



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

**Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report
For Schools with Residential Provision**

Holmwood House School

January 2023

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School's Details

School	Holmwood House School		
DfE number	881/6016		
Early Years registration number	EY2499293		
Address	Holmwood House School Chitts Hill Lexden Colchester Essex CO3 9ST		
Telephone number	01206 574305		
Email address	office@holmwood.house		
Head	Mr Edward Bond		
Chair of governors	Mr Steve Wade		
Proprietor	Bellevue Education International Ltd		
Age range	6 months to 13 years		
Number of pupils on roll	347		
	Day pupils	307	Boarders 40
	EYFS	130	Preparatory 217
Inspection dates	24 to 26 January 2023		

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Holmwood House School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged between six months and thirteen years. Founded in 1922 to educate boys, it became co-educational in 1985. The school occupies two sites on the outskirts of Colchester. Since the previous inspection the school has been purchased by an educational trust whose directors are the governing body. Children from age six months to four years attend the nursery in Great Horkeley, and pupils from age three to thirteen attend the prep school in Lexden. The school has applied to extend its age range to sixteen with effect from September 2023. Pupils in Years 4 to 8 can opt for an overnight stay during the week.
- 1.2 The previous ISI inspection was in July 2018 and the registered EYFS setting was inspected by Ofsted in July 2022, for which a separate report was published.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school's vision is to spark curiosity and ignite wonder in each child, through an inspiring learning environment and boundless opportunities for discovery and explanation. It aims to enable pupils to develop individuality, confidence and tenacity to reach their true potential, achieve personal success and be prepared for life.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds in the Colchester area. Data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is slightly above average compared to pupils taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 41 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), all of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for one pupil, whose needs are supported by classroom teachers. Data used by the school identifies pupils as being the more able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them and for other pupils because of their special talents in music, sport and creative arts.

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, including the National Minimum Standards for Boarding ('boarding NMS'), where applicable. 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, including the boarding NMS. 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.

Additionally, this visit serves as a material change visit to assess the school's proposal to increase its age range to sixteen.

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, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools, 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, the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2022, the 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 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 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. Boarders have access to a suitable programme of activities.
- 2.4 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.
- 2.5 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. Boarders' views are actively encouraged, and their opinions and concerns are appropriately considered by staff. Boarders are supported to develop good relationships with fellow pupils and staff which are based on mutual trust and respect. Any prefect system operating in the school is suitably managed.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] and NMS 13, 17 and 21 are 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 An appropriate induction process for pupils new to boarding is implemented, and suitable provision is made for boarders' medical and health care, their food and drink and for managing boarders' laundry and possessions. Boarders have suitable contact with friends and family. Boarding staff are appropriately trained and deployed.
- 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, and NMS 3, 5–12, 15, 16 and 20 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. Visitors to boarding accommodation are appropriately supervised and the school's arrangements for guardianship are suitably managed.
- 2.12 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] and NMS 19 and 22 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. Boarding accommodation is adequate for the needs of all boarders, and safeguards and promotes their welfare.
- 2.14 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] and NMS 4, 7 and 23 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. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is published by the school.
- 2.16 **The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] and NMS 1 are 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, and identifying those relating to the boarding provision.
- 2.18 **The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] and NMS 14 are 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 wellbeing of the pupils. Appropriate leadership and management of boarding ensure that the required policies and records are maintained and effectively monitored.
- 2.20 **The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] and NMS 2 are met.**

