

School inspection report

5 to 7 December 2023

Woodlands Schools Hutton Manor

428 Rayleigh Road

Hutton

Brentwood

CM13 1SD

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. The proprietor, who acts as chair of the board of directors, maintains close and effective oversight of the running and development of the school. Directors undertake regular and systematic reviews to evaluate how well the Standards are being met. With senior leaders, they ensure that a broad and relevant curriculum is provided, including outdoor learning. Directors act as critical friends to senior leaders to ensure that they have the required knowledge and skills to lead successfully.
2. Leaders actively promote the aims and ethos of the school. Senior leaders' plans for ongoing school improvement reflect the school's priority for ensuring the wellbeing of pupils. They monitor, evaluate and review the effectiveness of policies, systems and procedures in the school. However, the recently introduced system for monitoring teaching and learning is not yet fully effective.
3. Pupils make good progress in a wide range of subjects. Teachers possess appropriate subject knowledge and skills. The progress and achievements of pupils are effectively analysed by senior leaders to identify learning needs. Where teaching successfully employs this information, pupils respond positively to an appropriate level of challenge. However, sometimes teaching does not plan for pupils to build on previous attainment. This limits levels of achievement, particularly of pupils with higher prior attainment.
4. Behaviour management is effective. Staff maintain appropriate records of instances of misbehaviour and bullying. There are very few instances of poor or unkind behaviour. Pupils are confident that staff deal with any incidents quickly and effectively.
5. The school effectively promotes mutual trust and respect. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, which includes relationships education, prepares pupils well for their current and future lives. The physical and mental health of all pupils is promoted effectively. The school values are reinforced in PSHE lessons, assemblies and the positive relationship pupils enjoy with their teachers. A culture of kindness and respect for others is evident across the school.
6. Pupils confidently express their views, ideas and concerns. Pupils are confident that staff will listen carefully and take action quickly when necessary.
7. The school grounds and indoor facilities are well maintained. Effective fire safety and health and safety arrangements are in place.
8. The school prepares pupils well for life in British society and their next educational steps.
9. Safeguarding is effective. The comprehensive policy to safeguard pupils is effectively implemented and staff know how to take necessary action if they become aware of a concern. Safeguarding records are maintained as required.

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:

