



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Putney High School GDST

April 2023

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School's Details

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| School | Putney High School GDST | | | |
| DfE number | 212/6310 | | | |
| Registered charity number | 306983 | | | |
| Address | Putney High School 35 Putney Hill London SW 15 6BH | | | |
| Telephone number | 020 87884886 | | | |
| Email address | putneyhigh@put.gdst.net | | | |
| Acting Headmistress | Mrs Heidi Armstrong | | | |
| Chair of governors | Mrs Prudence Lynch | | | |
| Proprietor | Girls' Day School Trust | | | |
| Age range | 4 to 18 | | | |
| Number of pupils on roll | 1073 | | | |
| | Reception | 45 | Juniors | 274 |
| | Seniors | 554 | Sixth Form | 200 |
| Inspection dates | 25 to 27 April 2023 | | | |

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Putney High School, established in 1893, is an independent day school for female pupils. It is owned and managed by the Girls' Day School Trust (GDST), which is a registered charity and company with legal responsibility for governance. A local board of governors provides advice and support. The acting head took up her post in April 2023. Since the previous inspection the Athena building has been created to house sciences, music and drama facilities.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to encourage pupils' intellectual agility and curiosity so that they are down to earth, ambitious and unafraid to embrace challenge. It sets out to encourage pupils to develop a scholarly and bold approach to learning, along with the personal qualities of integrity, compassion, respect and an understanding of their social responsibilities.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a wide range of professional and diverse backgrounds across London. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above or well above the average of those taking similar tests nationally. The school has identified 146 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. There are two pupils in the school with an education, health and care plan (EHC). Two of the 207 pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) require and receive additional support for their English. The school provides extension work and challenge for all its pupils within and beyond the classroom.

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. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. 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. 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 standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, 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 junior school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 In the senior school, the school's GCSE and A-level results in the years 2020 to 2022 confirm 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 junior 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'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils of all ages achieve at extremely high levels in academic and extra-curricular activities.
- Pupils' attitudes to their learning are outstanding, as seen in their eagerness to extend their understanding beyond lessons through independent research.
- Pupils have excellent study skills; they are highly perceptive and confident in analysing and synthesising material.
- Pupils are excellent at working collaboratively in pairs or small groups.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils show excellent levels of self-confidence, self-assurance and understanding of how to improve their own learning.
- Pupils are confident decision-makers who take responsibility for managing their learning and are unafraid to seek support as necessary.
- Pupils have an excellent sense of morally acceptable behaviour.
- Pupils have a deeply felt commitment to issues of diversity and equality within the school and society.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Ensure that pupils develop skills when working in larger groups without teacher direction so that all are involved equally in the task.
- Take steps to develop pupils' ability to appreciate further the importance of the non-material in contributing to a full and successful life.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Almost all children in Reception reach a good level of development before moving to Year 1, a number attaining levels well above age-related expectations. The school's own assessment data indicate that pupils in the junior school reach high levels of attainment compared to those taking the same tests nationally. Pupils' attainment in public examinations in 2022 was excellent. At GCSE, a very large majority of results were at grades 8 and 9. Almost three-quarters of entries at A level were awarded

A* or A, with most results being between A* and B. These very high levels of attainment are similar to the centre- and teacher-assessed results in 2020 and 2021. On entry, almost all pupils have an ability above or well above that of others taking the same tests nationally. Even from this high starting point, data analysis shows that almost all pupils achieve GCSE and A-level results significantly above those expected on entry. This consistent pattern of excellent academic attainment is indicative of the very high quality of teaching and learning that is supported by the governors' and school's investment in staff training on the science of learning. In questionnaire results, a very large majority both of parents and of pupils expressed satisfaction with pupils' education and progress. Almost all sixth-form leavers go on to higher education, most to universities with rigorous entrance requirements, and some progressing to conservatoires or art schools.

