

School inspection report

13 to 15 January 2026

Holmwood House School

Chitts Hill
Lexden
Colchester
CO3 9ST

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders ensure that pupils' wellbeing is at the heart of their decisions and actions. They facilitate staff spending time getting to know every pupil well so that they can ensure that their pastoral needs are met. As a result, pupils experience positive relationships and are confident in how they are valued and recognised at school.
2. Leaders and governors work effectively to ensure that they comply with statutory requirements and that the Standards are met consistently. At the start of the inspection process, not all previous inspection reports were available on the school's website. This was remedied by the end of the inspection.
3. Leaders have high expectations for pupils' academic progress. They implement a curriculum that enables pupils to gain new knowledge as well as develop skills, such as reasoning and evaluation, that make them effective learners. Leaders monitor the curriculum to ensure that it remains appropriate and that pupils are making progress.
4. Teaching is well planned and appropriately paced, enabling pupils to build secure knowledge, apply prior learning and articulate their understanding across the curriculum. Typically, teachers provide support and challenge for the different variety of aptitudes of the pupils so that pupils can deepen their knowledge and understanding. This is not consistently the case across subjects and year groups which means that some pupils do not always extend their learning in lessons.
5. Pupils show high levels of kind and respectful behaviour. This is as a result of the school's consistent approach to promoting the '3Cs' of care, courtesy and consideration. Pupils are encouraged to display these values in their interactions with others. As a result, they have a well-developed moral understanding, are respectful of diversity and are polite to each other.
6. Leaders ensure that pupils develop their confidence and self-esteem. Positive relationships with staff enable pupils to develop a quiet and respectful confidence so that they can articulate their views and ask questions. Termly one-to-one mentoring meetings with staff enable pupils to reflect on and celebrate their achievements. Pupils make use of the '5Rs' of resilience, resourcefulness, responsibility, reasoning and reflection and the 'SPARK' values of skills, passion, aspiration, responsibility and kindness as frameworks to consider themselves as confident and effective learners.
7. The character education programme enables pupils to develop virtues, such as moral and civic values, that prepare them to make a positive contribution to school life and the wider community. Pupils are supported to reflect on how they are developing their character and what further actions they might like to consider. This results in pupils who understand how they can benefit others and the responsibility that comes with living in a community.
8. A robust approach to safeguarding ensures governors, leaders and staff understand their responsibilities. This promotes consistent safeguarding practices that protect pupils and foster a safe learning environment. Safeguarding training is comprehensive and well structured. Staff, including in the early years and in boarding, receive appropriate and timely training and guidance.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all required information is available on the school's website
- ensure that teaching is consistently adapted for pupils with different aptitudes so that they can be supported and challenged to extend their learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing. They invest time to create positive and nurturing relationships. This boosts pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Through their character education, leaders promote a culture in which respect and kindness are central to the way in which staff interact with pupils. As a result, pupils show the same values to each other, enhancing the school's warm and caring environment.
10. Governors have suitable oversight of the school. They collaborate with leaders to evaluate their work and create strategic plans for further growth. Governors and leaders are responsive to the views of pupils, parents and staff when they are working on development plans. As a result, they include stakeholders in how the school can improve further, such as engaging with parents about how the school's work on equality, diversity and inclusion can further improve. They respond to pupils' ideas, such as suggestions for additional after-school clubs. They include the staff in their vision to continue to refine the curriculum so that it prepares pupils for their future lives.
11. Governors provide support and professional development opportunities to enable leaders to hone their skills so that they can fulfil their roles effectively. Governors review policies and collaborate with leaders to ensure that they are implemented consistently. Through visits to the school, and by scrutinising key performance data, leaders and governors review practice to ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
12. Leadership of the early years is effective. Leaders know what they do well and areas for improvement, through their detailed self-evaluation and careful monitoring of teaching and learning. Leaders in the early years liaise well with leaders in the rest of the school to ensure that the transitions for children are smooth and successful. Leaders in the early years provide staff with appropriate support through induction, training and regular supervision. This ensures that children are nurtured and supported within a caring environment in which their wellbeing is at the forefront of practice.
13. Leaders for boarding ensure that they meet the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools (NMS) through evaluation of their work and by ensuring that boarding staff have appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding. Leaders develop and regularly review a comprehensive range of risk assessments and policies for boarding so that facilities and practices for boarding pupils are suitable and effective.
14. Leaders and governors demonstrate a proactive and positive approach to risk management. They consider a range of risks and implement relevant mitigating factors with the aim of providing an environment in which pupils feel safe and secure. Risk assessments for school facilities and off-site visits are thorough. Staff receive effective training so that they can regularly review risk assessments to inform future planning.
15. Leaders provide copies of key policies and other important information on the school's website. They ensure that parents receive detailed information about their child's progress. At the start of the inspection, not all previous inspection reports were available on the website. This was resolved by the end of the inspection process.
16. Leaders ensure that they meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 by drawing up and implementing a suitable accessibility plan. They consider actions to increase inclusion for those who

