

School inspection report

5 to 7 December 2023

Annan School

Annan Farm

Lewes Road

Easons Green

Uckfield

East Sussex

TN22 5RE

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 school is led by knowledgeable proprietors who ensure the school's aims are woven into all aspects of its work. The proprietors monitor the work of the other leaders effectively and establish clear plans to improve further the school's provision and outcomes for pupils.
2. The curriculum is underpinned by the school's Froebelian approach to learning which means that much learning is connected within topics chosen by pupils. Younger pupils, in particular, explore and learn to solve problems using natural materials and practical equipment. They learn more formal skills such as reading and writing when they show readiness.
3. Leaders are aware that some younger pupils or those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) find the transition to more structured adult-initiated activities challenging and have introduced supportive adaptations in response. Pupils of all abilities make good progress so that when they leave the school they achieve at or exceed the predicted level relative to their starting points.
4. Leaders make effective use of the woodland environment in which the school is set to implement a curriculum that encourages active outdoor learning. Pupils develop an astute knowledge and understanding of ecosystems alongside more practical skills. Teaching throughout the school is adapted to the interests and needs of the pupils and responds to their level of engagement in activities. Pupils are well-motivated and independent learners who show a keen curiosity in the world around them.
5. Leaders have created a nurturing environment which gives prime importance to pupils' wellbeing. Pupils develop a secure sense of self-awareness through activities which encourage them to reflect on values and issues such as relationships with their peers and their responsibility for the natural world. Their good behaviour stems from an innate sense of what is right and a desire to be a kind friend, rather than rewards and sanctions. Pupils develop respectful and non-judgemental attitudes to others. These are modelled by staff who establish warm and positive relationships with them.
6. As they move through the school, pupils develop a sense of social responsibility. They show initiative to helping others and are keen to play a useful part in both the school and wider community. In their committees, they discuss and organise fund-raising activities both for the school and good causes.
7. The proprietors ensure that arrangements for health and safety are rigorously implemented. The school site is secure. Similarly, safeguarding procedures within the school are robust and staff understand and follow them.

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 step

- Continue to develop transition arrangements from a play-based, child-led approach as pupils move up the school into Year 2 so that all pupils adjust smoothly to a more structured learning programme.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. The proprietors ensure that the school's Froebelian principles influence all aspects of school life. They use their educational expertise to fulfil their governance responsibilities effectively. They each have clearly defined roles, enabling one to exercise oversight whilst the other is responsible for running the school. The proprietors work successfully with a senior leadership team who contribute effectively to the operational life of the school. The leadership team monitor and evaluate all aspects of the school's work and sets suitable priorities for development. By their example and advice, leaders enable all staff to understand and promote the aims and ethos of the school. The proprietors ensure that staff undertake additional Froebelian training as part of their professional development.
9. The work of the school is supported by well-considered policies which reflect both the school's aims and statutory guidance. These are understood by staff and are implemented consistently. The proprietors ensure that risks are robustly assessed and managed. Suitable risk assessments, including for the woodland learning environment and trips, are in place and are reviewed regularly. The proprietors ensure that all necessary health and safety arrangements are applied rigorously.
10. Leaders manage complaints in a timely and appropriate manner according to the school's policy. Positive relationships with parents and the accessibility of staff mean that concerns are usually resolved informally. Parents are kept fully informed about their children's progress and educational needs through regular updates. Weekly newsletters provide comprehensive information about the range of the activities taking place.
11. In the early years, the proprietors provide resources of high quality which enhance children's learning. The leadership of the early years has extensive knowledge of both this early stage of children's development and of Froebelian philosophy. These are integrated effectively to provide a rich and varied curriculum for the youngest children. Early years leaders hold regular supervision meetings with staff which enable them to identify training needs, so staff keep their knowledge and skills up to date.
12. The leadership team ensures that pupils are kept safe in a secure environment with sufficient staff to listen to them and provide support and individual attention. Leaders ensure that, throughout the school, relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful, which actively promotes the wellbeing of pupils. The proprietors are responsive to the school's self-evaluation. For example, as part of the school development plans to extend older pupils' scientific knowledge and understanding, they have recently enhanced provision for additional activities in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). This has a positive impact on pupils' interest and enthusiasm for this area of the curriculum.
13. Through assiduous commitment to the wellbeing of the pupils, leaders and the proprietors ensure that the required Standards are met. They ensure that the school is inclusive and review the accessibility plan regularly, making modifications and reasonable adjustments to meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The proprietors maintain effective links with external bodies and ensure that they keep their professional knowledge and skills up to date.

