

School inspection report

20 to 22 February 2024

Witham Hall Preparatory School

Witham-on-the-Hill

Bourne

Lincolnshire

PE10 0JJ

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

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors provide effective oversight of leaders, who in turn actively promote pupils' wellbeing. The governors bring broad and balanced experience to their role, supplemented by regular training and use appropriate external expertise when needed. Governors regularly visit the school to observe and to meet pupils and staff, and they use the evidence gained to challenge leaders.
2. A cohesive leadership team is effective in promoting the school's aims, which are understood by pupils and reinforced by staff. Their effective self-evaluation and development planning support the implementation of the school's vision.
3. Pupils experience a broad and balanced curriculum which is further enhanced by a varied and well-planned programme of extra-curricular activities. Skilled teaching enables pupils to make good progress with their studies. Boarders enjoy an appropriate and varied activities programme.
4. Early years children flourish in a caring, secure environment created by dedicated staff. They make good progress due to effective planning by staff who know them well as individuals. This cultivates high levels of enthusiasm for learning in children.
5. Leaders are effective in promoting pupils' welfare. Pupils demonstrate high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem. Boarders enjoy a positive experience at school which contributes towards their growing sense of independence and resilience. The school's extensive physical education programme enables pupils to develop high levels of fitness. Their welfare is further enhanced by access to nutritious food choices and appropriate guidance on healthy eating.
6. The premises are well maintained, and the health and safety measures are adequate. However, leaders must ensure that maintenance equipment used by grounds staff is securely stored at all times.
7. Pupils are respectful towards others, both within their own and the wider community. Secure, happy relationships are evident in both day and boarding communities. Pupils engage enthusiastically with local community events and actively support a wide range of charitable causes.
8. Effective and appropriate guidance is provided to older pupils in future potential career options. Pupils' self-confidence and personal development is bolstered by the many opportunities to undertake positions of responsibility and to represent their peers on pupils' forums. Some older pupils feel that the guidance provided for their next stage of their lives is limited.
9. A robust safeguarding culture exists within the school. The wellbeing of all pupils is rigorously promoted by those with responsibility for safeguarding. All staff receive appropriate and regular training and contribute effectively towards the communal responsibility for safeguarding pupils.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

Recommended next steps

Leaders should ensure:

- the effective oversight of health and safety measures at the school is extended to include the secure storage of all maintenance equipment
- the personal development programme meets the needs of older pupils fully, as they prepare to transition to their next stage of education.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders and managers successfully promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders identify the school's strengths and areas for further development, which are recorded in a detailed school improvement plan. Governors oversee the implementation of the plan, working effectively with leaders and provide the appropriate resources.
11. The governing body provides effective oversight of the school's policies and procedures. Leaders ensure that school policies are relevant to the needs of pupils and that the teaching in all subjects is accessible to all. The school's accessibility plan identifies and addresses the academic and physical needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
12. Governors undertake suitable training in order to fulfil their responsibilities. Leaders ensure appropriate staff training takes place to support the effective implementation of policies. Where relevant, leaders make effective use of professional agencies in meeting the school's training requirements.
13. Leaders and managers support pupils' high levels of self-confidence and self-esteem by actively promoting the school values included in the 'Witham Way'. Pupils understand how to report any concerns online, in writing or in person to a trusted adult and their worries are addressed effectively. The views of older pupils are not always sought or followed when planning their personal development programme, and they are working to address this so that it is relevant to their emerging needs.
14. Effective leadership of boarding means that boarders receive suitable care and enjoy staying overnight at school. Leaders are suitably trained and they have developed suitable policies which are implemented rigorously. Resident staff fulfil their roles diligently, ensuring boarders are well looked after. Pupils regard boarding as an enjoyable and popular aspect of the school's provision.
15. Leaders enable children in the early years to thrive due to the care and individualised support they receive. Children benefit from many opportunities to initiate learning in a spacious, stimulating learning environment. Children have access to high-quality resources to support both indoor and outdoor learning. Their progress is carefully monitored and effective interventions by staff supports good progress. Children also benefit from an effective partnership between school and home.
16. Leaders and governors identify and mitigate the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing, enabling pupils to feel safe at school. However, leaders should ensure the secure storage of equipment used by maintenance staff. Pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing is actively and effectively promoted. Leaders oversee robust safeguarding policy and practice, including a conscientious approach to the recruitment of staff.
17. Parents are able to access relevant information and policies from the school's website. A clear and suitable complaints policy, available via the website, is followed appropriately by leaders when addressing complaints. Leaders manage any boarding complaints suitably. Appropriate guidance on pupils' progress, including targets for further improvement, is given through regular written reports and parents' evenings.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders enable pupils to experience a broad and balanced curriculum delivered through well-considered plans and a varied extra-curricular activities programme that engage pupils' interest and enrich their learning. The curriculum is suitable for the needs of pupils of all abilities, including those who have SEND.
19. Pupils demonstrate well-developed literacy skills, speaking with confidence and employing a broad range of vocabulary in their writing. Their knowledge and understanding of numeracy is secure and they can apply what they have learnt when solving mathematical problems. A variety of approaches are used successfully by teachers to deepen pupils' understanding, such as when older pupils were observed learning about algebra by hunting for n th terms in different parts of their classroom.
20. Lessons are carefully planned by knowledgeable, skilful teachers with consideration given to building upon pupils' previous knowledge, skills and understanding. Resources are effectively deployed by teachers to support pupils' learning. Senior pupils show secure computing skills as they use individual handheld devices to support their work in lessons.
21. Teachers adjust their planning for pupils who have SEND and use effective teaching methods to support their learning across the curriculum. Pupils with SEND, in consequence, make good progress. The needs of pupils with English as an additional language are effectively addressed enabling them to make rapid progress in their fluency in English.
22. The high level of engagement of pupils is due to the positive impact of different approaches to learning employed by teachers who know pupils well and understand their interest and needs. Pupils demonstrate high standards of behaviour in lessons which contributes towards their acquisition of new knowledge, skills and understanding. They show resilience and effort when undertaking tasks, even when they encounter challenges and setbacks.
23. Well qualified early years staff effectively support the development of key skills in the reception class. Children make good progress in their communication and language development and articulate what they are learning clearly and coherently. They confidently initiate their own learning activities and make rapid progress supported by careful tracking and skilful interventions by staff. As a result, almost all achieve a good level of development across their seven areas of learning.
24. An effective framework of assessment allows leaders and staff to track pupils' progress. Gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are identified and appropriate interventions enable them to make good progress according to their ability in all subjects. The marking of work is rigorous and consistent, clearly signposting areas for development and motivating pupils to improve. The progress of pupils is demonstrated by their success in the entrance examinations to senior schools, including those with challenging entry requirements.
25. Pupils of all ages further develop their knowledge, skills and understanding through an engaging extra-curricular programme which is appropriate to their needs and interests. Leaders include a varied range of activities which greatly enhance physical, creative and social skills. There are many opportunities to participate in a wide range of sports, including equestrian, golf and squash.
26. Pupils' education is enriched through many opportunities to participate in visits to places of interest, residential trips and competitions. More able pupils extended their understanding of STEM robotics