- strengthen the use of recently introduced initiatives for monitoring of teaching and learning to ensure that teaching is consistently effective
- strengthen the use teachers make of assessment data to match teaching to pupils' needs and ensure that pupils with higher prior attainment are challenged sufficiently to achieve as highly as possible.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Directors and leaders make pupils' wellbeing a priority in their strategic planning. They continually evaluate, through discussions, observations and surveys, how successfully the school's aims are met. Leaders and managers promote the aims through creating a school ethos that values confidence, individuality, respect, perseverance and creativity.
11. Directors support and challenge senior leaders and make sure that they have the knowledge and understanding to fulfil their roles effectively. Through well-informed oversight the directors and leaders ensure that the Standards are securely met.
12. Leaders routinely communicate school policies to staff and ensure that these are understood and effectively implemented. School systems and procedures are effective in supporting pupils' personal development and learning.
13. The directors maintain effective oversight of all aspects of the school. Regular reviews and reports from those with governance responsibility for areas such as education and safeguarding are presented to the full board. These enable directors and leaders to evaluate and review the school's performance. Where members of the board do not possess specific expertise in areas such as health and safety, directors carefully consider reports from independent specialists. They follow any recommendations made to assure themselves that the school's practice is effective.
14. Effective risk assessments are routinely undertaken to mitigate security or health and safety issues. Action is quickly taken should a risk be identified. Leaders pay special attention to potentially risky areas of the school grounds such as ponds and to different activities. The security of the site is closely monitored. Risks are effectively identified and mitigated for on-site and off-site activities. The identity of visitors is checked on arrival, and they are escorted around the school.
15. The school encourages open communication with parents. They make sure that staff are accessible and that any parental concerns are addressed quickly. An appropriate procedure for managing complaints is in place and detailed records of any complaints and actions taken in response to these are maintained.
16. Relevant information is made available to parents as required. Informative reports about pupils' progress are provided to parents regularly. Early years staff liaise regularly with parents about their child's development and provide information about their progress.
17. The school maintain effective links with other agencies to respond to pupils' welfare needs and any safeguarding issues that need to be escalated.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Pupils acquire a breadth of knowledge, skills and understanding in a wide range of subjects, including modern foreign languages and performing arts. Teachers regularly review the curriculum's appropriateness for the ages, aptitudes and needs of pupils, including those who have special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).
20. Teaching enables pupils to make good progress overall. Teachers possess a suitable level of knowledge of their subjects. For example, specialist teachers are employed for some subjects such as languages, sports and arts and pupils benefit from their expertise.
21. Through play-based activities and positive interactions with their peers and teachers, children in the early years develop confident communication skills. The literacy programme for the early years enables children to demonstrate confident recall of the sounds that letters make. Early years staff provide a suitable range of age-appropriate activities.
22. A wide range of activities is planned throughout the school that enable pupils to develop into eloquent speakers and effective listeners. The consistent approach to teaching reading skills throughout the school allows pupils to read with increasing fluency and expression and comprehend a range of different texts well. A variety of extended written tasks within a carefully considered English curriculum enables older pupils to communicate their thoughts and ideas effectively, using a variety of literary devices.
23. Teaching enables pupils to become competent mathematicians. Pupils establish secure numeracy skills in the lower part of the school. For example, pupils in Year 1 confidently know and understand number bonds to ten and can present them in different ways. However, in some lessons, pupils with higher prior mathematical attainment become less engaged when teachers do not plan activities that stimulate their interest.
24. Senior leaders regularly and systematically evaluate pupils' progress to highlight their individual learning needs. However, leaders do not monitor how effectively this data is used by teachers in planning lessons. When assessment information is used to plan appropriate activities, pupils' aptitudes and needs are met well. In these lessons, pupils are motivated by an appropriate level of challenge. However, in some lessons teachers do not successfully build on pupils' previous attainment and pupils, particularly those with higher prior attainment, are not always challenged sufficiently to achieve at higher levels.
25. The curriculum is enhanced by a range of outings and visiting speakers that place knowledge gained during lessons in a wider context. A range of after school clubs broadens pupils' interests and skills and provides the chance to develop hobbies and interests. Teachers take care to weave values such as tolerance, democracy and individual liberty into lessons and outside activities.
26. Pupils who have SEND are well supported in their learning. An effective procedure for identifying special education needs is in place and support is skilfully and sensitively provided. Strategies to meet individual learning needs are shared with teachers through comprehensive individual learning plans. The complementary pastoral support for pupils who have SEND positively enhances their achievements. Early years' staff identify when they need to give children additional support to help their development of early literacy and numeracy skills, and do so effectively.

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. Through the effective PSHE programme, pupils learn the importance of understanding and respecting others. Pupils learn about cultural diversity and consider the relationship between themselves and the wider world. Pupils' acceptance of other people's individual characteristics is clear in the courteous and thoughtful interactions between all members of the school community.
29. Pupils are well informed about different religions and develop their spiritual awareness through the balanced programme of religious education, assemblies and visits to places of worship. They acknowledge and respect that others may have faiths and beliefs that are different to their own.
30. Pupils understand and value the benefits of exercise on both their physical and mental health. They recognise that being in fresh air makes them feel good. The well-planned programme of physical education (PE), including team sports, dance and swimming, enables pupils to develop their physical fitness. Pupils also develop appreciation of the benefits of exercise and relaxation through after school activities such as yoga, gardening and cross country. The PSHE programme informs pupils about the importance of healthy eating.
31. The PSHE programme and effective pastoral support help pupils to become self-confident individuals, secure in the knowledge of themselves. Teachers motivate pupils to perform enthusiastically in school productions, concerts and assemblies which enhances their self-esteem.
32. The relationships education programme contains appropriate and useful content. For example, pupils learn about safe and healthy relationships and potential risks to these. They learn about the importance of consent.
33. Staff in the early years provide children with appropriate, varied and engaging activities that effectively support their personal, physical and emotional development. PE and dance lessons encourage children's enjoyment of exercise. The safe and secure outdoor areas provide children with a sense of freedom as they run around and explore the woodland area. Their teachers sensitively guide them in their social interactions and behaviour as they develop the ability to share, take turns and follow instructions.
34. Leaders and teachers encourage pupils to share and express their feelings. They are helped to understand and manage their emotions. Teachers sensitively guide them to adopt strategies to help cope with feelings of anxiety. Pupils value the support this gives them to maintain a happy outlook and positive approach to their learning and friendships.
35. Pupils understand the school's expectations of behaviour and their own conduct reflects the high expectations set. The clear system of rewards motivates pupils. Should a misdemeanour occur, staff develop pupils' understanding of how behavioural choices can have consequences for themselves and others. As a result, pupils develop an understanding of the impact of harmful behaviour on others and are mindful of what to do if they become aware of it. There is rarely a need to employ the sanctions outlined. Instances of bullying are rare and responded to swiftly and effectively.
36. Pupils are well supervised and feel safe at school. Suitable staff-to-child ratios are maintained in the early years.