- 3.6 Throughout the school, pupils make rapid progress in developing knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of the curriculum. The pupils love to learn and to challenge themselves intellectually, physically and creatively, thus demonstrating the school's success in achieving its aim of encouraging intellectual curiosity. Pupils with SEND or EAL achieve at least as well as their peers, well supported by the school's learning enrichment department. The quality of music-making throughout the school, seen in lessons, in rehearsals for a junior school production and for a senior school concert, is excellent. Engagement in theatrical productions is strong, demonstrating well-developed creative skills. Pupils show excellent physical skills in the many sporting opportunities available to them and many play at highly competitive levels. Children in Reception have excellent fine motor skills, seen as they cut, coloured and stuck paper and pompoms to create their own minibests. Understanding of phonics and numeracy at this stage is strong and develops rapidly as pupils move through the school and into the senior school. Scientific knowledge and curiosity are evident throughout the school; junior school pupils spoke enthusiastically about their project on Arctic animals; Year 10 showed excellent prior knowledge and practical skills in an experiment assessing the impact of particle size on rates of reaction. Pupils show a perceptive and analytical understanding of the past and the modern world. For instance, pupils in Year 4 were enthusiastic about their research into important women in the 1920s, and Year 13 pupils showed first rate ability to explore the global distribution of communicable diseases.
- 3.7 Pupils have excellent communication skills. Children in Reception eagerly discussed mini-beasts using mature vocabulary as they referred to predators, prey and habitats. They write neatly with good letter formation. The library is well resourced and junior pupils read avidly, posting reviews on leaves to be added to the recommendation tree. Pupils' imaginative written work shows their wide vocabulary and understanding of literary devices such as rhetorical questions and alliteration. In the senior school, pupils show excellent awareness of the power of language and demonstrate their ability to write in a clear, fluent and sophisticated style. They show an excellent understanding of literary style, evident in Year 12 discussions on *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Pupils independently make notes which are concise and precise. They are highly articulate whether speaking in English or in a foreign language. On occasion, their eagerness to speak is such that listening skills can suffer. They use subject specific terminology confidently and in discussions they express their views and understanding succinctly. This was seen, for example, as Year 9 pupils in design and technology (DT) explained the importance of using renewable materials and Year 10 pupils discussed the rise of China as a global power. They are assured and compelling speakers, as observed in an extra-curricular debate on gender stereotyping in film. Pupils' skill in public speaking is fostered by a culture which actively encourages pupils to articulate their own opinions while respecting those of others.
- 3.8 Mathematics is a real strength of the school and pupils are highly competent mathematicians who take genuine pleasure in the intellectual challenge of numbers. They say that their fascination with the subject has been supported by the school's response to their request that consideration of mathematics is extended across curricular subjects. Children in Reception confidently understand mathematical concepts, explaining that they wanted to make their model snail in three dimensions as they did not want it to be flat. They confidently add and subtract numbers up to 10, some manipulating numbers up to 20. By Year 5, pupils have developed a deep understanding of percentages and fraction

conversions. In a physics lesson, Year 11 pupils confidently used their mathematical skills to calculate solutions to questions on power and electrical energy. Pupils are highly conscious of the way in which mathematics is relevant across the curriculum and apply their knowledge extremely well, for example in geography, textiles, history of art, DT and coding.

