

School inspection report

23 to 25 April 2024

Ashford School

East Hill

Ashford

Kent

TN24 8PB

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
MATERIAL CHANGE REQUEST.....	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	5
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	8
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
THE QUALITY OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE IN THE REGISTERED EARLY YEARS PROVISION	14
SETTING 1:	14
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE EARLY YEARS PROVISION	14
QUALITY OF EDUCATION	14
BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES.....	15
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	15
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	16
SAFEGUARDING	17
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE	17
THE QUALITY OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE IN THE REGISTERED EARLY YEARS PROVISION	18
SETTING 2:	18
OVERALL EFFECTIVENESS: THE QUALITY AND STANDARDS OF THE EARLY YEARS PROVISION	18
QUALITY OF EDUCATION	18
BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES.....	19
PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT.....	20
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	20
SAFEGUARDING	21
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE EARLY YEARS FOUNDATION STAGE	21
SCHOOL DETAILS	22
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	23
INSPECTION DETAILS	24

Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor ensures that leaders and managers have the required knowledge and skills and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. The performance and procedures of the school are rigorously monitored by the proprietor to inform the school's development. Leaders actively promote the wellbeing of pupils and promote the aims of the school. Leaders have a thorough understanding of the school's strengths and have detailed plans for its development. There is a comprehensive and detailed approach to the management of risk.
2. The school provides a broad curriculum and high-quality teaching. As a result, pupils of all needs and abilities make good progress throughout the school. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make progress because their needs are identified early and learning strategies are shared effectively with parents. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive effective support to develop their communication skills in English in order to access their education. A suitable framework for marking and assessment is in place which helps pupils to identify how to improve their performance. The leadership provide a wide range of recreational activities which further develops pupils' skills and attitudes to learning.
3. The curricula for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationship and sex education (RSE) have a wide coverage of appropriate issues which are considered in an age-appropriate manner. These are highly regarded by pupils. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for their responsibilities in British society. The school population is diverse, and pupils are kind, tolerant and respectful of each other. Effective policies and procedures are in place to ensure that pupils are well behaved, and the incidences of bullying are rare and are dealt with appropriately when they occur. The premises are maintained in line with effective health and safety procedures.
4. Boarders feel secure in their accommodation and their views are considered by leaders in the development of boarding provision. Close monitoring of their academic performance has led to an improvement in the academic outcomes of boarders. Leaders have considered the boarding procedures and routines and have a clear vision for the development of boarding provision. Some of these plans will address the inconsistencies between the houses which exist. However, these considerations and plans have not been widely shared amongst staff and boarders, and this has led to some confusion and frustration.
5. Pupils are well informed about social and economic issues and are well placed to contribute positively to society. Pupils of all ages are aware of the impact that their decisions and behaviour have on others. Detailed provision for careers education empowers pupils to make appropriately ambitious decisions for their next steps.
6. Leaders are fully aware of their safeguarding responsibilities. Staff are well trained. The diligence of staff in the use of an online platform ensures effective communication relating to safeguarding concerns. Leaders have developed close links with local external agencies. Recruitment checks are carried out thoroughly and are appropriately recorded. Pupils know how to address concerns with adults and understand how to stay safe including online.

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:

- improve the communication of boarding routines, procedures and development strategies and the consistency of boarding provision in order to enhance pupils' experience of boarding.

Material change request

7. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to include increasing the upper age limit of the school to 20 and to increase the limit of the school role from 1084 to 1188.
8. Safeguarding practice in the school is effective and leaders are rigorous in checking the suitability of staff to work with children. Leaders maintain effective procedures to ensure that health and safety and fire safety requirements continue to be met. Leaders prepare effective risk assessments, which include risks relating to an increase in pupil numbers and an increase in the age range of pupils. Risk assessments are reviewed, and suitable mitigations implemented in order to minimise risk.
9. Staffing and supervision are appropriate to support the increase in pupil numbers and the increased age range. The quality of education will be maintained through leaders' monitoring and taking action by deploying additional staff when appropriate. Provision including toilet and first aid facilities are suitable and other aspects of the well-maintained premises, such as the dining hall, are sufficient for increased pupil numbers.
10. It is recommended that the requested material changes be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The proprietor and the local governing body receive regular reports from school leaders and routinely scrutinise and monitor school practice and procedures as part of their quality assurance processes. This includes thorough monitoring of the academic performance and pastoral procedures of the school which informs the development of the practices of staff at all levels in the school. The proprietor and governors provide appropriate challenge and support to school leaders and ensure that they fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
12. The specialist knowledge and experience of specialists in the proprietorial body combined with expert knowledge in the local governing body, particularly with regard to safeguarding, is effective in advising and supporting leaders to ensure that robust measures are in place to protect pupils from harm.
13. Leaders regularly reflect on the success and development of the school and have effective monitoring processes in place. Leaders have an accurate view of many of the school's strengths and areas for further development, particularly with regard to academic and pastoral matters. Leaders use this understanding to inform their plans for the school, both in the short and longer term. The proprietor ensures that the school is sufficiently well resourced for these plans to be executed successfully.
14. A careful and structured approach to the management of risk relating to the school premises and educational and recreational activities is effective. Leaders identify the risks around school sites and take appropriate decisions to mitigate the possibility of harm. Leaders and governors review risk assessments regularly to ensure that they remain relevant to changing demands. Records kept about accidents are thorough and up to date.
15. Complaints are managed appropriately within the timeframes stated in the school policy. Parents receive reports regularly about pupils' progress and attainment. All other required information is made available to parents, largely through the school's informative website. The school fulfils its responsibilities to review education, health and care plans and to provide funding local authorities a statement of income and expenditure annually.
16. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan that is implemented effectively.