37. The school site and accommodation are maintained to a suitable standard. Swift action is taken to address any reports of health and safety concerns. Steps are taken to limit the risk of fire and evacuation drills are practised termly. First aid is readily available to pupils. All teaching staff, including those in the early years, and an appropriate number of other staff are trained in paediatric first aid.
38. The admission and attendance registers are maintained as required. Staff follow up any unexplained absences.

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

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

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

40. The implementation of the curriculum encourages pupils' knowledge and understanding of values such as tolerance and respect for individual liberty. Through the effective PSHE, humanities and arts programmes and assembly themes, pupils gain a secure understanding of the variety of cultures within British society. Pupils also develop their knowledge and understanding of life in other countries through the effectively planned modern foreign languages programme.
41. Leaders maintain a school ethos that supports pupils to establish a firm understanding of right and wrong. They quickly appreciate that rules and laws exist to help people live safely and happily within a community. Pupils value the school rules which support the well-established school culture of courtesy, respect and consideration for others. Teachers enable pupils to discuss and agree classroom rules to ensure a friendly and purposeful learning environment. Teachers help pupils to understand that others may hold opinions that differ from their own and that it is right to respect opposing views.
42. Pupils are encouraged to contribute to and support their school community. Pupils in Year 6 undertake their roles of responsibility as prefects, heads of school, house captains and sport captains with pride. Younger pupils take responsibility within lessons, for example as stationery monitors, helping towards the smooth running of the classroom.
43. The PSHE programme includes a regular focus on economic education. Pupils develop their understanding of money in society and the importance of saving.
44. The school values pupils' opinions and encourages pupils' understanding of democracy. The elected school council enables pupils to express their suggestions for change, school improvement or supporting outside agencies through charity work. Pupils are confident that they will be heard and considered by school leaders. Recently completed projects influenced by pupils' suggestions include the painting of parking bays and safety zones in the car park. The councillors organised an election to decide which animal the school should adopt.
45. The pupils' environment club develops their awareness of the importance of looking after the school and the global environment. With staff support, pupils have organised fundraising activities to help the county's wildlife trust.
46. Pupils quickly establish a strong sense of teamwork within the house system. They are encouraged to show initiative in organising events to support a wide variety of local, national and international charities. Pupils enjoy well-established links with a local care home and welcome residents to their Christmas productions.
47. Leaders ensure that children in the early years are sensitively supported and guided as they learn to socialise with their peers and work together in a range of age-appropriate activities. Where children have disputes, these are quickly noticed and dealt with sensitively by staff. Children engage happily with their teachers and explain their needs with growing confidence. They are actively encouraged to take on roles of responsibility, such as taking the register to the office.

48. The oldest pupils are well prepared for entrance assessments for senior schools. Pupils are well prepared, academically and socially, for the next stage of their education and for life in British society.

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

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

50. Directors maintain efficient oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements and check that these are implemented effectively.
51. Safeguarding leads receive regular safeguarding training at the appropriate level, ensuring that their knowledge and skills are up to date and suitable for their role. Staff understand their responsibility to ensure the welfare of pupils. Their training in safeguarding matters is updated regularly. Staff have a secure understanding of child protection procedures and know how to refer a concern to leaders or external agencies. The school follows locally agreed procedures when safeguarding concerns arise. The school has appropriate procedures in place for managing any allegations against staff, including low level concerns.
52. Pupils develop a secure understanding of how to stay safe online through the PSHE and information, communication and technology (ICT) programmes. Appropriate systems to filter and monitor the use of the internet in the school are in place.
53. Pupils are confident that they can approach adults at school for help and support if they are worried or upset. They feel secure that they will be listened to and supported.
54. Leaders implement effective safer recruitment procedures. A central register of appointments is kept which confirms that all required pre-employment checks are completed before staff begin work at the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

The quality of the early years foundation stage in the registered early years provision

