixth form, A-level results in the years 2015 to 2018 have been above the national average for sixth formers in maintained schools.
- 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 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include 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. They also include 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 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.

2.19 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include 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.
- Pupils' progress to GCSE is excellent; pupils gain many top grades, due to excellent teaching and a challenging curriculum.
 - Over half of pupils' A-level results are at Grade A* or A.
 - Pupils are highly self-motivated learners with excellent attitudes to learning, reflecting well the school's values and aims.
 - Pupils are strong communicators: fluent, confident and convincing.
 - Pupils are highly competent in applying their numeracy and information and communication technology (ICT) skills.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils are highly self-aware, but not self-absorbed.
 - Pupils' excellent spiritual development prepares them very well for the next stage in their lives.
 - Pupils develop strong self-belief and empathy, fostered through meditative practices.
 - Pupils are sociable and confident and understand the importance of working well with others.
 - Pupils develop strong leadership skills and their contribution to the life of the school and beyond is significant.

Recommendation

- 3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes the school might wish to consider:
- implementing strategies for supporting EAL pupils more widely across the school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils' attainment overall over the years 2015 to 2018 is above average at A level and at GCSE is well above the national average. Attainment at GCSE is also above that for selective senior schools. Over this period, over four-fifths of results at GCSE were at the top grades A* or A. The proportion of results at these grades was exceptional in 2018. In 2019, the school's data show high standards have been maintained with around two-thirds of entries attaining the new grades 7 to 9.
- 3.6 Over half of all A-level examination results over the same period have been at A* or A. The school's data for 2019 show a further increase in this proportion. Pupils are highly successful in obtaining places at universities which require high standards of entry, including a few each year going to Oxford and Cambridge. Over four-fifths of pupils obtain places at their first-choice university.
- 3.7 Pupils with SEND achieve in line with their peers. Pupils with SEND, and those with difficulties in a particular subject, are supported very well by specific interventions, such as how to develop stronger study skills, 'clinics' to reinforce learning, and teachers' skilful questioning and setting of tasks which match the needs of individual pupils well in lessons. Some similar strategies to support pupils with EAL were observed, but these are not widespread. Consequently, in occasional lessons and activities, those pupils can be at a disadvantage. Nevertheless, the achievement of pupils with EAL is excellent, reflecting their high determination to succeed.
- 3.8 Pupils make excellent progress to GCSE. The school's systems for tracking progress support achievement well, as leaders use standardised testing to identify pupils' individual starting points and

monitor the trajectory towards their targets. Leaders of subjects and years oversee this more effectively than at the time of the previous inspection. Together with senior leaders, they identify quickly where extra help is needed or where a gifted pupil requires additional challenge and extension. This has led directly to the continued rise in attainment at both GCSE and A level.

- 3.9 Pupils whom the school considers to be amongst the most able achieve highly. Several of the academically more able pupils in each year up to GCSE are invited to the *Horizons* group for additional independent study in depth, allowing them scope to use their initiative and follow an interest beyond the classroom. The span of these year-long annual projects is wide and has recently included 'Architecture in Manchester', 'The history of the shire horse', 'Illegal drug routes into Europe', 'From communism to capitalism in Russia'; and the research of an ancestor's army career in its historical context. When discussing their completed projects, pupils were evidently enthused by doing them and commented that they had learnt valuable research skills, how to manage their time more effectively and how best to present their findings, including a formal presentation to their peers. The written projects showed a high standard of research, analysis and synthesis of findings.
- 3.10 Sixth-form pupils rightly observe that the excellent *Wider Perspectives* programme focusing on enhanced, broader approaches to study opens their eyes and equips them well for achieving the highest grades. Many pupils credit also the strong meditation practice they have built up over time in helping them to think clearly. Pupils' ability to weigh up evidence, apply previous knowledge and form clearly articulated opinions is highly developed. This was evident in a lively citizenship lesson when discussing whether the UK was becoming more polarised. Pupils readily challenged each other and the teacher on points expressed.
- 3.11 Pupils' progress in lessons is excellent, although occasionally in a very small number of lessons a few pupils seem to be asked more questions than others. This may explain the negative responses of a few pupils in their questionnaire regarding perceived 'favouritism'. However, this adds to the rapid pace and challenge overall, as very able pupils model answers for others, extending those pupils appropriately. Inspectors note, moreover, that most pupils are not afraid to question matters in school and have several channels to air their views.
- 3.12 Pupils are excellent communicators: fluent, confident and convincing, drawing on a range of sophisticated vocabulary and idiom, often well beyond that expected for their age and stage. This is because they are given opportunities in every lesson from Year 7 onwards to express opinions, clarify thoughts and extend answers. Pupils are not afraid to challenge and question, and do so regularly. There are many occasions on which pupils, especially in the sixth form, speak formally before an audience. Inspectors heard powerful oral presentations from members of the sixth form at the open evening held during the inspection before pupils in Year 11 and prospective new A-level students, on life in the sixth form. Scrutiny of a sample of pupils' work shows that they write accurately and cogently at length in a variety of genres, across many subjects, to a very high standard.
- 3.13 Pupils are excellent and reflective listeners, showing understanding and empathy. They are keen to succeed, but not at the expense of others and are willing to learn from one another.
- 3.14 Pupils' excellent communication skills are enhanced by exposure to several languages: French, optional Spanish, and a sound grounding in classical language study: Latin, Sanskrit (from preparatory school age) and, for some, ancient Greek. Pupils in Year 13 conversed with fluency beyond their stage when discussing Canadian culture in French, with a high standard of pronunciation and very good command of grammar and syntax. Pupils comment that the provision of native speakers as teachers, together with the recent decision by the school's governors to appoint native-speaking teaching assistants has enhanced their listening skills, and stimulated them to seek to improve further independently. For example, pupils choose to listen to live newsfeed and internet video at home and seek out home-stay placements in France.
- 3.15 Pupils acquire very strong mathematical skills and apply complex mathematical skills effectively to other areas of the curriculum, such as science. The school provides good opportunities for pupils to