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. The quality of teaching and its effect on pupils' progress is closely monitored. Leaders have developed and implemented a focus on provision for all pupils, across the ability spectrum, to ensure that all are challenged and supported in lessons. The range of subjects taught ensures pupils have many opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills. As a result, pupils make good progress across the curriculum due to high-quality teaching and teachers who are nurturing, supportive, understanding, helpful and informative.
19. Staff plan and implement a wide range of learning into the Reception curriculum, incorporating opportunities to develop communication and language, mathematical, technological and listening skills. Consequently, children are confident and articulate and are focused on their learning through the application of core skills.
20. Pupils demonstrate sophisticated linguistic skills. In discussion, they also demonstrate that they are self-motivated, thinking and learning for themselves through the actions they take, for example, in being part of the school council, or in their lessons and the activities they choose.
21. In science, leaders provide detailed frameworks and expect teachers' planning to include opportunities for skills of analysing and considering the parameters of experiments. Pupils confidently showcase these skills as they plan and carry out the practical elements of all the sciences.
22. Teaching enables pupils to use technology effectively to produce and present their work using different media such as documents and videos for example to explore gender stereotyping. In lessons pupils' use of technology enhances their progress. Pupils who have SEND were able to use tablets to create extensive written responses to their understanding of Chaucer's text. In design technology, computer assisted design work enabled pupils to produce designs with precision and such technological skills are developed through the curriculum.
23. The provision for aesthetic and creative subjects is well organised, with staff having high expectations and aspirations for their pupils. Pupils achieve highly, in drama, music and art. Pupils' work in school displays and sketchbooks demonstrated highly skilled learning journeys, which were personalised responses, including analyses of different artists, where they developed critical thinking, and challenged assumptions. For example, sketchbooks demonstrated the exploration of self-portraiture, perceived female concepts and caricature, enhanced with text, photography and mixed media.
24. In the prep school, the leadership has designed curricula across all subjects that offer explicit opportunities for pupils to develop and display their speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. Collaboration across multiple departments provides all pupils with numerous opportunities to practice and display these skills. The school's Pre-Senior Baccalaureate programme encourages pupils to reflect on their learning and motivates them to improve their work.
25. Leaders have ensured that those who need additional support have provision to support their progress and consequently the quality of SEND provision is very effective. This enables those pupils to have access to personalised learning plans from a very early age. Procedures are in place to ensure that pupils with SEND are identified early, and courses of action are planned. Pupil passports offer an extensive overview of each pupil's specific needs and provide pupils with understanding and

ownership of strategies to help them improve so that they can make progress in line with their peers. These inform teachers' planning, where specific provision or intervention is highlighted. Throughout the school, teaching within lessons enables good progress, including for those with SEND. Support and guidance to parents is an important feature of the success of the school's provision for pupils who have SEND.

