

School inspection report

5 to 7 March 2024

Sherfield School

Reading Road

Sherfield on Loddon

Hook

RG27 0HU

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'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors oversee the work of the school effectively. They visit regularly, working closely with leaders to promote the ethos of the school, whilst reviewing all aspects of the provision. As a result, leaders, together with governors, are developing a comprehensive strategic development plan with the aim to challenge, inspire and support pupils in all aspects of school life. However, the impact of this is yet to be seen.
2. Teaching demonstrates a wide range of effective skills and makes use of regular assessment to inform careful plans for the progress of all pupils. Staff's individualised support for pupils leads to external examination results in the senior school which show that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Some pupils make rapid progress.
3. Teaching demonstrates a wide range of effective skills and makes use of regular assessment to inform careful plans for the progress of all pupils. However, provision for a few younger pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is not always effective, as advice from the learning support department is not always followed.
4. Pupils are provided with careers guidance which enables them to consider a suitable variety of pathways and develop an understanding of the world of work. In the sixth form, appropriate economic education prepares pupils for life after school. Nevertheless, economic education is less well developed for pupils below Years 12 and 13.
5. Leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. The school's core value of connection with others is promoted through personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons and assemblies that focus on inclusion and equality. This results in pupils believing in the importance of looking after others. However, there are currently few opportunities for pupils to develop their ability to take on peer mentoring roles within the school.
6. Leaders provide effectively for the needs of boarding pupils, including those from overseas. Boarding staff know the pupils well and provide boarders with helpful pastoral and academic support.
7. Teaching in the early years is appropriately personalised to meet children's needs. This enables children to make good progress from their starting points. Leaders assess children's development regularly and this informs their planning. Activities chosen allow children to develop their learning so that they make good progress and are prepared for the next stage of their education.
8. There is a prevalent culture of safeguarding throughout the school. All staff complete a training programme in safeguarding during induction and regular updates are provided. Leaders make referrals to external agencies, when appropriate, and do so in a timely manner.