take part in competitions, such as the national Mathematical Challenge, entering at three levels and in the National Maths Olympiad. Eleven pupils at senior level gained gold, silver or bronze level awards in 2018 and 11 did so at intermediate, with 13 at junior levels.

- 3.16 Pupils have excellent ICT skills, much improved since the previous inspection, following significant investment in resources and schemes of work that are more relevant to current demands in the world of business, creativity and commerce. Pupils in Year 8, for example, are working at a level beyond that usually seen, learning to manage a large budget using commercially available software packages normally used at GCSE level. Pupils in Year 8 were observed at the early stages of successfully learning how to write a gaming programme, and customising some of the features. Learning was rapid, and there was great excitement at managing to get their ball to move, but not yet able to control where it went. Pupils across the school apply their ICT skills well in other subjects, such as science and geography, but there are some missed opportunities for them to do so more often.
- 3.17 Pupils also have highly developed skills in science, reflected in their considerable successes in national competitions and in their selection for university-level masterclasses, as a result of specialist teaching in all three sciences from Year 7 onwards. In 2018, pupils in Years 9 and 10 were awarded 16 medals, including one gold, in the National Biology Challenge and, at senior level in the Biology Olympiad, three pupils were highly commended or bronze medal winners in both 2018 and 2019.
- 3.18 Pupils achieve well in other areas, including in music, sport and the arts. Around 12 to 15 pupils annually are awarded the Duke of Edinburgh's Award at silver and bronze levels, a good number for a relatively small school. The senior lacrosse team finished within the top 16 nationally in 2018, and other sports teams in athletics, cross-country and netball are successful in local competitions between schools.
- 3.19 There are a number of notable individual successes. Senior pupils in 2017 to 2019 have won first places in national academic competitions, including in art (ISA schools) and in the GCSE Classical Association essay-writing. Pupils have recently won English essay-writing competitions (ISA schools) and, at A level, were highly commended in the Young Geographer of the Year 2018.
- 3.20 Many pupils perform publicly in drama productions and musical theatre, for example when staging a large-scale production with the boys' school: Vivaldi's *Gloria* in 2019 and *Oh, what a lovely war!* in 2018, and an annual joint performing arts gala, as well as in school concerts. A small number of pupils successfully enter graded examinations in music. All pupils successfully learn new skills and find new interests as they participate in an excellent and diverse range of clubs and activities such as politics, film, zoology, cooking and creative knitting, gymnastics, orchestra and singing, yoga and self-defence, alongside subject-based and sports-based clubs that further pupils' independent learning or practice.
- 3.21 The main factors behind pupils' excellent achievement are the high quality of teaching, which is intellectually rigorous, resulting in enjoyable, but often challenging lessons; and the suitability of the curriculum, which provides sufficient breadth and depth for very able pupils.
- 3.22 As a result, pupils have extremely positive attitudes to learning and are highly self-motivated. Pupils' behaviour is impeccable, with a generally calm demeanour, the result, pupils say, of their reflective practices in school. Pupils show evident enthusiasm for learning and a thirst for further independent study. Pupils across the school, in discussion, say that that the meditation practices they use and the periods of *Quiet Time* serve them well, not only in helping to remove barriers such as anxiety about examinations. They typically comment: 'Being still for a while helps me stay grounded to work hard in lessons day to day'.
- 3.23 Questionnaire responses from parents, staff and pupils are very strongly positive on all aspects of the school's provision. Pupils say that they value the sense of community in school and credit the clarity of teaching, encouragement and support they receive from staff for their success.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.24 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.25 Pupils are acutely self-aware, without being self-absorbed, because reflection and contemplative practice, together with consideration of others, are built into the everyday life of the school. In lessons, pupils are typically asked to articulate a personal response or to describe their feelings and reactions to a topic. In form time during the inspection, lower-school pupils paused to consider the meaning of gratitude, looking at ways to define this in pairs and reflecting in silence what it means to them in relation to features of nature or possessions. In a Sanskrit lesson, when translating a story, pupils openly discussed their views on poverty. Pupils are given frequent opportunities to review their own progress and consider their strengths and weaknesses in their academic subjects. On all these occasions, pupils of all ages show a remarkable maturity and sensitivity in response. Debate and questioning each other, or challenging the teacher, are features of many lessons. As a result, pupils are excellent and confident communicators, showing empathy and tolerance in their views.
- 3.26 Pupils have developed and refined the skills they need to lead teams effectively, because the school provides many opportunities for taking up leadership roles, from school council representatives and group leaders in the lower school, to senior prefect roles in Years 12 and 13. Prefects interviewed described how they had learnt to manage the exuberance of lower-school pupils and stressed the importance of working as a team, even if by nature they would have instinctively chosen to lead alone. They are aware of their own leadership styles, commenting, 'You need to get the right person on the team for each initiative, to drive it forward'. If shy of public speaking, they know the techniques to cope, astutely aware that 'generally one's audience has come because they are interested, and want to learn from your experience', and to read their body language. As a result, senior pupils present as self-confident. They say that the school has built this up systematically over the years and that, as a result, they feel well equipped for moving on to university.
- 3.27 Pupils' spiritual understanding is outstanding, reflecting the emphasis on this in the school's aims. Through religious studies lessons, pupils know about other religions, beliefs and practices and, through the study of philosophy, they show very good understanding and an appreciation of the importance of a set of beliefs in one's life. Older pupils study Buddhism or Hinduism in more depth as part of A level, as well as Christianity. Pupils draw on the taught meditative practices to reflect on bigger questions related to the meaning of life and their place in the world. Many pupils commented in their questionnaire responses on how important this practice was to them, noting that their belief and confidence in this approach grew with age, and that they draw strength from this, to serve them at difficult times. They also typically say, 'I can't imagine not doing it now'. Their spiritual awareness has a direct impact on their deep respect for diversity and the right to be different, as reflected in their active participation in clubs such as 'Sapphire' for LGBT issues. Pupils stress that clubs are open to all. Pupils view the mix of religious and cultural backgrounds in school as a strength, for example in bringing different perspectives to a topic under discussion, or to a period studied in history. Pupils of different cultures work very well together.
- 3.28 Pupils are very well grounded and are balanced in their points of view. They have an excellent understanding of how to keep themselves safe and of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. This is demonstrated through their involvement regularly in school sport and clubs and their focus on good nutrition. Pupils appreciate that the school is vegetarian, but are not afraid to challenge decisions made about school meals and persuade leaders to change their minds.
- 3.29 Pupils have excellent awareness of the stigma around mental health, commenting, 'You need to name it; you need to speak out'. Pupils have translated their concerns into action, fundraising locally for mental health. Prefects mentor younger pupils, having received formal training in basic mental health and safeguarding. School leaders are aware of the pressures on young people and have taken action to prioritise pupils' good mental health and well-being. This is illustrated, for example, by the appointment of a well-being coach, who leads staff and pupils in their meditative practice. Anxious or