26. Teachers are highly skilled, tailoring their teaching to meet the needs of all pupils, including those who speak EAL, and stretching those with advanced communication skills through high levels of conversation in their activities, for example, ensuring that both home language words and English language are used to support early communication skills for children who speak EAL and extending the vocabulary of the more able children.
27. Pupils demonstrate significant progress with their study skills, their learning of facts as well as assimilation of concepts in a variety of ways including sharing their understanding, peer assessment and supporting and praising each other.
28. The school has a regular and school wide approach to monitoring teacher performance. This ensures that any concerns regarding undermining British values would be quickly identified.
29. Marking and pupils' responses to it are closely tailored to specific tasks set, as well as to individual pupils who benefit from a clear and familiar structure when drafting and redrafting their work. Exam results confirm that this process has encouraged pupils to develop ownership of their output and the process of self-improvement. Regular assessment identifies pupils' strengths and areas to target for further learning and reinforcement of skills. Regular reviews of data facilitate effective interventions to reinforce learning and extend and challenge more able pupils. Data shows that pupils of all abilities are achieving well above national age expected levels and better than that suggested by baseline tests.
30. In Reception, lessons are well planned and delivered, ensuring that teaching builds upon previous learning. Children throughout the EYFS are self-motivated to learn and have a strong grasp of the core values that are strongly embedded. For example, whilst sharing their independent writing with inspectors, children in the Nursery demonstrated a high level of communication and language skills.
31. Throughout the school, pupils participate in a large array of extracurricular activities which support and enhance the educational offering. Pupils benefit from activities that stretch and challenge or offer new opportunities. Some clubs are for the most able pupils, for example music enrichment increase pupils' understanding of music theory, swimming squad, different dance clubs along with many others. In the senior school, an extensive co-curricular programme offers pupils the chance to try out new activities with their peers. Pupils recognise the broad variety of possibilities, for example the arrival of an electric kit car which will race in competitions when it has been completed.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. The school has effective provision to foster mutual respect through PSHE, assemblies and posters around school. As a result, pupils are highly tolerant of each other and display a clear awareness of issues around age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. The prep school generates an environment where mutual trust and respect for others permeate throughout the school, and these are further enhanced by the Pre-Senior Bacculaureate. Leadership has established a school culture where mutual respect is embedded in all facets of life. Whether in or out of lessons, pupils display excellent manners, highly developed communication skills and compassion through their words and interactions.
34. Pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is developed in many aspects of school life. Through the yoga activity, pupils are given a sense of calm and relaxation using meditation and mantra. It also helps build an awareness of their mind and body, helping their physical, and mental wellbeing. The sacred space is an area where pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is developed. Pupils of all faiths are welcomed and encouraged to talk and share prayers and hopes together. As a result of a well-planned lesson, Year 3 pupils showed an appreciation of the beauty of Monet's garden beyond the physical, material aspects of life. In Nursery a group of children watching caterpillars were fascinated by them and expressed a sense of wonder- 'Wow! Look, they're wriggling, they're going to be butterflies.'
35. Mental health is of vital importance and the school practises a proactive rather than reactive approach. The school has excellent structures in place to ensure that pupils' mental health is well cared for. These include approachable staff, the *I Wish My Teacher Knew* box in each classroom and an online button on which to register anything, whether positive or negative, they wish to share with their teacher. This develops pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Wellbeing journals and emotional wellbeing are a focus in lessons. The relationship based on trust and mutual respect between teachers and pupils is clear to see. This empowers pupils to be open, honest and not be afraid of asking questions that could make them vulnerable as they delve deep in to what they perceive as their shortcomings. These are then turned into a strength and used as future targets. Pupils are very honest and analytical about their abilities.
36. Pupils are highly engaged in PE lessons where their physical wellbeing, together with their emotional wellbeing, are central. Positive praise from both teachers and the other pupils encourages everyone to try their best. Constructive criticism from both teacher and pupils is taken on board by the pupils to improve performance. Leaders have planned and offer a broad programme of sport and activities that enable all pupils to participate, develop and enjoy physical activity. The school encourages everyone to take part, which ensures pupils of all abilities and motivational levels can develop a love for sport that they frequently take beyond the school. Leaders carefully monitor participation rates and achievements, including up to national representation. Leaders act on pupil and parent feedback to ensure the programmes offered to pupils cater for their needs and abilities. Pupils enjoy physical play at break time and the space encourages them to do so.
37. PSHE is highly valued by pupils of all ages. It is successful in encouraging pupils to acknowledge that they need to learn about the challenges of growing up in a complex and fast-developing world.

38. Leaders ensure that RSE schemes of work in place take into account pupils' religious backgrounds, therefore encouraging mutual respect and supporting British values and benefitting pupils' personal development. In the prep school, pupils understand the needs of their peer group and build very strong relationships with their peers that extend beyond their own class or year group. Male pupils in Year 6 recounted a clear recollection of RSE lessons. They stated that they were a little immature last year when it was introduced but now understood that it was all about growing up. Leaders' decision to provide a broad relationship education challenges prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination and explores the development of tolerances of different relationships, faiths and marriages. Pupils demonstrate a highly developed understanding of themselves and others, preparing them for the future world.
39. Pupils are polite and keen to engage in conversation, confidently answering questions. They are happy and well behaved, and older pupils enjoy positions of responsibility. These positions develop their self-confidence and self-knowledge as well as increasing their sense of empathy for others in their community. Relationships between and behaviour of pupils are very good and in line with the school ethos of caring for others. Teachers have high expectations of pupils in their work and behaviour and apply the behaviour policy consistently throughout the school. Consequently, behaviour in class and around the school is of a high standard, creating a calm and purposeful working environment.
40. Leaders manage incidents of poor behaviour well. They use a restorative approach to dealing with incidents, enabling pupils to learn from their mistakes. Behaviour and bullying logs are well maintained, reviewed regularly and trends are identified and addressed. In discussion, pupils had no awareness of bullying but were aware of the processes in place. The school's anti-bullying strategy is effective. Pupils were aware of who to turn to for support, whether there was a health or wellbeing concern, and recognised the benefit of the medical support, wellbeing centre and multi-faith room in supporting their mental and physical health.
41. The various health and safety procedures within the school are effectively monitored and support pupils to learn in a safe environment. The premises and accommodation are maintained in accordance with the regulations, including a programme of electrical and water testing. There is a clear process in place for reporting any maintenance issues so that they can be rectified. Suitable toilet, washing and drinking water facilities are provided.
42. Fire drills take place, including during boarding time, and are correctly carried out and recorded. Fire risk assessments have been conducted on all the buildings and an action plan is in place to reduce risks where identified.
43. The risk assessment process is clearly stated, understood and implemented with appropriate risk assessments in place for the school sites and for educational visits which are closely overseen. The management of risk is thorough and embedded in the organisation, with leadership and management providing the necessary support and training so that the risk management process is well known through the school. As a result, the vast majority of pupils report that they feel safe in school.
44. Accidents are recorded, reported appropriately and monitored. First aid and wellbeing arrangements are well developed and provide physical, medical and emotional support where required in dedicated facilities.