have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), such as providing resources so that pupils can access the curriculum and looking at how the site can be made more accessible.

17. Leaders maintain effective communication with external agencies. They inform the local authority about funding of education, health and care plans (EHC plans) and collaborate when conducting annual reviews of any EHC plans. Leaders provide relevant information to the local authority attendance officer about pupils who leave and join the school at non-standard transition times.
18. Leaders implement a complaints policy with suitable timescales and opportunities for complaints to be managed informally as well as formally. The policy is made available to parents on the school's website. Governors are involved in the complaints process when required. Leaders keep appropriate records, including details of any actions taken as a result of complaints.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders provide a comprehensive and ambitious curriculum that is also designed to help pupils acquire important learning skills, such as resilience and independence, to enable pupils to become effective learners. The curriculum for younger pupils is planned through 'learning arcs', which link different areas of learning and ensure that new learning is connected to prior knowledge and skills. As pupils get older, they experience an increase in the number of subject-specialist teachers. This culminates in Years 10 and 11, where pupils can access a range of GCSE options. At this stage, leaders respond to pupils' interests where possible, such as recently providing a BTEC Firsts option in travel and tourism and GCSE in business studies.
21. Teachers have good subject knowledge and employ a variety of teaching strategies to engage pupils, such as mini whiteboards, discussion with others and independent research. They encourage pupils to develop their reasoning skills by asking probing questions to justify their views. Pupils learn how to analyse information, such as considering advantages and disadvantages of different types of transport. They develop skills in evaluation, such as comparing answers to mark schemes to consider how their work could improve. Teachers share learning objectives and success criteria with pupils. This enables pupils to understand what is required of them in lessons. Typically, teachers ensure that they provide effective support and challenge to pupils, especially for the youngest and oldest pupils. There is some inconsistency in how teachers adapt their teaching to support and challenge pupils so that they learn as effectively as they should.
22. Teachers in the early years provide a well-considered and planned curriculum to enable children to learn effectively. Children are supported to make connections in their learning. For example, children make wormeries to develop their understanding of what worms need to live and also measure and compare the length of worms to develop their mathematical understanding. Staff interactions with the children are purposeful and well judged. Skilled questioning encourages children to explain their thinking and develop their reasoning and oral language. As children progress through Reception and get ready for the transition to Year 1, they learn phonics, which they apply to reading and writing simple sentences and they begin to formalise their practical understanding of mathematical concepts.
23. Leaders ensure that suitable assessment procedures are in place, incorporating standardised tests, end-of-topic assessments and end-of-term tests. This enables leaders and teachers to monitor that pupils are making good progress in their learning and to identify if any pupils require additional support to sustain their progress.
24. Leaders ensure that pupils who have SEND are assisted with targeted support to meet individual needs. Leaders compile and regularly review profiles for pupils who have SEND. These are accessible to staff so that they can be considered in teachers' planning. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, such as visiting professionals who support pupils' needs.
25. Leaders identify pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and assess their level of knowledge. When required, these pupils receive structured language support, with personalised adaptations to the curriculum. This promotes improvements in their linguistic skills and also contributes to notable progress in other subjects.