depressed pupils gain in self-esteem through one-to-one coaching, enabling them to take control of their own decisions and actions regarding their future, and are able to benefit more fully from what the school offers. Senior leaders monitor the positive impact of this approach to well-being by conducting surveys amongst the older pupils.

- 3.30 Pupils have highly developed social and collaborative skills. Pupils view the school as a unified community and play an active part, through school council, fundraising for charity and organising school events. Pupils' initiatives range beyond school, for example sixth formers teach Latin in a nearby primary school and pupils in Year 7 entertain older residents to *Art of Hospitality* lunch, including reading poetry with them. Older pupils paint with residents in a local care home. These actions have developed pupils' empathy and their strong sense of social responsibility. The *Eco Group* is active on behalf of the environment. Curriculum initiatives have successfully developed the skills pupils need to form and sustain healthy relationships: pupils spoke highly of the *Girls on Board* programme introduced into Years 7 to 13 that has helped them to work out friendship issues better when they arise, by putting themselves in others' shoes. In lessons, pupils work particularly effectively when asked to do so in pairs, but also will spontaneously help one another.
- 3.31 Pupils have a strong moral code, underpinned by the value they place on a mutually supportive school community and informed by their study of philosophy and religion. Their moral awareness is reinforced well, thematically, through *Quiet Time* and form time.
- 3.32 Leaders and managers have successfully built a unified school community based on trust, as they had hoped in their stated aims. Pupils in their questionnaire responses and in discussion comment that they know and appreciate that staff will support them well. Staff model the school's values well; relationships between staff and pupils are warm and productive, underpinning the pupils' successful personal development.

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 and the governor with a responsibility for safeguarding. Inspectors observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended quiet times and assemblies. Inspectors attended the sixth form open evening. Inspectors visited 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

Mrs Honoree Gordon

Reporting inspector

Mr Ian Vallance

Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)

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Team inspector (Headmistress, GSA school)