- 3.9 Pupils are highly confident and competent in using information and communication technology (ICT). Such skills were honed during the period of school closure and pupils benefit from school leaders' decision to continue the use of online platforms and resources. Children in Reception use the class tablet devices confidently and the school provides junior pupils with their own devices from Year 3 upwards. These are used effectively and creatively, for example when pupils in year 5 confidently used stop animation techniques to produce a film of a myth. Senior pupils appreciate the speedy access to a wide online body of resource material as well as the rapid and helpful feedback on their work. They use ICT purposefully and responsibly. Pupils are confident in using word processing and spreadsheet applications, presentational and computer-aided design software. They view ICT as providing helpful tools to further their learning and progress as well as their organisational skills.
- 3.10 Pupils develop excellent study skills. They approach open-ended challenges with vigour and determination, saying they like to go beyond the point given by their teachers. From an early age they enjoy speculating and drawing together knowledge. Year 4 pupils swiftly called upon their learning about parts of the ear to explain how we hear. Senior school pupils confidently analyse text and a range of sources to make considered hypotheses and draw conclusions. For example, in an English lesson, Year 8 pupils speculated on the story of a play they were about to study by looking at photographs. Year 13 pupils drew swift and thoughtful links between elements in Christ's parables and the beatitudes of the sermon on the mount. Pupils are well able to think beyond the obvious and are encouraged to do so, with a consequent positive impact on their levels of achievement.
- 3.11 Pupils achieve at excellent levels in activities beyond the classroom with considerable successes in academic competitions. Annually a number of junior school pupils are offered scholarships for entry to senior schools. There are numerous successes in music examinations for junior and senior school pupils. Essays produced by sixth-form pupils have won prizes in GDST and university essay competitions. Pupils in the senior school have been winners in competitions for debating, history and creative writing. Each year there are high numbers of awards at bronze, silver and gold levels of the Mathematics challenge and in science Olympiads. Several pupils have completed the gold level of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) while at school. Young Enterprise teams are prize winners annually. Sporting successes proliferate, supported by expert coaching. During the 2021–2022 season, school teams won seven national titles and the school has achieved national recognition for its sporting achievements.
- 3.12 The pupils' attitude to learning is outstanding. The school is highly successful in encouraging pupils to develop the scholarly, bold and intrepid approach of its aims. Pupils are highly motivated and aspirational learners, seen in the numbers taking part in the extension activities offered in the school-devised Athena and Futures programmes. Sixth-form pupils spoke of choosing topics for research projects beyond their own A-level subjects simply because they want to learn about matters which intrigue and puzzle them. In lessons pupils of all ages are unafraid to face intellectual challenge; they are invariably focused and ask thoughtful questions in seeking to learn more. They take the initiative in researching and reading for themselves, embracing the school's culture of curiosity and initiative. They move seamlessly between independent and collaborative work. They work together very well in small groups, although, especially in the junior school, they can find it more challenging to ensure that all pupils are equally involved and have their opinions heard in larger groups.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-discipline are exceptionally well developed. They are highly motivated and they are determined to be the intellectual, intrepid and innovative learners of the school's values. Junior pupils learn strategies to develop a sense of self-confidence and self-worth in the Opening Minds well-being programme, and they express their opinions confidently but respectfully in discussions. Pupils' sense of self-esteem is further developed by the range of opportunities within the curriculum and the extensive extra-curricular programme, so that all pupils can find something which they enjoy and in which they succeed. Year 4 pupils rehearsing for a forthcoming production based on the story of Little Red Riding Hood showed great self-awareness and confidence in conveying the range of emotions experienced when going into the woods. Pupils across the school fearlessly make suggestions in class, knowing that making mistakes is a positive step towards learning. Senior pupils show an excellent ability to reflect on their learning and can identify areas of strength, weakness and steps to improvement. Pupils' determination and resilience is also evident in their approach to sports; the gymnastics squad were seen rigorously exercising to maintain flexibility out of season.
- 3.15 Pupils show highly developed awareness of the importance of making wise decisions. In their imaginative game involving a princess builder, children in Reception decided their own roles in the scenario as builders, cooks or bakers. Older pupils in the juniors were eager to take control of their learning, selecting levels of challenge in mathematics and which aspects of the 1920s to explore as part of the school's cross-curricular Ignite project. Across the school pupils show enthusiasm and common sense in making choices; pupils in Year 8 spoke of deciding to have two nights free of extra-curricular activities so as to balance fun with maintaining a high academic standard; Year 9 pupils cogently explained the decision-making processes involved in their DT project, thinking carefully about the impact of their choices. Pupils had given careful consideration to their choices for GCSE and A-level subjects, with future careers in mind. Year 13 pupils are acutely aware of their own learning preferences and choose to revise in the way that suits them best.
- 3.16 In the junior school, pupils speak naturally about the beauty and wonder of the world around them, from the excitement the Reception children felt in searching for minibeasts to the amazement expressed by pupils in Year 1 at seeing unusual trees on a visit to Wisley Gardens. Throughout the junior school pupils show genuine delight in singing together, becoming absorbed in the sound and the actions they create. Senior school pupils, too, take great aesthetic pleasure in music and art; they listened in attentive silence to the music played in assembly and warmly applauded as it ended. Junior pupils spoke of being affected by their visit to a factory making poppies for Remembrance and were moved as they reflected on the sacrifices and horrors of war in the past and in the present day. Senior school pupils are highly conscious of issues of climate change and sustainability. They are less comfortable in thinking in the abstract about the non-material elements that help give life purpose or meaning, some saying directly that they do not understand the concept of spirituality other than in terms of religious belief. In lessons pupils were eager to explore the factual content but their thinking was rarely encouraged to probe into the philosophical or ethical issues raised. In discussion with inspectors, pupils showed that they can reflect in these terms as they spoke of school trips which they had found inspirational.
- 3.17 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Pupils contributed to the restructuring of the behaviour policy and in questionnaire responses were unanimous in understanding its expectations. Behaviour throughout the school is exemplary. There are excellent relationships between pupils and staff, characterised by mutual respect, kindness and courtesy. Pupils have the maturity to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and an understanding of their responsibilities to others as members of the school community.