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

56. The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
57. Leaders and managers have developed the curriculum to meet the needs and interests of the children extremely well. Planning and teaching are carefully monitored to ensure appropriateness of the learning intentions and implementation of activities.
58. Children are well prepared for the next stage of their education. This is especially so when they are transitioning from one room to another within the setting. The key person system is highly effective, with staff carefully chosen to suit the child. Children who have SEND have their needs catered for extremely well.
59. Children within the setting are happy and settled. Their demeanours indicate that they feel safe. They form secure attachments to adults and generally separate from parents easily.
60. Safeguarding requirements are appropriately met. Staff are fully aware of their responsibilities to keep children safe from harm. Robust health and safety measures are in place, which include risk assessments for indoor rooms and outdoor areas, as well as daily checks.
61. Leaders and managers are highly committed to ongoing development. There have been several changes made to the provision recently which have improved children's experiences. Parents comment positively about these recent changes.
62. The recommendation from the previous inspection, to ensure that changes to nappy-changing arrangements take into account the hygiene requirements of the children, has been met.

Quality of education

63. The quality of education is outstanding.
64. Leaders and managers provide a curriculum that is age appropriate and covers the required areas of learning. Key people carefully plan interesting activities that build on children's knowledge and interests, and as a result most children make good levels of progress in relation to their starting points. The introduction of 'loose parts', which involves providing a range of everyday objects for children to self-choose, has been highly effective in sustaining children's interest and helping them to extend activities, such as when older children 'baked' pies in the role play corner with real fruit and cooking utensils.
65. Staff are aware that the children join the setting with a range of prior experiences and take steps to broaden their horizons. For example, children regularly explore the natural world through visits to the woodland environment, which children often have less prior knowledge of. Leaders and managers are ambitious for children who have SEND. Staff work closely with parents and specialists to ensure that the child's needs are met. Highly successful support for individual children who have SEND enable them to develop their skills and knowledge well.

66. Exciting activities promote children's use of a wide vocabulary. Babies and toddlers listen and react positively to their key person, such as when identifying body parts, while older children use well-chosen words to describe what they see. For example, a bear hunt in the grounds on a frosty day promoted the investigation of 'spikey' leaves. Younger children eagerly join in the actions of rhymes while the oldest children expressively sing songs learnt for their Christmas concert. Babies delight in listening to music, enjoying a range of tempo and sounds. Stories are read in a way that excites children, as seen when two-year-old children listened to and acted out *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* while in the home corner. Children make a start at early writing by learning to mark make, for example by making patterns on large paper. Older children begin to learn letter sounds, and some older children are beginning to form letters using the correct pencil grip. However, children's skills are generally less well developed in this area, and this is something that managers have sensibly identified for further development, in readiness for school.
67. The recent introduction of an online assessment system to assess and record children's development has been successful. Information is used by key people to plan children's next steps in learning and helps parents to support their child's learning at home. The reading library is used by parents to take books home to share with their children, thus further promoting a love of reading.
68. Mathematical knowledge is developed from an early age, with simple counting activities such as counting children in a line. Older children can competently match quantities to ten with numerals through fun games designed to consolidate their understanding in preparation for school.
69. Care is taken to develop children's physical development skills. Babies and toddlers are extremely well supported by staff who are adept at planning and implementing activities that develop confidence in the prime areas of learning. This includes when babies are starting to walk. Older children confidently pedal wheeled vehicles. Across the age range, children keenly go on long walks in the school grounds. Fine motor skills are also developed well through a range of activities, such as using spoons and tweezers to move objects.

Behaviour and attitudes

70. Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
71. Leaders and managers set high expectations for behaviour, which are understood and shared by staff. All adults act as positive role models and regularly reinforce behavioural expectations. Older children explain the importance of behaving well, such as by using 'kind hands'. Where children face a possibly challenging behavioural situation, such as when learning how to share, staff assist in helping children make the right decision, which helps resolve issues quickly and teaches important life skills.
72. Children demonstrate a positive attitude to their learning. Across the age range children are keen to explore their environment, curiously engaging in activities with their key person and other staff, especially where these are new and unusual.
73. The relationships between key people, their children and parents are warm and respectful. The management team know the children and their families well, and support them wherever required, including where children are finding it hard to settle. This helps develop good habits for the future. Parents report that the relationships with their child's key person are warm and effective. It is

apparent that key people know their children well, as observed when they speak with parents at collection time, reporting on care and interests.