3. The quality and standards of the Early Years Foundation Stage

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

- 3.1 The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is good.
- 3.2 Leadership and management have good procedures in place for evaluation of their practice and identify areas for training to improve effectiveness through regular supervision meetings.
- 3.3 Safeguarding and welfare arrangements are effective and follow statutory guidance. Staff understand their responsibility for protecting children in their care and promoting their well-being. Training and induction are in place to ensure staff have the knowledge to recognise the signs of abuse and understand reporting procedures. Suitable safer recruitment procedures are followed when employing staff. The induction process is thorough; ongoing supervisions support and monitor staff effectively.
- 3.4 Children make good progress in relation to their starting points and are well prepared for their next stage of development. Children with SEND are very well supported and make good progress with appropriate intervention. Planning recognises the needs and strengths of individual children. Transition activities are planned carefully to ensure that the babies and children are well prepared for their next stage.
- 3.5 Children respond positively to the widespread opportunities to communicate with staff and other children in the setting. Early language development is encouraged. Staff model clear pronunciation, instructions and guidance but time is not always allowed for children to respond to ensure that they have fully understood instructions. Children enjoy stories, rhymes and songs and are excited to join in with known nursery rhymes.
- 3.6 Children observed in the setting are happy, safe, and secure, having formed excellent relationships with the staff and each other across the Nursery in a nurturing and stimulating environment. Staff demonstrate excellent levels of care, warmth and happiness.

Quality of education

- 3.7 The quality of education is good.
- 3.8 Staff promote good outcomes for children. Key persons are knowledgeable of the children in their care and use activities based around children's interests to motivate the children to progress onto their next steps. Planning does not always have a clear learning intent, which results in some children not being appropriately challenged.
- 3.9 Children were observed to sustain a good degree of concentration and enjoyment when engaged in meaningful learning experiences. These included brushing their teeth, preparing tea in the home corner, hammering in nails, and dressing and undressing the dolls. These activities were effective in educating the children in a safe environment, providing them with opportunities to mirror adult modelling of activities.
- 3.10 Children are able to articulate their needs and are encouraged to use their voices within their play, self-care, activity time and when talking to the adults. However, this could be encouraged further as they progress through the setting. For example, when reading children a story and talking about the importance of trying even if we make mistakes, opportunities were lost to allow children to talk about things they found difficult and to relate this to resilience.
- 3.11 Practitioners communicate clearly and positively with the children, regularly questioning them, although they do not always check children's comprehension. Children observed had a good understanding and application of counting skills appropriate for their age, for example two-year-olds were able to count the children in the class to 11 with adult support. Children observed demonstrated

development at an appropriate level in their fine and gross motor skills when feeding themselves and when negotiating the indoor and outdoor environment within the well-resourced setting.

- 3.12 Children are carefully prepared for each stage of their development including through visits from their new key person, visits to their new room and key person transfer meetings. A child who had recently moved to the next class was seen to have already built up a good relationship with her key person, who demonstrated a strong grasp of her needs, care plan, stages of development and next steps.

Behaviour and attitudes

- 3.13 Behaviour and attitudes are good.
- 3.14 The culture in the nursery setting is universally positive, warm and respectful and behaviour observed was very good. An example of this was seen when a child in the pre-school room who wanted to tell about his snack time choices began with “excuse me”. Children are kind and loving towards each other, supporting with a hug or helping each other get dressed for outdoor play. Staff model extremely warm and positive behaviour at all times and in turn children respond well to this.
- 3.15 Children enjoy playing and exploring in the outdoor area which is spacious and has a wide range of opportunities for exploration and discovery. Children are confident to explore; two-year-olds keenly explored the secret garden, investigating a range of natural materials and demonstrating good co-ordination and dexterity whilst hammering in nails.
- 3.16 Children listen to the staff and are confident to try new activities, trusting in adults to support them, and responding positively with a smile. Children respond appropriately to questions. For example, when asked if they would like to do the teeth brushing activity they quickly put on aprons and waited patiently at the table to begin. Pre-school children are confident when experimenting with new objects and in new environments. They enjoy collaborating, for example when counting vehicles in the sand. Children sing spontaneously and readily join in with choruses and refrains.
- 3.17 Children are able to choose from the different activities on offer and are given opportunities to explore. They make and learn from their own mistakes and are not disheartened. For example, when painting through until there was a hole in the paper, pupils giggled and applied less paint the next time.
- 3.18 Parents spoken to were highly complimentary about their and their children’s experiences, and this was reflected in the questionnaires. Amongst replies that were almost without exception positive about all aspects of the setting, parents highlighted the sensitive way in which children had been integrated or re-integrated into the Nursery after periods of absence during lockdowns.