26. Leaders provide an enrichment programme, which includes a variety of clubs, to enable pupils to learn new skills and develop their interests. Pupils can access clubs such as drama, construction, sport and cookery, while enhancing their social interactions with others. Leaders encourage pupils to participate in a termly overnight stay as part of the boarding experience so that pupils can enhance their independence and confidence. At these times, pupils can take part in outdoor activities such as orienteering, often dressing up as part of the theme for the evening, such as superheroes.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. Leaders prioritise pupils' emotional wellbeing and promote effective pastoral care. They develop nurturing relationships with the pupils and get to know them as individuals. Teachers use form times effectively to have a daily 'check-in' with individual pupils so that they are settled and ready for the day. As a result, pupils are confident to speak to an adult at school if they are worried about themselves or a friend. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme empowers pupils to develop calming strategies, such as breathing exercises or accessing the library as a safe space. There are systems in place to support pupils, such as speaking to the school counsellor or having 'thrive' sessions to discuss managing emotions.
29. Leaders uphold and promote the '3Cs' of care, courtesy and consideration to encourage a positive culture of mutual respect. This gives pupils a well-understood framework for their respectful behaviour towards each other and adults at school. They show empathy in their interactions with others, voluntarily helping and demonstrating politeness and manners. They celebrate diversity, understanding and respecting the differences between themselves and others.
30. The '3Cs' underpin the school's behaviour policy, which is implemented fairly and consistently. Pupils understand expectations and display high standards of positive behaviour. Rewards are effective in reinforcing the school's values and promoting moral character. Sanctions are used when required and often involve reflection time so that pupils are supported to understand how they can improve their own behaviour. Bullying is rare but leaders are effective at resolving any issues that do arise.
31. Leaders implement a detailed relationships and sex education (RSE) programme through well-planned and taught PSHE lessons. Within RSE sessions, pupils learn how to develop healthy and nurturing relationships, such as qualities of friendship and how to navigate conflict. In age-appropriate ways, pupils learn about consent and puberty. Older pupils learn about how these apply to sexual relationships.
32. Leaders develop pupils' confidence and self-esteem by recognising their individual talents and achievements. Through the '5Rs' and 'SPARK', teachers help pupils to understand and display skills that constitute a successful learner. Pupils are recognised in assemblies when they have shown one of these attributes, such as persisting in the face of adversity or expressing their thinking with clarity. This further enhances pupils' confidence that they have the skills to achieve and make progress. The performing arts programme, encompassing music and drama, enables pupils to develop their self-esteem as they learn how to express themselves and perform in public.
33. Teachers enable pupils to develop their spirituality by understanding themselves and their connections with others. Pupils develop their self-knowledge through reflection times, such as 'correct and reflect' in form times and during their termly mentoring meetings. At these times, pupils consider the school's values and how these have an impact on themselves and the way in which they interact with others.
34. Leaders are effective at promoting positive physical health. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy. They learn about nutrition in science lessons and have access to healthy options at lunch. Pupils develop fitness and core strength through the well-planned and implemented

physical education (PE) programme, which emphasises personal progress and healthy lifestyles. Pupils have regular swimming lessons and take part in team sports, such as rugby and hockey. The sports programme is inclusive, with pupils having the opportunity to represent their school and captain a team. Pupils understand the link to character development, reflecting on how skills such as teamwork and resilience can be promoted through sport.