45. The admissions register is kept in accordance with the regulations, and attendance is logged appropriately and monitored for trends so that any issues can be investigated and addressed with the appropriate support.
46. Leaders in boarding have implemented a prefect system that is well planned and ensures pupils have opportunities for leadership and are aware of their responsibilities. Prefects confirmed they have a strong voice and represent the boarders. Their recent pupil research led to discussions around the type and quality of food, and all commented positively on the improvements that have resulted.
47. The school leaders provide a homely environment in which boarders feel safe, secure, and comfortable. Boarders enjoy the privacy of their accommodation and mealtimes are healthy. However, there is a significant inconsistency in the boarding experience between the houses. Leadership in boarding has developed a wide range of opportunities for pupils to experience beyond the school day. Meticulous planning, pupil leadership input and access to facilities ensure pupils enjoy a wide-ranging experience in their life outside of the school day.
48. The leadership of the school has focused closely on the academic attainment of boarders. Leaders have implemented improvements in learning habits, study routines and monitoring to ensure a steady improvement in the academic performance for this groups of pupils through, for example supervised homework sessions. The views of some boarders are that this significantly limits the access to the boarding houses in the evening, and that there is restricted access to their accommodation when they are unwell or during the day. Boarders expressed concerns that they are not trusted to become independent, due to their lack of understanding of why the systems and procedures are in place.
49. The leadership of boarding has a clear vision about improvements being introduced and the intended benefits for pupils. However, this vision has not been communicated clearly with boarding staff or boarders. This has led to confusion and frustration amongst boarders.
50. There is an array of activities on offer in three large rooms of the Nursery, covering all seven areas of learning in an enabling environment. This enables the children to play and explore in areas of their own interest. Children play happily alongside their friends and are fully immersed in the learning experiences on offer to promote their development in an age-appropriate environment.

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

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

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

52. Teachers provide opportunities for pupils' social and moral education to develop by linking topics in programmes of study to real world issues. For example, whilst learning about supply and demand for electricity, the focus of pupils moved quickly to problems associated with acid rain, global warming and its impacts, with pupils openly debating the need to reduce fossil fuels usage and how they might influence this in their local and wider communities.
53. The school has effective provision, which is appropriate to each age group regarding the understanding of future planning, including economic issues, such as student loans, and financial understanding. The global citizenship curriculum provides opportunities for pupils throughout the prep school to understand and develop good knowledge and understanding of economics for example Year 4 pupils considered the value of buying designer clothing. To support their economic understanding further Year 6 have instigated a healthy snack shack where they sell healthy snacks to pupils at break time.
54. Leadership have ensured that the appropriate PSHE curriculum plans are age appropriate and reflect aptitudes. Topics covered enable pupils to develop their mutual respect, tolerance and understanding. The curriculum plans reflect the school aims, actively promote British values and offer a dedicated careers guidance programme. Consequently, pupils are prepared for their futures with confidence in a changing world.
55. Opportunities and experiences in the EYFS fully support the children's social development. When there is a disagreement, children in Reception accept responsibility for their actions and are earnest in their apologies. They demonstrate a clear understanding of the impact their behaviour can have on others. Children in the Nursery demonstrate high levels of collaboration and negotiation to be able to succeed in making a marble run. They show an understanding of democracy and respect as they listen to each other's suggestions and come to a corporate decision on their play.
56. In discussions, pupils had clear recollections of learning about democracy. They understood the importance of independence, collaboration, respect, freedom and the right to a voice. When asked what this meant to them, they stated that they were core to life in Britain. The leaders promote opportunities to build skills and understanding of social development, such as understanding of the law, and other cultures through the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion society who shared their cultural knowledge and understanding with pupils and staff. Pupils speak highly of this experience to gain a better understanding of the world around them.
57. In promoting the school aims – to empower our community of learners with the confidence to be a genuine and best version of themselves – teachers know their pupils well. Consequently, pupils are encouraged to be analytical about their achievements. Teachers assist pupils in identifying their next targets and help them achieve them and become the best version of themselves.
58. The careers programme is thorough and innovative and is highly regarded by the pupil body. Leaders have developed a clear sequential curriculum path for all pupils from Year 7 to provide them with the tools and knowledge required to make informed decisions about their next steps. Consequently, by the end of their secondary education, pupils express a clear understanding of their next steps which are appropriately ambitious and diverse. The school's programme in careers ensures pupils

know all possible paths available to them and analysis of destinations suggests that a diverse, detailed and unbiased approach to destinations is enforced.

59. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to prepare for life in British society and for pupils to develop understanding of democracy, law and institutions in Britain. The school council teaches about democracy as pupil representatives are voted on to represent their class. Older pupils visit public institutions such as the Houses of Parliament where they attend workshops and increase their understanding of the role of parliament and how it works. Pupils were not only able to explain the process, but offered suggestions to how the process could be improved.
60. Older pupils recognised the provision in place was preparing them for life beyond school, such as through the discussion of relevant topic areas, including drink driving and the consequences, and the importance of abiding by the laws in place in Britain. The school provides a framework for pupils to develop a sense of responsibility and accept their actions were usually a personal choice. Pupils can debate topics and reason their arguments, displaying a keen sense of fairness and expressing the difference between right and wrong choices.
61. Pupils recognise the opportunities that the school is providing through the variety of curriculum, co-curriculum and pupil led societies, both in school and in the community. Pupils are confident and have a highly developed self-understanding and self-worth, and how they can use this to support others, including those of different cultures and beliefs. The training and opportunities offered through the activities and outreach programmes offer pupils a challenging range of ways to develop their own personal skills through projects of high social value. Pupils are active in the local community and in charity work through the co-curricular programme, including a local foodbank, the CCF, and swimming lessons. These enable pupils to see how their developing skills can support others. Pupils support sections of society where there may be people less fortunate through charitable events and charitable fundraising. Pupils in the prep school visit a local care home and sing to residents. Pupils have raised funds for a variety of local and national charities including a Brain Tumour charity, the RNLI and Ukraine by suggesting and running their own cake sales, biscuit making and a penny mile.
62. The school celebrates and promotes an understanding of diversity. Pupils have a clear understanding that race, colour, religion and culture are respected and opportunities within lessons and assemblies to celebrate these, enable pupils to develop understanding and respect.

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

63. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

64. Safeguarding procedures are well established and well known. Leaders engender a culture of openness and vigilance. The safeguarding policy follows current statutory guidance and is implemented effectively.
65. The proprietor and the local governing body conduct regular reviews of safeguarding practices. They discuss and thoroughly scrutinise safeguarding arrangements. Leaders implement any actions arising from their findings promptly.
66. Safeguarding induction and training for staff, including that for the safeguarding leaders, are thorough, regular and in line with local requirements. Leaders keep up to date with changes to legislation and trends in child protection and radicalisation issues. Leaders provide safeguarding updates and scenario-based training for staff, followed by school generated quizzes to review understanding. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and procedures. They know how to escalate concerns when required including a firm understanding of whistleblowing procedures.
67. Safeguarding leaders' relationship with local children's services is effective. The safeguarding team engage with social services, families and the police appropriately. They implement appropriate procedures in response to any concerns about child-on-child abuse or allegations against staff. When issues do arise, pupils are supported effectively. Safeguarding leaders maintain thorough records of concerns. They record incidents and concerns, analyse trends and respond to emerging patterns. They have a strong understanding and effectively mitigate the safeguarding risks associated with supervising pupils on the school sites. Leaders carefully monitor pupils affected by safeguarding issues to ensure that they receive appropriate support.
68. There are a number of ways for pupils to voice concerns which are well known to them. Leaders ensure that every pupil has a known 'go to' adult to whom they can raise issues and the school has developed online systems which are well understood by pupils in order for them to raise issues. All pupils, including those who speak EAL, understand the procedures and support should there be a safeguarding concern which might include the support of a language assistant. As a result, pupils feel safe and happy in their school. The physical and mental health of pupils are given a high priority and effective communication with parents is maintained appropriately.
69. All appropriate safer recruitment checks are made in a timely manner and accurately recorded. The nominated governor with responsibility for this area reviews the effectiveness of safeguarding arrangements, including recruitment checks.
70. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Robust internet filtering and monitoring procedures are in place and alerts are immediately reviewed by members of the safeguarding team who take action as required.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

71. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

Setting 1: Bridge Nursery

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

72. The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
73. Leaders and managers are committed to an ambitious curriculum. They support staff to understand children's previous learning and use their observations to plan effectively for the best outcomes for the individual child. Staff are skilled at recognising children's developmental stages, reflected in their detailed and creatively implemented plans across all areas of learning. This has a significant and highly positive impact on children's development.
74. Staff give children a rich range of experiences, which helps them to learn about themselves, each other and the wider community. Staff host multicultural days to introduce children to the many different languages that the school community speaks. Children also learn about different types of music and foods that people eat. Most recently, children participated in food tasting and were introduced to traditional curries during Eid festivities. Staff similarly enhance the curriculum with a wide range of carefully planned learning experiences. These help to introduce new skills. For instance, children learn yoga, find out about dental care, navigate obstacle courses and learn to play musical instruments.
75. Staff help children understand right from wrong. Children respond positively to correction and accept staff guidance and support. For example, when children find situations emotionally challenging, staff sensitively use a combination of sign language and the spoken word to help guide them through the situation successfully. Staff provide comprehensive information for parents, including about daily activities and guidance on supporting their child's learning. In particular, parents have found information shared about supporting children's social and emotional wellbeing helpful. Parents have been invited into workshops on how to support their child in times of emotional highs and lows. This is promoting a consistent approach between home and nursery and is therefore having a positive impact on children.
76. Leaders ensure that staff remain well informed about relevant safeguarding issues. For instance, they provide regular briefings about contextual safeguarding risks, which helps to ensure that staff have the knowledge they need to help protect children's welfare.