Personal development

- 3.19 The personal development of children is good.
- 3.20 Children observed who had joined recently were well settled both emotionally and developmentally. Those with potentially more complex needs are appropriately supported. Those who experience difficulty in separating from their parents are particularly well supported with adaptations, such as shorter periods in the setting. Children observed were confident to try activities across the classroom and in the outdoor area and demonstrated independence in all areas of development.
- 3.21 Children have a balanced diet which is prepared freshly on the school site and engage in preparing their own snack from a range of fruits and vegetables. Children are continually encouraged to drink water throughout the day. Opportunities are seized to enable children to develop both their independence and confidence to try new skills. This was seen at snack time when, under supervision, children cut up peppers before eating them.
- 3.22 Children have opportunities to take age-appropriate risks within their play environment both indoors and outside. They climb on tyres, vehicles, planks, swings and larger constructions, learning through

experience about mitigating risk. Staff encourage children to climb up and down from these types of equipment carefully and stay close by as children risk manage themselves and navigate themselves on and off items safely.

- 3.23 Each child's relationship with and reliance on a key person is well embedded. Children demonstrate secure attachments within the warm, close, and happy environment of the setting. Staff have a strong grasp of all the characters in each of the rooms and respect their individuality. Key persons were observed working with children one to one and supporting their welfare needs such as nappy changing and drinks. At the same time, children independently explored other areas of the classroom before seeking out their key person for reassurance.
- 3.24 Staff plan to support children's physical skills well. Children strengthen their hand muscles by using a variety of malleable materials such as play dough. Babies enjoy using toy hammers to smash ice, developing their strength.
- 3.25 Children are encouraged to be independent in their self-care and hygiene from a very early age with hand washing, wiping noses and toileting. For example, after showing two-year-old children how to wipe their noses, key persons allowed the children to try it for themselves. Independently and without guidance children successfully undertook the task and deposited their tissues in a bin.
- 3.26 Staff model warmth, gentleness, and kindness in their interactions with all of the children and each other and in turn this is demonstrated by the children in the setting, who listen to each other and respond respectfully.

Leadership and management

- 3.27 Leadership and management are good.
- 3.28 Managers are highly focused upon the provision of high-quality care and education through shared policies and procedures and a warm, caring culture. They engage with all children and are regular visitors to each of the classrooms. Managers have an input into planning, observations, and assessments. They are experienced, and their understanding of the age group provides strong foundations upon which to build their vision for the future.
- 3.29 The proprietorial body and wider school leadership is supportive and has a good knowledge of the setting. They provide good oversight of the implementation of statutory requirements. Leaders fulfil their statutory duties under the equality act 2010 and other duties in relation to safeguarding and safer recruitment.
- 3.30 The Nursery has a clear vision, but long- and short-term planning is not always well synchronised with that of the wider school, which misses opportunities to share the most effective approaches from both sites.
- 3.31 Staff are extremely well supported by managers and have termly supervision meetings which cover all areas of wellbeing, work relationships, safeguarding, key children, first aid and individual professional development. Children in the setting are well supported, particularly those with additional needs, who have comprehensive plans in place to support them effectively on their individual learning journey.
- 3.32 Parents report that communication with themselves, children and others in the community is excellent.

Compliance with statutory requirements

- 3.33 The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006 and no action is required.**

Recommendations for further improvement

In addition to the above action points, the school is advised to make the following improvements to its provision for children in the early years.

- Ensure curriculum planning includes clear learning intent, with appropriate challenge for each stage of children's development.
- Ensure that staff check that children fully understand any instructions they are given.
- Integrate more fully the educational vision and material needs of the Nursery into whole school planning.