35. Teachers in the early years plan a variety of activities to enable children to be physically active. Children take part in regular swimming and PE lessons to increase their fitness and agility. They climb on apparatus and play with small equipment to develop their co-ordination and dexterity.
36. Leaders have a robust approach towards health and safety in the school and boarding provision, including risks relating to fire safety. Regular checks and external audits enable prompt response to any issues. Leaders have termly meetings to review trends and prioritise actions. Fire drills are carried out regularly, including at boarding times, so that pupils know how to safely evacuate buildings.
37. Leaders ensure that boarding provision provides suitable accommodation, with access to comfortable sleeping arrangements, appropriate washing facilities and nutritious food options. There are effective induction arrangements for those who are new to boarding. Leaders have appropriate policies and procedures in place to ensure that they meet pupils' needs and that the environment is secure and welcoming.
38. Teachers supervise pupils well throughout the school day to promote their wellbeing. Leaders ensure that they comply with appropriate ratios in the early years, including when children are eating and sleeping.
39. Leaders maintain suitable admission and attendance registers that meet statutory requirements. Leaders promote the importance of attendance and monitor attendance rates. They are sensitive when supporting pupils and their families to improve any attendance issues, demonstrating success so that pupils can attend school regularly.
40. Leaders manage pupils' medical needs effectively by providing trained first aiders, including paediatric first aiders for children in the early years. There are suitable medical rooms with secure storage for medicines.

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

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

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

42. Leaders promote values such as democracy, the rule of law and the role of important public institutions through the curriculum. Leaders also give pupils first-hand experiences of these values in practice. For example, leaders conduct regular surveys to gather pupils' views and have an active school council and eco-committee. Members of the school council undertake presentations to the governors so that pupils can suggest ideas as to how the school could further improve. Pupils elect members of the school council and leaders of the 'elements', which is the house system. Pupils learn about the role of the Government during enrichment lessons and in UK Parliament week. They explore individual liberty when considering how and when they are able to make their own decisions and voice their opinions. Older pupils debate the UN's right to education and the inequalities faced across the world by those who are denied an education.
43. The curriculum for religious education enables pupils to develop their cultural understanding when learning about different religious festivals, such as Hannukah, Diwali, Ramadan and Christmas, and why these are important celebrations within those religions. PSHE lessons and assemblies provide pupils with opportunities to explore different cultural events for people living in and outside of the UK and the rights of people in line with the Equality Act 2010. Pupils' learning through the curriculum deepens their understanding of the importance of inclusion and mutual respect.
44. The school's focus on character education encourages pupils to reflect on moral and civic virtues. They link this to their responsibility to promote the common good for the school and local community. Pupils support charities that make valuable contributions to the local area, with charities often democratically elected in house meetings. Older pupils volunteer in the community as part of The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Leaders encourage pupils to take responsibility for the school's environment and develop their understanding of sustainability through the eco-committee. Pupils work together such as by creating posters to remind people to use less electricity and by planting wildflower seeds to benefit pollinating insects. Pupils further develop their sense of responsibility and contribution to the community when taking on positions of responsibility for the school, such becoming buddies for younger pupils.
45. Staff in the early years support children to develop their social skills by modelling and encouraging how to share and work collaboratively with each other. Staff discuss the importance of following rules, such as being kind, in order to be a good friend to others. This enables children to form effective friendships with their peers.
46. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to make informed decisions about subject options, careers and life beyond school through impartial and considered careers information. Younger pupils participate in careers week so that they can start to learn about different jobs and the role they play within society. The enrichment programme has dedicated time for careers education lessons for pupils in the senior school. The curriculum is enhanced by visiting speakers with a variety of careers so that pupils can reflect on different routes into careers, such as apprenticeships and degrees. As they get older, pupils are well informed about their options and receive appropriate independent advice and guidance in line with their abilities, interests and aspirations.
47. Leaders promote pupils' economic literacy by incorporating an understanding of financial matters in different aspects of the curriculum. PSHE lessons enable pupils to learn about topics such as