Quality of education

77. The quality of education is outstanding.
78. Staff design activities that captivate and stimulate children's interests. This fosters deep concentration and active participation. For example, during an observation, younger children enthusiastically explored jelly, ice shapes, minibeasts, and plants with their hands. Their focused attention and interactions with staff reflected a sense of wonder and excitement. Staff helped to further promote high levels of communication and language and children explained their thinking confidently, saying to others 'You hold the jelly, now rub it, it's disappeared!'

79. Staff effectively support children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They plan learning opportunities specifically tailored to children's needs to help ensure that they are fully included. Throughout the nursery, staff successfully and consistently use a combination of sign language and gesture to support children, such as when they investigate minibeasts using a magnifying glass. This helps children to engage at their own level.
80. Staff proficiently assess children's progress and communicate with parents. They complete regular assessments which inform their individualised planning, and which facilitate opportunities for children to advance across all learning areas. Detailed feedback, including the two-year progress check are provided to parents, promoting a transparent and collaborative approach.
81. Children actively engage in a wide range of play activities throughout the nursery, demonstrating exceptional turn-taking and communication skills. Staff interactions are supportive and nurturing, fostering a positive learning environment where children feel empowered to explore and express themselves. Staff have a secure understanding of the sequence of skills children need to learn and physical activity is encouraged, with children demonstrating control in both gross and fine motor skills. For example, children confidently use a pincer grip to pick up pieces and complete puzzles and they navigate obstacle courses and climbing equipment in the outdoor area with high levels of control and coordination.

Behaviour and attitudes

82. Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
83. Relationships among staff, parents, children, and managers are characterised by warmth and friendliness. Children feel emotionally secure, demonstrated by the strong attachments they have with staff. During observations, children in the toddler room were seen eagerly taking turns using light balls to roll down tubes, displaying curiosity and enjoyment. Staff provided continuous praise, using phrases like 'Good job' and 'Well done', while also prompting reflection with questions, such as 'What happened?' and 'Where did it go?' Children responded proudly to this encouragement, fostering a positive atmosphere and an enjoyment of their learning.
84. Staff have high expectations for behaviour and respond sensitively and effectively to support children when needed. For example, during story time, staff use sign language to help children understand behaviour expectations. They use distraction and redirection well and this gentle approach helps to maintain a supportive learning environment for all children.
85. Children receive swift and effective support from staff, especially when they face challenges in regulating their emotions. For instance, in the baby room, a child became upset when a staff member tried to take away their comforter after nap time. The staff member responded by reassuring the child and saying, 'that's okay, you're not ready. Here you go,' returning the comforter and offering a reassuring hug until the child felt ready to participate in activities. This demonstrates that staff understand their key children well and know how to make sure they feel emotionally secure.

Personal development

86. The personal development of children is outstanding.

87. Children with varying talents and abilities receive exceptional support. Staff recognise children's interests and create individual learning plans to promote their unique strengths further. Children with a passion for gardening enjoy precisely planned gardening activities and learn to plant seeds, look after them and learn how they grow. Children with advanced communication skills are challenged with complex instructions to expand their vocabulary and mathematical ability. For instance, during a minibeast investigation activity, young children confidently identified various insects, from centipede to woodlouse, using subject-specific vocabulary, which is advanced in relation to their age and stage of development.
88. Staff prioritise teaching children mutual respect and tolerance in the curriculum. They model positive behaviours, adherence to rules, and promote high-level independence skills during routine times. During snack time, children demonstrate good manners and cooperation. They follow routines, make choices and demonstrate a keen sense of values. For example, children articulate politely what fruit they would like for a snack, they select and eat this independently. Children support each other and are very caring, helping their peers to clear away their crockery afterwards.
89. Staff actively promote curiosity, resilience, and independence across all rooms in the nursery. They create a nurturing environment and they encourage explorative play. For instance, children are able to select toys and resources which are stored at an accessible level. They can use them to create their own starting points for play. Children show a sense of responsibility and care as they learn to tidy for themselves and also assist others. They also demonstrate high levels of independence for their ages in tasks, such as dressing for outdoor activities.

Leadership and management

90. Leadership and management are outstanding.
91. Managers prioritise focused and highly effective professional development for staff, ensuring they feel incredibly supported in all aspects of their development and personal wellbeing. Staff have recently completed training about personal, social and emotional development, which is their current focus. Staff attend courses and then share best practice with others. They also observe practice in other rooms, which is promoting consistency across age groups. Some staff have in particular enhanced their knowledge of exploratory and sensory play and have been working on helping others to incorporate this into their planning and learning environment. This is having a positive impact on children's levels of engagement.
92. Leaders and managers maintain an ambitious vision for the nursery. They actively involve all staff in creating this and their focus is to provide high-quality care within an exciting and engaging environment. This vision informs training and development plans with the aim of continually enhancing the curriculum offer. The manager has extremely high expectations and she frequently shares updates in best practice in early years to keep staff knowledge current.
93. Leaders and managers engaging with staff, children, and parents extremely well. Parents spoken to feel exceptionally well supported and value the detailed feedback provided on their child's progress. Staff consistently share comprehensive information with parents regarding their child's development and wellbeing, offering support for home-based activities across all developmental areas.