4. Recommendation with regard to material change request

Summary of findings

- 4.1 The school meets the standards and is likely to continue to do so if the material change is approved. The proprietors and school's leadership have suitably planned for a phased increase in the age range. Curriculum documentation, including schemes of work, are appropriate, and the school already has teachers with suitable qualifications and experience to teach to GCSE. PSHE schemes of work, including provision for RSE, have been revised. There is a suitable framework for assessment in place. Boarding accommodation has the flexibility to accommodate a greater age range for both male and female pupils.

Recommendation

- 4.2 It is recommended that the school's application to increase its age range to six months to 16 years be approved.

5. 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

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

- Pupils develop high standards of knowledge, skills and understanding in all areas of the curriculum.
- Pupils' excellent individual progress is supported by thoughtful and informed planning, although strategies for this are not consistent between the sites in the pre-school age groups.
- Pupils have exceptional communication skills which ensures that the well embedded collaborative approach to learning is productive.
- Individual and groups of pupils achieve strongly in the creative and performing arts and in sport.

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

- Pupils are highly self-reflective and develop individuality, tenacity and confidence as they move through the school.
- The school's strong encouragement of collaborative approaches is highly successful in promoting pupils' personal and social development.
- Pupils show excellent moral understanding but are less aware of the non-material aspects of life.
- Pupils have an excellent understanding of strategies to maintain their physical and mental fitness.

Recommendations

5.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Implement greater cohesion in the short- and long-term planning for younger pupils on the school's two sites to ensure that educational outcomes for pre-school pupils are optimised.
- Implement approaches and identify opportunities to deepen pupils' spiritual awareness.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

5.5 Pupils develop very high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding as they move through the school. In this way the school very successfully fulfils its aim for pupils to reach their true potential and achieve personal success. The school uses a variety of data systems to monitor achievement and progress and identify pupils' academic and attitudinal strengths and weaknesses. These findings are integrated into the planning of lessons, which consequently enhances pupils' progress. Analysis shows

that pupils make generally consistently strong progress from their entry points in both mathematics and English. Any ripples are addressed, and if appropriate, the school's leadership has reviewed either curriculum or teaching approaches. The school has analysed progress of particular groups within the umbrella of SEND, and nearly all these achieve in line with other pupils, particularly in mathematics. This data confirms the observations of inspectors in lessons, in interviews and in the scrutiny of pupil work. The large majority of parents replying to the questionnaires said that their child's individual needs were met.