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 consistently effective provision for all pupils who have SEND
- provide more extensive economic education for pupils below the sixth form
- develop pupils' ability to take on peer mentoring roles and responsibilities.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The proprietors, together with leaders and managers throughout the school, ensure that pupils receive education that is wide ranging and actively promotes their wellbeing. Governors maintain a highly informed oversight of how leaders fulfil their responsibilities, including through regular meetings and visits to the school where they invite the views of staff and pupils.
10. Leaders throughout the school have recently engaged in a period of rigorous self-evaluation and careful reflection to inform their plans for the strategic development of the school. Accordingly, planning is well informed by the current context of the school. For example, leaders recognise the need to further strengthen the provision for pupils who have SEND. Plans for further training of staff are in place with the intention that all pupils who have SEND will be provided with appropriately targeted support.
11. Leaders' knowledge and understanding of both identifying and addressing risk is robust. Systematic risk assessment processes are in place and regularly reviewed. The school considers the welfare needs of pupils effectively, including when planning trips and activities. Arrangements for outings and activities and staffing ratios are adjusted to accommodate pupils' needs.
12. Boarding is well led. Staff are knowledgeable and committed to caring for boarding pupils. They carry out their responsibilities effectively so that pupils feel well known, safe and comfortable within the boarding community.
13. Early years leaders show a clear understanding of the needs of this age group. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively so that children feel safe and secure.
14. Parents receive regular feedback on their child's progress through parents' evenings and detailed academic and pastoral reports. They are provided with all other required information, much of which is available via the website. Leaders ensure that parents can contact staff easily when they have matters to discuss. Concerns are recorded systematically and dealt with according to the published complaint policy's procedures.
15. Leaders, supported by governors, promote the school's caring ethos effectively. This is seen through the PSHE curriculum and assemblies which celebrate diversity and promote respect for others. Leaders have recently introduced professional counselling facilities for pupils. These are well used, allowing pupils to access mental health support quickly. Boarders have access to an independent listener who is known through her visits to the boarding community.
16. The school fulfils its responsibilities under equality legislation. Reasonable adjustments are made for those pupils who have SEND. An accessibility plan is in place which includes appropriate measures to support the access to the premises and the curriculum by any pupils with a disability.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively and design it to meet the needs of all groups of pupils. The suitably broad and balanced range of subjects allows pupils of all ages and abilities to gain knowledge and develop skills. Leaders consider carefully the choice of academic qualifications offered in the senior school. Where appropriate they make decisions, for example, to adjust course content or delivery to promote the best possible outcomes for pupils.
19. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and adopt a wide range of appropriate teaching strategies, which result in pupils of all ages making good progress. Results at GCSE, BTEC and A level show that pupils make good progress in relation to their starting points, with some making rapid progress.
20. Almost all lessons are well planned, purposefully paced and engaging. Pupils are fully involved in the learning tasks which contain high levels of challenge. For example, in a computer science lesson pupils used critical thinking skills successfully to analyse data collected on recyclable and non-recyclable waste. In an English lesson, pupils argued for differing interpretations of Macbeth's state of mind, citing persuasive textual illustrations.
21. Teachers typically adapt their teaching methods to support pupils' needs so that pupils may make good progress. Pupils of all ages praise the encouraging nature of the teaching. They recognise that this helps them to grow in confidence as they learn to use new skills and assimilate and apply knowledge. Boarders are supported effectively in their academic study by house staff during evening study sessions.
22. Teachers gain a clear understanding of pupils' aptitudes and needs through regular appraisal of their progress. This is tracked from individual starting points against standardised assessments. This system informs teachers so that they are able to adapt provision for pupils as necessary, targeting areas for improvement. Regular and personalised formative feedback and review of academic targets with their teachers allows pupils to understand what they need to do to make progress. This process enables pupils to learn to self-assess effectively.
23. Most teaching draws on effective strategies to support the needs of the pupils, including those who have SEND. Leaders identify the needs of, and implement support for, individual pupils, including those who have English as an additional language (EAL), those with higher prior attainment and those with an education, health and care plan (EHCP). Additional support, when required, is personalised and specific. Nevertheless, consistently effective provision in the classroom for younger pupils who have SEND is not always evident. Strategies provided by the learning support department are not always implemented.
24. Early years staff have high expectations of what children can achieve. They understand how children learn and develop and provide engaging learning opportunities, such as sharing stories and singing. This results in children gaining knowledge and developing their communication skills. They follow instructions successfully. The school's well-resourced and presented early years learning environment fosters curiosity. For example, children were intrigued by and thoroughly engaged in an activity exploring magnetic properties. Assessment of children's progress and learning is regular and effective, ensuring that children receive teaching that is matched well to their needs.

25. Timetabling ensures that there is enough free time during the school day in which all pupils can relax, play or socialise. After school activities provide enrichment, relaxation and the opportunity to learn new skills. Leaders ensure that pupils may choose from a wide variety of activities, including creative writing, ballet, chess and laser run. Boarders enjoy a programme of weekend activities which includes cultural trips to London and Oxford as well as local events. These activities allow pupils to develop new skills and enjoy a sense of achievement. Time spent in the outdoor learning environment allows younger children further occasions to develop fine and gross motor skills.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Leaders support pupils' wellbeing beyond the classroom. This is seen through curriculum provision in PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) delivered by the deployment of knowledgeable teachers.
28. The PSHE curriculum enables younger pupils to explore topics such as a 'growth mindset' and learning who to trust. Older pupils consider research on the dangers of social media, for example, and explore the reasons why people get into debt, the resultant impact on wellbeing and the support available. Arising from this, pupils understand that healthy physical and emotional development is important. The self-esteem, confidence and resilience pupils demonstrate is fostered in the considerate and compassionate environment modelled by the school's leaders. This is particularly evident in boarding.
29. The RSE curriculum is age-appropriate and meets the needs of pupils' different stages of development. Younger pupils learn about the importance of self-respect, resolving conflicts and different types of families, for example. In the senior school pupils explore emotional changes and strategies to manage these changes, and a range of sexual health topics.
30. Suitably equipped common rooms in the boarding house allow pupils to relax and socialise. Boarders feel well known and supported and get to know school routines and expectations quickly through the comprehensive induction they receive on joining the community. Leaders ensure that overseas boarders understand joining information and procedures through a variety of ways, as necessary. Boarders understand that rules in place are for their safety. Any sanctions are fairly deployed. Boarders' personal possessions are protected and sleeping arrangements are suitable. Boarders' privacy is respected and they can always contact a member of staff, including at night. A suitable statement of boarding principles and practice is communicated to boarders, parents and guardians.
31. In the early years, the effective key person system provides emotional security through continuity for the youngest children. Leaders in this section of the school provide a programme of activities to promote children's personal, emotional and physical development. This includes oral hygiene and learning to consider others' feelings.
32. A medical centre with suitable accommodation and trained staff is available for all pupils who become unwell or have specific medical needs. Across the school, an appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, including in the boarding house. All staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid in order to support pupils' medical needs. Leaders understand the importance of supporting individuals with mental health issues. As a result, they have put in place arrangements by which pupils may address concerns through accessing counsellors who offer appointments in school two days a week. External provision is also in place.
33. Robust anti-bullying and behaviour policies are clearly understood and implemented consistently by leaders and staff, which results in bullying being rare. Pupils feel comfortable raising concerns. When cases arise, they are taken seriously and dealt with swiftly and compassionately. Pupils' behaviour exhibits their genuine consideration of each other and their teachers. The school's approach to behavioural issues encourages pupils to take responsibility for their actions, supported through the