94. Leaders and managers implement clear policies and procedures for logging concerns and complaints, ensuring transparency with explanations, actions, and outcomes. Recorded actions demonstrate a proactive approach to addressing concerns, with a collaborative effort between the nursery and parents to resolve issues effectively and promptly. This ensures children receive the necessary support and attention for their wellbeing and progress.

Safeguarding

95. Safeguarding is effective.

96. Leaders establish thorough procedures to ensure safe recruitment and safeguard children, both within and beyond the nursery. Children's physical and medical requirements are met and leaders ensure robust first-aid arrangements are in place.

97. Safeguarding is a high priority. Leaders provide ongoing training updates to equip all staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to help to keep children safe. Staff exhibit confidence in implementing safeguarding procedures and leaders ensure that clear guidance is in place around the nursery for both staff and visitors. Leaders are proactive and they regularly review policies and procedures, such as in relation to safe eating in the early years.

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

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

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

Setting 2: The Stables Nursery

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

99. The overall effectiveness of the early years provision is outstanding.
100. Leaders provide an ambitious and engaging curriculum that challenges children, follows their interests and passion for learning. Staff are highly perceptive to children's emerging ideas and modify the learning environment and resources spontaneously in response to these. In addition, children have the freedom and confidence to decide when they want more resources to enhance their play, such as when they go outdoors and collect natural materials to use in their constructions. Children make outstanding progress in their learning and development relative to their starting points.
101. Leaders ensure that staff share a secure knowledge of how young children learn. For instance, staff have completed sign language training to promote communication skills and they use this consistently within their practice to help children to access the curriculum. This is particularly successful for children who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
102. Staff place utmost importance upon giving children choices within their play. They are highly effective at using questioning to support children's independence. For instance, staff encourage children to think for themselves and they regularly ask 'What would you like to do?' Children respond with high levels of maturity for their age and in a self-assured manner, expressing what they would like to do. This demonstrates their positive attitudes to learning.
103. Staff have a secure knowledge of procedures to follow should they have a potential concern about children's welfare or staff practice. They attend regular training and fully understand their responsibility to report any potential risks. Staff understand and follow policies and procedures, including in relation to risk assessment to help ensure the building is safe and suitable for children.

Quality of education

104. The quality of education is outstanding.
105. Staff are highly qualified and they deliver a tailored curriculum based on the children's interests and next steps. This has a positive impact on what children know and can remember. For instance, children freely recall information from familiar books. They refer to sea creatures in stories that they have read as they replicate pictures of them in their creative activities. Staff ensure that every day learning opportunities build over time to help children make rapid progress.
106. Staff support children's communication and language skills extremely well. Children effectively communicate their needs in an age-appropriate way. They speak with increasing confidence and fluency, such as when they discuss texts with their key person. Staff read to children in a way that excites and engages them. They effectively introduce new ideas, concepts and vocabulary through a variety of books. Children's passion for reading in every room is evident as children choose books,

share them with friends, read them on their own and ask staff to read to them. This helps promote a strong life-long love of books and reading.

107. Staff create a highly stimulating and inviting environment. This encourages the children's curiosity and independence. Children are deeply engaged in their play and sustain high levels of concentration. They happily play alongside each other. For instance, they strengthen their physical skills as they scoop, pour and measure water. Young children explore what will happen if they pour water in different ways and discover what will happen if they pour it through a funnel, onto the floor and in the water tray. This experimentation develops children's knowledge and understanding.
108. Staff understand each child's unique needs. They build strong relationships with children and understand how they learn. Staff recognise the support that children need and use different strategies, such as sound recordings, to help children communicate with them. This is highly successful in giving children a voice. Children who SEND achieve the best possible outcomes.

Behaviour and attitudes

109. Behaviour and attitudes are outstanding.
110. Children show exceptional levels of interest and curiosity in the world around them. They explore the nursery confidently and are actively engaged in their learning. Babies contentedly move around the room playing and exploring the activities on offer. For instance, they show an interest in posting activities and placing balls into a box. Staff capture this interest and provide other containers for children to post into. Children delight in doing this for extended periods of time. Children are highly motivated and are very eager to join in with games with their peers. They demonstrate this when they crawl over to join others playing games that have caught their attention, such as hide-and-seek. Children have extremely high levels of confidence in social situations. They delight in meeting new people and interacting, such as with new starters, and replicating what visitors are doing, such as typing.
111. Children show high levels of self-control. They consistently keep on trying hard, even if they encounter difficulties. Staff are highly effective at supporting children to be successful. They provide children with space and time to try tasks independently. For instance, staff demonstrate new skills to children, such as using scissors and they give children the opportunity to have a go themselves before offering support. They similarly show children different ways to put on their coats, which they attempt independently. As part of their consistent practice, staff use strategies, such as visual timetables, to help young children understand what is coming next. This helps children to follow new routines.
112. Children show a kind and caring attitude towards each other. They happily share their toys and wait patiently for their turn. They understand the need to follow the rules and listen attentively to adults. Children have consistently high levels of respect for others in relation to their age and stage of development. They demonstrate an early understanding of compassion and empathy and freely offer comfort to each other by giving cuddles.