during a competition at a local senior school. They benefit from an interesting range of visitors to the school leading activities which further enrich their personal development and topics studied in lessons. Boarders enjoy a varied programme of after school activities and are given appropriate opportunities to complete prep and enjoy free time.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Pupils are supported by a well-embedded culture of care, reflecting the school's key values as framed through the 'Witham Way'. Leaders promote the importance of understanding other people's needs. Pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence are built on the positive relationships and mutual trust within the school community. Pupils enjoy coming to school.
28. Leaders' aims are reflected in a curriculum which effectively supports pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing. The positive impact of the Learning for Life lessons can be seen in pupils' understanding of what underpins appropriate personal development and healthy relationships. However, some content of the Learning for Life lessons is not matched to the emerging needs of older pupils.
29. School staff respond effectively to pupils who raise concerns. Pupils can report an issue in writing, online and in person and are confident that the response they will receive will be timely and helpful. Boarders are clear about who they can speak to if they have a concern or worry and feel well supported by all staff with responsibility for their care.
30. Pupils' spiritual growth and the development of a clear sense of right and wrong is an important feature of their education. The Christian principles are embedded in day-to-day life. Good standards of behaviour are evident within both the day and boarding communities. Leaders monitor behavioural trends closely and intervene effectively to address issues that arise. On the rare occasions when bullying occurs, the needs of both victim and perpetrator are addressed swiftly and effectively.
31. Pupils benefit from regular exercise and engage wholeheartedly in the school's physical education programme. They understand the importance of exercise in supporting their physical and mental health. They enjoy high levels of fitness as a result of participation in regular games lessons and matches. Healthy eating is actively promoted in lessons and day and boarding pupils have access to healthy food choices.
32. Children in the early years enjoy secure relationships with caring, attentive staff, which support their rapid personal and emotional development. Their day is punctuated by active learning and opportunities to develop their physical movement skills. The importance of oral hygiene and healthy eating is emphasised to children in the early years. As a result, children enjoy attending their sessions, and settle quickly and confidently upon arrival.
33. Pupils are appropriately supervised at all times, both during the day and within the boarding community. Children in the early years benefit from effective supervision arrangements which enables them to learn and play safely. Both day and boarding pupils are clear about how to respond appropriately in an emergency and fire precaution measures are implemented rigorously.
34. The premises are well maintained. Risks to pupils' health and safety are usually identified and mitigated in a timely and appropriate manner. During the inspection, an issue concerning unattended maintenance equipment was identified. This is addressed promptly, and procedures put in place to prevent a recurrence. Admission and attendance arrangements are suitable. The relevant local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.