Personal development

74. The personal development of children is outstanding.
75. The key person system adopted by the setting is highly effective. While each child is assigned a key person who is responsible for their care and learning, all staff are well known to children, and this means that children feel equally comfortable interacting with other staff where this is required. Older pupils are keen to talk to visitors and enjoy engaging in discussions. Transition arrangements are carefully managed, with regular visits to the next room helping make the move as seamless as possible.
76. Children are provided with a healthy, balanced diet and enjoy eating a range of fruits and snacks. The importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle, including the occasional treat, has been reinforced by managers and is instilled in children and staff. Toddlers feed themselves, and babies who are bottle-fed are content to be given these by their key person. Older children select and carry their own lunches in the lunch hall. They eat their meals with little adult assistance and engage in quiet conversations with their friends and adults. This is a valuable skill that helps develop independence.
77. The setting's hygiene practices are well known by staff and followed diligently. Children's personal needs, including nappy changing and regular washing of hands and faces, are met well. Sleep routines are calm and well managed, with staff taking the time to settle children and record regular checks.
78. Children listen well to instructions, including those that relate to risks and safety measures, such as while visiting the woodland environment. Care is taken to keep children safe while using technology, although children rarely use technology in the nursery. Managers are highly successful in enriching children's understanding and respect of people, families, and communities different from their own. For example, they invite parents in to share and talk about their cultures with others.

Leadership and management

79. Leadership and management are outstanding.
80. Leaders and managers have a clear vision of how they wish to develop the provision in order to continually improve the care and education children receive. Managers and staff evaluate their practice which feeds into development plans. These inform ongoing development in all areas, including the curriculum, staff's, professional development and methods of administration.
81. Leaders and managers work with external agencies effectively when the need arises. Managers and staff welcome advice from external specialists, such as speech therapists, and incorporate their ideas into their planning to meet the children's needs, including those of children who have SEND. Effective partnerships are fostered with schools in preparation for when children transition to the next stage of their education.
82. Leaders and managers highly respect staff and encourage them to engage in professional development. Ratios are maintained suitably, and workloads are carefully managed. Staff have

recently been encouraged to take on areas of responsibility, such as becoming the equality named co-coordinator (ENCO). Staff have embraced this opportunity to enhance children's experiences. Opportunities for ongoing training are plentiful. Staff have regular meetings with managers to discuss their key children, training needs and safeguarding, thus helping to ensure that children's needs are met. The recent appointment of a mental health coordinator for staff is indicative of the care taken to ensure that staff are well supported.

83. Leaders have clear oversight of the setting, with regular meetings with management and visits to the setting. Leaders and managers keep abreast of current EYFS requirements to ensure that the setting fulfils its statutory duties, including those that relate to the Equality Act 2010.

Safeguarding

84. Safeguarding is effective.

85. Safeguarding practices are appropriate. Staff understand the procedures in place to follow should they have any concerns. Records show how they follow these to help keep children safe from harm. Leaders and managers maintain clear oversight of any concerns. Safer recruitment procedures are robust.

Recommended next steps

- Provide more effective opportunities for children to develop mark making and early writing skills to help prepare older children for school.

The extent to which the school meets the requirements of the early years foundation stage

86. The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

School details

School	Woodlands Schools Hutton Manor
Department for Education number	881/6047
Registered early years number	EY336851
Address	Woodlands Schools Hutton Manor 428 Rayleigh Road Hutton Essex CM13 1SD
Phone number	01277 245585
Email address	info@woodlandshutton.co.uk
Website	woodlandsschools.co.uk
Proprietor	Mr Ken Lewis
Headteacher	Mrs Donna Burkert
Age range	3 months to 11 years
Number of pupils	105
Number of children in the early years registered setting	66
Date of previous inspection	9 to 10 May 2020

Information about the school

87. Woodlands Schools Hutton Manor is an independent coeducational day school. Situated near Brentwood, the school was founded in 2001, and the nursery, Little Acorns, was added in 2010. Children enter the nursery from the age of three months. At the age of three years, they may transfer to the main school or continue in the nursery. The school is divided into three sections: the early years for children aged three to five years; infants for those aged five to seven years and juniors for those aged seven to eleven years. The school is part of a family-owned company, where the proprietor has oversight of the school and is advised by a board of directors. The current headteacher was appointed in September 2023.
88. There are 21 children in the early years part of the main school, comprising the one Nursery and one Reception class. There is also a separate registered early years' setting on the same site, which provides for 66 children aged 3 months to 5 years.
89. The school has identified eight pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
90. No pupil speaks English as an additional language.
91. The school states its aims are to combine all that is traditionally best with progressive and forward-thinking ideas, to enable pupils to become confident and socially responsible citizens and life-long learners. The school seeks to foster curiosity, independence and a life-long love of learning to enable pupils to achieve their full potential in their personal, social, spiritual and academic development.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 December 2023

92. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

93. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other directors
- 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

94. 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**.

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