Personal development

113. The personal development of children is outstanding.
114. Staff are highly effective at developing children's understanding and respect for each other. Staff use signs, comfort words and songs in the different languages that children speak. This supports children's understanding of routine and helps them to feel valued. Staff celebrate the diversity of their nursery, such as by encouraging children to learn about similarities and differences between themselves and others. Children learn about celebrations, such as Holi and Easter and they learn to sing songs in languages spoken by their peers, such as in Spanish.
115. Staff are highly effective in developing children's character. Children have a strong sense of self and a good understanding of what makes them unique. For example, children share family photo albums and staff use these to promote links between home and nursery. Children are encouraged to recognise, name and talk about their family members. Staff challenge children to take appropriate risks, which develops high levels of resilience and independence in relation to their age. For instance, babies work hard to climb the soft play equipment. They experiment with different body movements to solve the problem of how to climb up to the top and they persevere until they succeed. This shows that they are determined learners.
116. Staff modify settling-in and transition arrangements to cater for children's individual requirements. For instance, they find out about children's home routines and support parents sensitively to help children to adjust to nursery. They are highly successful at this, such as when they help children and parents to adjust to transitions relating to feeding and sleeping.

Leadership and management

117. Leadership and management are outstanding.
118. Leaders are ambitious and have high aspirations for continual improvement. They prioritise ensuring that standards are high in each nursery room and that the curriculum is implemented consistently well. Leaders complete frequent observation and monitoring to gain an accurate oversight of the provision and they use this to inform their development plan.
119. Leaders place staff wellbeing high on the agenda. They successfully engage with staff, such as through supervisions, to ensure they feel fully supported. Leaders address any issues that staff raise with them quickly and appropriately. They have put procedures in place to support staff mental health, such as promoting a positive working environment where staff can take time out and have breaks in a comfortable environment. Staff report that they feel valued and very well supported in their role and they welcome new initiatives to support their wellbeing.
120. Leaders ensure that training is personalised to the needs of their staff team. This helps to develop staff knowledge and skills. For instance, leaders create individualised training plans for each member of staff. This includes aspects identified from staff supervisions and from personal requests. This balance means that staff embrace training positively.
121. Leaders feel well supported by Governors. Governors are involved in the running of the nursery at a strategic level and they support decision making and the drive for continual improvement.

Safeguarding

122. Safeguarding is effective.
123. Leaders have a clear understanding of their responsibility to protect children's welfare. For instance, they are familiar with local safeguarding partnership procedures and they know what to do should they have a concern. Leaders ensure that staff share an equally robust understanding of safeguarding, such as through training and staff meetings.
124. Staff actively promote a safe and caring environment for the children. For example, they complete regular fire evacuation drills with the children, which helps them to become familiar these routines should they need to follow them in an emergency.

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

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

School details

School	Ashford School
Department for Education number	886/6000
Registered early years number	The Bridge – EY34413 The Stables – 2558538
Registered charity number	1016538
Address	Ashford School East Hill Ashford Kent TN24 8PB
Phone number	01233 625171
Email address	reception@ashfordschool.co.uk
Website	www.ashfordschool.co.uk
Proprietor	United Church Schools Trust
Chair	Dr Rosalind Given-Wilson
Headteacher	Mr Michael Hall
Age range	0 to 18
Number of pupils	1082
Number of boarding pupils	107
Number of children in the early years registered setting 1 (The Bridge)	99
Number of children in the early years registered setting 2 (The Stables)	90
Date of previous inspection	3 to 5 March 2020

Information about the school

126. Ashford School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils between three months and 18 years. Originally established in 1898 as a school for female pupils, it became co-educational in 2005. The school is part of the United Church Schools Trust, known as United Learning, whose trustees have responsibility for governance, supported by a local governing body. Since the last inspection the Stables Nursery was opened, and one of the boarding houses has closed.
127. The school has four boarding houses on the senior school site; three of which were operational at the time of the inspection. Two of these provides accommodation for male pupils and the other is for female pupils.
128. The senior school site includes the Bridge Nursery. The Prep school site is about three miles distant and includes a pre-school nursery and the Stables Nursery.
129. The school has identified 330 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
130. English is an additional language for 109 pupils.
131. The school states its aims are to create adventurous learners inside and outside of the classroom, through developing an environment where the wellbeing of the child is paramount. It fosters a sense of respect for individuality by encouraging intellectual freedom and creativity, determination and leadership and encourages academic confidence and curiosity, hence empowering our community of learners with confidence to be a genuine and best version of themselves.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

23 to 25 April 2024

132. A team of fourteen inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

133. 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 of the local governing body
- 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 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.

134. 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