- 5.6 Children in the EYFS demonstrate excellent levels of knowledge and understanding across all areas of learning. Reception children analysed dinosaur excrement to successfully identify the difference between herbivores and carnivores. In the pre-prep, pupils were able to confidently classify materials and explain ways in which they can be recycled. The rapid progress made by the younger pupils of all ability and need is a consequence of detailed planning with well-defined learning intents. In the pre-inspection questionnaire completed by older pupils, almost all said that their knowledge and skills improve in most lessons.
- 5.7 Pupils are confident inter-disciplinary thinkers who demonstrate their ability to link knowledge from different areas. An example of this was seen in their exploration of the world of finance which incorporated scientific concepts, de-coding messages and sustainability. Pupils excel in tasks that require their creative thinking. For example, in English, they wrote an outstanding piece of work with strong linguistic elements in addition to their imagination. In arts, an Egyptian theme inspired pupils to develop their own design of prints. The patterns and colours that they printed on paper and fabric showcased how they can build on their newly acquired knowledge and skills creatively. Lesson planning draws on their pupils' flexibility and enthusiasm to cross curricular boundaries. Pupils are stimulated, and almost all reported that they found lessons interesting.
- 5.8 Children in the EYFS and younger pupils read and write with confidence using their phonic knowledge, applying their skills across the curriculum. For example, Reception pupils phonetically built up words to name a sea creature. Pupils actively engage in reading. The youngest pupils had to be coerced out of the well-stocked library, and seemingly around every corner was observed a pupil "head down" in a book. Pupils write with sophistication, identifying appropriate style and language. In a lesson focusing on the *Ballad of Charlotte Dymond*, older pupils astutely identified the different genres in creating their own ballads and a contemporary newspaper report. More able Year 3 pupils quickly mastered the position of the apostrophe in the possessive, although this is work from the year above. The variety of tasks over a short period stimulated their thinking and understanding. In modern languages, more able pupils successfully included connectives and intensifiers in extended complex sentences. The demand for pupils to use the target language instilled confidence in those more reticent to speak in a foreign language. Pupils have acquired a good range of vocabulary, although only a few have mastered phonemes at a level which enables them to successfully imitate a native accent.
- 5.9 Pupils show well-developed physical skills. From a young age, children are confident in the water, turning around and changing direction as they travel across the swimming pool. Children in the EYFS show good levels of coordination, balance and strength in their playground activity. All pupils participate successfully and enthusiastically in the wide range of sporting activities that the high quality of grounds and facilities allow. Individuals and teams have a strong record in county, regional and national competitions, and pupils are regularly awarded sports scholarships to senior schools.
- 5.10 In the questionnaire almost all parents agreed that the range of curricular and extra-curricular activities was suitable for their children. Pupils are as enthusiastic about music and drama as they are about sport. The majority of pupils take part in the regular drama and musical productions, and the standards achieved are excellent, and occasionally exceptional, for their age. Individual performers routinely achieve distinctions in external music and drama examinations. By the time they leave the school, pupils are producing a good and sometimes excellent quality of two- and three-dimensional art for their age. Pupils learn how western art has evolved, and this historical backcloth influences

their choice of subject and medium. Many portfolios show excellent research skills and a no “rush to complete” approach. During the inspection Year 8 pupils were skilfully developing their own story boards in preparation for an animation, collaborating to perfect the exact detail before moving on to the next stage.