recently introduced emphasis on restorative justice, so that pupils whose behaviour drops below expectations are supported in modifying their behaviour effectively.

34. Supported by governors, and informed by external expertise, leaders ensure that health and safety and fire safety measures are effective through adherence to appropriate procedures and policies that require regular checks and maintenance and appropriate training for staff. Attendance and admission registers are appropriately recorded and stored, and the school reports to the local authority on pupil attendance as required. Premises and accommodation are suitable and appropriately maintained. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to make use of the spacious grounds for recreation and relaxation. The supervision of pupils of all ages is generously staffed. This results in pupils feeling safe at all times of the school day.
35. The school has adopted a 'sport for all' approach, which benefits pupils' physical and mental health. Leaders allow pupils to participate in a range of games activities from an early age; they participate in mixed gender sport, as well as representing the school on a regular basis. Those achieving at national level are supported through scheduled time for expert coaching. In the early years, children enjoy riding bicycles. This, together with frequent use of the playground equipment, enables them to grow confident in their physical abilities.

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

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

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

37. The school's ethos and culture promote the value of democracy, respect and tolerance. These values are displayed in the boarding house and main school building and embedded in the PSHE curriculum. For example, younger pupils learn about the importance of respecting and protecting the environment, whilst older pupils explore strategies to contest sexism. Pupils are frequently given opportunities to discuss ethics and the rule of law, seen, for instance, in prep school drama and ancient history lessons. As a result, pupils show a clear appreciation of the importance of high moral standards.
38. Pupils of all ages learn to be compassionate and accepting of others. They know to allow for differences, describing the school as a very caring and enriching diverse community. The curriculum and assemblies present pupils with a balanced perspective on political issues. Diverse cultures and faiths are recognised and respected. The needs of those observing Ramadan, for example, are honoured through particular practical arrangements.
39. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils of different ages to take on responsibilities within the community. The prefect team and house captains are drawn from sixth-form pupils and those in the last year of the prep section. Pupils may also contribute to the community through the organisation of house competitions and charity work. Nevertheless, these roles do not specifically meet pupils' desire to extend their responsibilities to peer mentoring.
40. The careers programme for all pupils in the prep and senior sections of the school helps pupils to prepare for life in British society. Linked to the Gatsby benchmarks, digital platforms and classroom activities are used for the effective delivery of these objectives. Leaders also organise speakers from the world of work. An annual careers fair gives pupils scope to explore a wide range of occupations. Pupils in the sixth form benefit from the individualised expert support they receive from their teachers, allowing them to make informed decisions about the future. Their post-school destinations reflect the wide-ranging, impartial advice they receive.
41. Leaders ensure that the delivery of economic education in the sixth form, as part of their enrichment course, focuses on important life skills such as weekly budgeting and an understanding of the housing market. Lower down the school, pupils develop an awareness of financial matters through calculating budgets and target sales, working collaboratively to secure their goal as they raise money for good causes. However, overall, the provision of economic education below the sixth form is uneven.
42. Leaders and staff promote understanding of roles and responsibilities within the wider community. Pupils learn about parliament, the nature of a democracy and voting rights through the PSHE curriculum. The school's core values of 'confidence, creativity and connection' can be seen in action through group projects such as raising money for benches and designing and making bird feeders for the school grounds. In the locality, pupils are regular visitors to a local care home and a school for pupils who have SEND. They also volunteer throughout the year in projects set up through a local council outdoor centre. Pupils show initiative through choosing charities and methods of fundraising to support causes in the UK and further afield.