35. Effective first aid arrangements are in place to meet both day and boarding pupils' needs when they are injured or unwell. Both day pupils and boarders have access to appropriate medical facilities located at the heart of the school and are well cared for by a team of matrons. Boarders' living and sleeping arrangement are homely. They are able to store their possessions securely.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

36. Leaders enable pupils to contribute to their school community. Pupils understand the diversity and richness of different communities within the UK and in other parts of the world. High levels of respect and acceptance of individual differences amongst people is evident amongst pupils at the school.
37. Staff enable pupils to gain good insights into life in British society and how they might be effective citizens who understand and espouse British values. Pupils learn to respect the views of others through forums such as the school council and eco committee. They are encouraged to view political issues from different perspectives in order to achieve a balanced view. Pupils are respectful towards people from other cultures and who follow different religions and beliefs.
38. Pupils develop an understanding of the institutions and services that underpin British society. They learn about the work of the police and the history of parliament. Pupils have the opportunity to experience the democratic processes through election to forums such as school council.
39. Pupils demonstrate a clear moral compass as they seek to follow the Witham Way. The school provides a successful grounding in helping pupils in preparing them to be law-abiding citizens in the future. They gain a clearer understanding of how the legal process works when participating in a trial in a mock law court.
40. A secure understanding of how to manage money is gained by pupils through the school's Learning for Life curriculum which enables them to understand the potential impact of decisions they might make about their personal finances. The school provides opportunities for pupils to initiate fund raising ideas involving them running small businesses requiring financial decision-making. Leaders have identified further opportunities for pupils to enhance their understanding of how to use money effectively.
41. Leaders enable pupils to receive helpful guidance in preparing for the next stage of their lives. Boarders gain independence and responsibility in managing their own possessions. Pupils in Years 5 to 8 receive helpful careers guidance through the Learning for Life lessons. Year 8 pupils participate in an annual careers fair in which they receive advice about future life choices and GCSE choices that support different career paths. Leaders are working to strengthen the personal development and relationships education programme for older pupils.
42. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to serve their school community by undertaking a wide range of roles of responsibility, such as prefects, heads of houses and sports captains which supports their personal development. Pupils are provided with clear guidance and support by staff in order that they can fulfil their duties effectively. Pupils engage in a wide range of activities which support different community events. This includes the school community as a whole working together to support a charitable cause. In the last year, a significant amount of money was donated towards children in their fight against the medical condition rhabdomyosarcoma.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Leaders place high priority on safeguarding both day and boarding pupils and do so effectively. Governors are proactive in providing effective oversight through the rigorous scrutiny of safeguarding policies and by closely monitoring their implementation. They visit boarding houses and meet with boarders to assess first hand their safety and wellbeing. Safeguarding concerns that are raised are scrupulously recorded and appropriately addressed. Suitable referrals are made to external agencies by the school's safeguarding team. Pupils feel safe at school.
44. The school's safeguarding policy includes the most recent statutory guidance. It is updated in a timely manner at least annually. Amendments to safeguarding guidance are shared promptly with all staff. The policy can be easily accessed from the school's website and is a clearly written.
45. Safeguarding leaders are given sufficient time to perform their roles appropriately. They undertake suitable training which enables them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Upon joining the school, staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training as part of their induction which continues at regular intervals for all staff, enabling them to keep up to date with current requirements.
46. Safeguarding concerns are recorded, reported and addressed in an effective and timely manner, including those related to online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Effective systems are in place to filter and monitor inappropriate online activity. Risks to pupils' wellbeing are suitably assessed and mitigated. Appropriate measures are in place to identify and address risks of child-on-child abuse and staff understand and follow the requirement to report low level concerns.
47. Safeguarding policies and procedures in the early years are appropriate and effective. A senior leader has overarching responsibility for safeguarding in the early years and is suitably qualified to fulfil their role. Safeguarding risks to early years children are appropriately identified and mitigated both at school and during outings.
48. All staff, governors, volunteers and contractors undergo appropriate recruitment checks. A suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) is kept. Staff with responsibility for administering the SCR receive appropriate training and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders and the governor with responsibility for safeguarding provide rigorous oversight of recruitment processes.
49. Staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to safeguarding pupils' wellbeing. Pupils trust that concerns they disclose will be acted upon promptly and effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Witham Hall School
Department for Education number	925/6015
Registered charity number	507070
Address	Witham-on-the-Hill Bourne Lincolnshire PE10 0JJ
Phone number	01778 590222
Email address	secretary@withamhall.co.uk
Website	www.withamhall.com
Chair	Mr Andrew Riddington
Headteacher	Mr William Austen
Age range	4 to 13
Number of pupils	243
Date of previous inspection	20 to 21 November 2019

Information about the school

50. Witham Hall School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 4 to 13 years. The school was founded in 1959 and became a charitable trust in 1978. It is overseen by a board of governors. The school comprises a pre-preparatory department, including an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), for pupils aged 4 to 7, and a preparatory department for pupils aged 7 to 13.
51. Pupils can board from Year 4 and upwards. The boarding accommodation is located in the main school building.
52. The school has identified 50 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
53. English is an additional language for one pupil.
54. The school states its aim is to provide a safe, healthy and caring environment in which Withamians will thrive. Pupils are encouraged to aim high and in order to reach their full potential.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 February 2024

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

56. Inspection activities included:

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

57. 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

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