- 5.11 Pupils’ communication skills are exceptional. Children in the EYFS become confident, articulate speakers and listeners, benefiting from the encouragement to collaborate in their learning. Pupils enjoy working in small groups, they listen attentively to their peers, and they successfully and, for their age fluently, verbalise their thoughts. Older pupils naturally speak, listen, argue and debate, and the collaboration this allows fully supports and enhances their academic achievements. In subject specific areas they use technical vocabulary accurately. These high levels are observed during unstructured time: pupils listen to each other attentively and respond appropriately, either by adding more information or respectfully challenging what has been said. Boarders’ listening skills, alongside their strong emotional intelligence, result in effective support for their fellow boarders when they are homesick, unwell or when boarding for the first time.
- 5.12 Data correlates with work in books, outcomes at 11+ and 13+, and observations in lessons to support the judgement that pupils’ mathematics is a strength of the school. Levels of numeracy amongst the youngest pupils are high. Pre-Reception children sequenced days of the week, months of the year and numbers to 30. Year 2 pupils confidently counted in 2s, 5s and 10s and applied this knowledge to total £10 with different coinage. Pupils of all ages are arithmetically confident, have a quick recall of multiplication tables, and are unafraid to solve problems. Much of the mathematics is contextualised, for example in their financial maths research project, where pupils explained mathematical concepts such as interest, inflation and commodities market. However, pupils equally enjoy and benefit from formal calculative work. Pupils with SEND observed make equally good progress, supported by appropriately challenging tasks and apposite support from assistants and other pupils.
- 5.13 Pupils’ use of information and communication technology (ICT) is both functional and creative, with the former well embedded in pupils’ learning approaches, and the latter developing. Pupils’ responsible use of ICT ensures that it aids rather than distracts from learning. Changes in the curriculum are supporting more pupils to discover the opportunities for creative challenge. Those who are more talented in this area have, for example, designed QR codes for use by other pupils to record and retrieve their work. Children in the EYFS confidently use digital devices to record their work and the work of their friends.
- 5.14 Pupils’ study skills are highly developed and are fostered, encouraged and embedded across the school range. Pupils are encouraged to persevere and solve problems from an early age and enjoy the challenge of thinking creatively and independently. Year 3 pupils used erasers, pencil sharpeners and rulers to model the melting of polar ice, in parallel explaining how the “atmosphere trapped the sun in”. The confidence shown in experimental work reflects the emphasis on practical investigations in the younger year groups. At this early stage pupils make informed predictions, for example on the flexibility of different materials. Year 7 pupils analysed a wide range of sources during a scavenger hunt in history, and rapidly synthesised the information to develop their understanding of the hierarchy of a medieval village. There were many other such examples of the school successfully achieving its aims to spark curiosity and ignite wonder in each child.
- 5.15 All pupils have excellent attitudes to their learning. They persevere, enjoy challenge, and are determined to succeed alongside, but not to outdo their friends. They collaborate effectively and naturally, often without trigger from teachers. Their strong communication skills ensure collaboration is productive. Asked about their independent study time, pupils remarked ‘it’s the time you do individual work, because in lessons we learn so much more together’.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 5.16 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 5.17 The school very successfully fulfils its aim to develop individuality, confidence and tenacity so that pupils are prepared for life. In the questionnaires almost every parent agreed that the school had helped their child to be confident and independent. The youngest children demonstrate an extremely high level of self-confidence. They are able to recognise their own strengths and identify the level of work that they should try. They demonstrate an excellent level of self-understanding; they are proud of themselves and each other and reflect upon their academic and social achievements, showing resilience and a mature outlook for their age. In discussions and in lessons older pupils similarly show high levels of self-understanding and the knowledge as to what makes a good character. They are self-analytical, thinking beyond the superficial. Pupils who had befriended Syrian refugees spoke with extraordinary maturity about the personal impact it had made on them. Pupils are self-assured learners who have developed their ability to reflect on their learning and identify areas of further improvement and the steps they need to take to achieve their aims. They have strong self-discipline, working with focus during independent study sessions, and with common purpose when collaborating in lessons. Pupils who had experienced the overnight stays that constitute the school's boarding arrangements commented how they developed independence and tolerance. All parents said that the boarding experience had supported their child's development.
- 5.18 As they move through the school pupils develop the confidence to make their own decisions. The wide variety of outside equipment successfully challenges children in the EYFS to assess risk. In a phonics lesson, Reception children made their own choices about their activities, and slightly older children decided between the hot or mild chilli challenge in mathematics. The planning of lessons ensures that pupils are given choice in their learning across the curriculum. These include selection of their medium in art, in the style of presentation in English, and in their preferred method in algebra. The development of strong decision making is inherent in the ethos of the school. In line with its aim, pupils are capable of independent and reasoned thought, and are well prepared to make more life changing decisions later in their school careers.
- 5.19 Pupils' awareness of the non-material aspects of life is relatively less well developed. In discussion, some pupils described the value of reflecting and employing mindfulness techniques in their daily life. They value opportunities provided by outdoor learning to enjoy the natural world, but rarely move beyond a superficial appreciation of the beauty of their physical surroundings. Exceptionally, in PHSE, some pupils pondered from both spiritual and scientific perspectives what makes a collection of cells human. Most pupils, experience spiritual uplift only in their musical performances, or through their art.
- 5.20 Pupils have strong moral attitudes, evident in their clear understanding of what is right and wrong. They are highly respectful of the school rules. In the questionnaires almost all parents said that the school promoted good behaviour. Pupils show impeccable manners towards adults and each other. They are comfortable correcting behaviour of other pupils in a gentle and polite way, ensuring that pupils do not get themselves into a difficult position. They show particular consideration for, and understanding of, pupils with behavioural and learning barriers, modelling their attitudes on the inclusive approach of staff. As a result, these groups feel secure and make considerable progress in their personal development. Pupils are keen to debate greater moral issues, such as mitigation and retribution in their cross-curricular theme of murder, or different views of abortion in PSHE. In a paragraph on the prologue to Romeo and Juliet, Year 7 pupils skilfully analysed how choice of language would cause Elizabethan audiences to confront their own guilt. They bring to moral issues clear and flexible thinking. In this area the school very successfully achieves its aim of encouraging pupils to be responsible for their own learning, respect others around them, and to adopt a proactive approach to care, courtesy and consideration.