43. Pupils develop a clear understanding of right and wrong as a result of leaders' and staff' modelling of respectful behaviour and communication of clear, consistent expectations.
44. Early years staff develop children's social skills and awareness by encouraging them to share and to listen to one another. As a result, children are able to collaborate enthusiastically and effectively, such as when surveying mini-beasts in the school grounds. Boarders learn to share communal areas and house tasks across the age range. They debate issues in boarding meetings. These opportunities help them to learn to live harmoniously with others.

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

45. **All the relevant Standards are met.**

Safeguarding

46. The importance of safeguarding is recognised by staff as fundamental to the caring, respectful ethos underpinning the school community. Pupils of all ages feel safe at school, including in the boarding house. They acknowledge that they have trusted staff to whom they can turn if they have anxieties or issues, confident that matters they raise will be taken seriously, and escalated where appropriate. Safeguarding records are kept clearly and securely.
47. Thorough safeguarding training is provided for all staff when they join the school, including about the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) ensures that regular updates are provided to staff on issues including low-level concerns and child-on-child abuse. The attitude is that safeguarding issues can arise here, even if occurrences may be rare. These comprehensive arrangements ensure that staff are clear how to follow the school's safeguarding procedures.
48. The school follows appropriate procedures for all safeguarding matters, including child-on-child abuse and allegations against staff. Leaders work effectively to manage incidents with external agencies when concerns arise. They make timely referrals to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police when appropriate.
49. Pupils understand how to stay safe online and know how to report incidents, including those arising from social media and online gaming. They learn to do so through their PSHE lessons, assemblies and form time. The DSL monitors pupils' online use at school regularly and uses a robust filtering system, responding and educating as necessary.
50. Leaders are trained thoroughly in safer recruitment practice. They carry out all required safer recruitment checks and record these appropriately on a single central register of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Sherfield School
Department for Education number	850/6084
Registered early years number	EY293642
Address	Sherfield School Reading Road Sherfield-on-Loddon Hook Hampshire RG27 0HU
Phone number	01256 884800
Email address	hmpa@sherfieldschool.co.uk
Website	www.sherfieldschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Sherfield School Ltd
Chair	Mrs Lesley Meyer
Headteacher (Interim)	Mr Neil Richards
Age range	0 to 19
Number of pupils	610
Number of boarding pupils	64
Number of children in the early years registered setting	93
Date of previous inspection	14 December 2022

Information about the school

52. Sherfield School is a co-educational day and boarding school located near Hook in Hampshire. Founded as a boarding school for female pupils in 1947, the current school opened in 2004. The school is overseen by a board of governors. An interim headteacher was appointed in September 2023. The school has three sections: a Nursery and Reception for children from three months to four years of age which includes the registered Early Years Foundation Stage setting; a prep school for pupils in Years 1 to 8; and a senior school for pupils in Years 9 to 13.
53. Boarding is offered for pupils from the age of nine. Boarders are accommodated in one boarding house on the school site.
54. There are currently 111 children in the early years setting, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
55. The school has identified 129 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Three pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
56. English is an additional language for 41 pupils.
57. The school states that it aims to be a school where pupils thrive and flourish as they experience the excitement and enjoyment of learning. It seeks to guide pupils towards reaching their full potential as passionate and innovative problem solvers, ready to contribute to society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 March 2024

58. A team of eight inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

59. Inspection activities included:

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

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

61. The registered Early Years Foundation Stage setting was not included in this inspection.

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**.

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