budgeting and mortgages. The mathematics curriculum has an emphasis on real-world skills so that pupils learn about how mathematics is useful in their everyday lives at school and in their chosen careers. Enrichment sessions focus on managing finances and this is reinforced through practical tasks, such as entrepreneurial projects that involve planning a project within a defined budget, with a view to making a profit.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. Leaders and governors promote a safeguarding culture in which everyone understands their collective responsibilities in protecting pupils from harm and promoting their welfare. They implement a detailed safeguarding policy that adheres to statutory requirements. The policy is reviewed at least annually to ensure that it remains compliant and effective.
50. Governors and staff, including those working in the early years and in boarding, have up-to-date safeguarding training and receive safeguarding information. This gives them the appropriate knowledge and understanding of how to report and record any concerns about pupils or staff working with the pupils. Training also equips staff to recognise and respond to a range of risks, including online harm, bullying, and extremism and radicalisation. Staff are vigilant in ensuring that pupils feel safe and receive timely help when required.
51. Leaders responsible for safeguarding are knowledgeable and responsive. They liaise well with the staff to provide regular training updates, scenario-based training, weekly briefings, and safeguarding quizzes to ensure that staff remain well informed. Safeguarding leaders collaborate with external agencies and make referrals when required. They keep detailed and confidential records relating to safeguarding, including justification for actions taken. They provide support for pupils with any safeguarding concerns, ensuring that they monitor pupils carefully through this process. They keep governors appropriately informed of their actions and provide an overview of their work for scrutiny at governors' meetings.
52. Through the caring relationships that staff promote, pupils feel safe and are supported. Pupils seek help from staff and raise concerns through face-to-face conversations or via 'worry boxes' and anonymous reporting systems. Pupils who board understand the availability and role of the school's independent person. Leaders empower pupils to understand that they should not be bystanders and that they report any wellbeing or safeguarding concerns about their peers as well as themselves.
53. Leaders adopt a proactive approach to online safety. They have internet filtering and monitoring systems in place. These are tested regularly and alerts are reported to safeguarding leaders and acted upon quickly. The PSHE programme enables pupils to understand the importance of staying safe, including online. As a result, pupils know how to protect themselves online, such as not sharing personal information and reporting any concerns to adults. Leaders involve parents in understanding online safety for their child, through talks from external speakers and regular communication.
54. Leaders have a thorough understanding of safe recruitment practices, which they use to compile a single central record of appointments. This enables them to ensure that all adults working at the school are suitable to work with pupils. Governors ensure that pre-employment checks and recruitment processes are undertaken effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Holmwood House School
Department for Education number	881/6016
Registered early years number	2499293
Address	Holmwood House School Chitts Hill Lexden Colchester Essex CO3 9ST
Phone number	01206 574305
Email address	office@holmwood.house
Website	www.holmwood.house
Proprietor	Bellevue Education International Ltd
Chair	Mr Mark Malley
Headteacher	Mr Edward Bond
Age range	6 months to 16 years
Number of pupils	396
Number of boarding pupils	65
Number of children in the early years registered setting	100
Date of previous inspection	24 to 26 January 2023

Information about the school

56. Holmwood House School is a co-educational day and boarding school in Colchester, Essex for pupils aged six months to sixteen years. Pupils aged two to sixteen years old attend the main school site in Lexden. Children aged six months to four years old attend the Nursery in Great Horkesley. The school is owned and governed by Bellevue Education International Ltd.
57. The school applied to the Department for Education (DfE) to request a material change to the school's registration to increase the age range of pupils on the school roll to 16 years old. Inspectors conducted an inspection at the request of the DfE in January 2023 at the time of the previous regulatory compliance inspection. Inspectors recommended that the material change be approved.
58. There is one boarding house based in the main building in Lexden for boarders aged eight to fourteen years old. This boarding house accommodates up to 65 pupils in single-sex dormitories.
59. There are 176 children in the early years in total. This comprises two Pre-School classes and two Reception classes, both in the main school, and a separate early years setting, which is registered with Ofsted and provides for children under four years old.
60. The school has identified 31 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
61. The school has identified English as an additional language for eight pupils.
62. The school states its aims are to spark curiosity and ignite wonder in each child, through an inspiring learning environment and boundless opportunities for discovery and exploration that develop individuality, confidence and tenacity to reach their true potential, achieve personal success and be prepared for life.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

13 to 15 January 2026

63. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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

For more information, please visit isi.net