- 5.21 Collaboration, support and caring for others are strongly woven into the fabric of the school ethos. High quality social interaction is strongly promoted in lessons and activities. Written work shows pupils' sophisticated awareness of relationships, for example in identifying the portrayal of family and friendships in *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The buddy system, which allows each pupil at times to be both mentor and mentee, is highly valued by pupils and fosters excellent relationships between year groups. Pupils appreciate how pairing of two pupils of different academic abilities can benefit both. In boarding, more experienced pupils help first-time boarders to settle in and support those who are homesick or anxious. Children in the EYFS take their specific roles seriously, including holding the door and leading the line. Children respect the importance of taking turns, and willingly share equipment in the outside areas. In the questionnaire almost every parent said that the school equips their child with the team working and collaborative skills they need in later life. Older pupils in particular are well involved in groups to improve the well-being of others, both inside and outside the school community. Formal leadership roles such as heads of Elements (houses), charity and eco-representatives are fulfilled with good sense and a focus on impact. Pupils regularly raise money for local, national and international charities. Occasionally this work is initiated by pupils themselves. Inspectors attended both school council and house meetings. Both were distinguished by the near absence of staff intervention, and by the quality of leadership shown by older pupils, who integrated and involved younger members of the school, and consciously included those with SEND. Pupils' sports reports did not concentrate on results, rather members of teams acknowledged others for significant performances, each comment greeted with applause. In this collaborative approach fellow pupils promoted each other's confidence and well-being, very successfully fulfilling another of the school's aims.
- 5.22 Pupils' written work shows an excellent understanding of religious festivals and symbolism. Examples included contrasting the relative importance of Epiphany across the world, and the importance of water in religious worship. Discussions with pupils demonstrated their innate appreciation of different national roots or religious faith. Children in the EYFS demonstrated a good understanding of what difference and individuality through the story of Elmer the Elephant. In questionnaire responses that were very supportive of the school's governance and leadership overall, all parents said that the school promotes values of respect and tolerance. Assertions by pupils in discussion, correlated with records of behaviour and bullying and questionnaire responses, confirm that there are virtually no incidents in this area based on race, faith or gender. Pupils reflected on the value they placed on PHSE lessons in discussing these issues.
- 5.23 Pupils have an excellent grasp of what constitutes a healthy lifestyle. They make healthy food choices and understand what a balanced diet means in everyday life. Pupils are well-equipped to manage their emotions, especially when they feel overwhelmed or anxious. Their strategies include discussing their feelings with their friends, taking part in sport, and reflecting on their day. They acknowledge the need for rationality and perspective. Pupils enjoy physical activity through the school's wide-ranging sports programme, and they spend a good proportion of their free time outdoors taking advantage of the school grounds. In discussions, many pupils cited the independent study session as a major contribution to them achieving a balance of life in the evenings and at a weekend.

6. Inspection Evidence

- 6.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended house meetings. Inspectors visited boarding accommodation and 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

Mr Stephen Cole	Reporting inspector
Mr Ralph Dalton	Compliance team inspector (Head, ISA school)
Mrs Emma Patel	Team inspector (deputy head, IAPS school)
Dr Ellen Hesse	Team inspector for boarding (Principal-elect, ISA school)
Mrs Allison Skipper	Co-ordinating inspector for early years (Head, ISA school)
Mrs Moyra Thompson	Team inspector for early years (Head, ISA school)