- 3.18 Pupils show an excellent capacity to collaborate and work together effectively. In Reception the problem of there being too many children to go into the play house at once was easily solved through a quick discussion and compromise. Year 3 pupils showed good collaborative skills in working in small groups to create obstacle courses and explain them to others, although in doing so some group members dominated so that all were not involved. Senior school pupils are well used to working collaboratively and were seen doing so across the curriculum such as in science, textiles and English. In a Year 10 drama lesson, pupils showed excellent collaborative skills as they worked together to develop their devised piece. Their ability to work well in sports teams is clearly demonstrated and this contributes to their excellent results. A cheerleading club provided an excellent example of learning to rely on teammates, as four pupils coordinated their movement to lift a fifth into the air safely and gracefully.
- 3.19 Pupils are eager to contribute to the school community through the various committees and forums available in juniors and in seniors. These include pupil council, food council and eco ambassadors. Junior school pupils say that some of their initiatives, such as playground pals, have lapsed as a result of the disruption caused by recent periods of remote learning. Senior school pupils are supportive of the recent relaunch of the house system, which they welcome as a means of creating a stronger sense of a whole school community. Pupils have opportunities to take on leadership roles as form representatives or prefects; the number who apply to become members of the senior school leadership team is a reflection of their willingness to accept responsibility. Pupils support a number of charities and outreach activities. Several sixth-form pupils volunteer in local primary schools to help the pupils in their reading. Charity and community support ventures include juniors reading to elderly residents in a care home, senior pupils making sanitary wear for a period poverty project led by sixth-form pupils, and others volunteering in the service element of DofE.
- 3.20 The school community is richly diverse with pupils from differing cultures, religions and backgrounds, and the pupils' genuine respect for diversity in all its forms is clearly evident. Pupils act as diversity representatives, have initiated a diversity club, an LGBTQ+ society and a multi-faith society. Their response to global events, which raised awareness of ethnic, racial and gender inequalities, has resulted in changes in the curriculum and resources to reflect the realities of the school community and of modern Britain, strongly supported by school leaders and governors. Junior pupils routinely contribute to assemblies which celebrate cultural diversity such as the recent one in which Year 4 pupils sang a multilingual welcome song. Senior pupils feel strongly that the school encourages them to be themselves, whatever that self is. They told inspectors that one of the school's strengths is its inclusivity and its culture of respectful understanding of differences of culture, gender and sexuality.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of how to stay safe and healthy, physically and mentally. They are astute in managing their online usage thanks to teaching which re-enforces the message on internet safety frequently. They are conscious of the importance of healthy eating and exercise and they take an active interest in sport which the school facilitates for all abilities. There is a caring and holistic approach to the health and wellbeing of pupils, who are supported academically and emotionally by the school's pastoral team. In the questionnaire, a small minority of pupils said the nurse is not always available; the school has plans to extend the medical facilities to help this situation. The pupils are helped to understand and control their emotions through the *Positive Me* programme in juniors and, in seniors, through personal, social and health education and initiatives such as the *Breathe Week* and mindfulness sessions. Sixth-form pupils feel very well prepared for the next stage of their lives with confident knowledge of how to take responsibility for their wellbeing.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Mrs Colette Culligan | Reporting inspector |
| Mrs Danielle Clarke | Compliance team inspector (Principal, SofH school) |
| Mrs Jeanette Adams | Team inspector (Former deputy head, IAPS school) |
| Mrs Lynne Horner | Team inspector (Former head, SofH school) |
| Mr Nicholas Oakden | Team inspector (Head of Juniors, IAPS school) |
| Ms Rachel Pairman | Team inspector (Deputy head, IAPS school) |
| Mr Kieron Peacock | Team inspector (Former headmaster, IAPS school) |
| Mrs Melanie Pople | Team inspector (Former deputy head, GSA/HMC school) |