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

14. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. In line with the school's ethos, leaders have designed a broad and balanced programme with a particular focus on linking learning between curriculum areas. The curriculum encompasses a variety of topics which stimulate pupils' interest, curiosity and creativity. Due importance is given to linguistic and mathematical knowledge and skills, and teachers ensure that pupils apply and develop these in their topic work.
16. Leaders ensure that the school's approach to learning of 'inspire, discover, create and communicate' is implemented effectively. Teachers involve pupils in choosing and planning topics through memorable visits and trips. Since these reflect their different interests and experiences, they are self-motivated and enthusiastic learners.
17. Early years staff plan a rich variety of activities, adapting these according to children's responses. They provide extensive opportunities for children to engage with the environment through providing natural resources and linking activities between indoors and outside. Children, therefore, become absorbed in their learning. Through high-quality conversation, focusing on developing vocabulary, staff successfully develop the children's language skills. As a result of engaging and personalised activities, most children reach a good level of development for their age.
18. Outdoor learning is a distinctive feature of the curriculum that enables pupils to develop their curiosity, to ask questions and think deeply using all their senses. Teachers with specialist expertise organise activities which enable pupils to connect with nature in all weathers and seasons. They use imaginative approaches to planning and judicious questioning so that pupils of all abilities acquire a well-developed understanding of ecosystems and learn practical skills using real tools capably. For example, in the infant garden, children have constructed a sturdy wooden castle in which they enact their learning imaginatively.
19. Leaders organise, from Reception, a diverse range of after-school clubs which provide pupils with opportunities to develop their creativity, thinking and physical skills. Teaching within topics incorporates art, poetry and drama so that pupils can express their learning in ways meaningful to them. As they grow older, teaching introduces effectively more structured skills. For example, pupils learn about artists and learn to use a range of media in art. Skilful and encouraging teaching in music enables pupils to make notable progress, for example singing tunefully in two parts.
20. In accordance with the school's principles, formal skills are introduced when children show they are developmentally ready. Teachers introduce new mathematical concepts effectively through initial use of practical equipment. Younger pupils enjoy sharing story books and learn to use them to find information with adult support.
21. Whilst teachers provide encouragement and supportive resources, some younger pupils, particularly those with SEND, find the introduction of more structured, adult-initiated tasks, such as writing, a challenge as they move into Year 2. Leaders recognise this and have introduced additional support. Nevertheless, as formal literacy skills are acquired, pupils' progress accelerates in the middle years so that attainment in reading and writing for older pupils is at or above the expected level for their age relative to their starting points. Consequently, older pupils read avidly and present their work well. They also demonstrate highly developed note-taking skills which help them to recall teaching and organise their work.

22. Teachers assess pupils' work against subject learning objectives. This enables them carefully to monitor progress to ensure it is in line with expectations and to adapt planning to pupils' needs. Staff identify pupils who may have SEND and implement effective support individually or in groups. Consequently, most pupils who have additional learning needs make good progress. The few pupils who have EAL quickly acquire confidence and skills in English through sensitive support and the provision of appropriate resources.
23. Positive and supportive relationships between pupils and staff build pupils' confidence to challenge themselves and take risks in their learning. They, therefore, develop depth and breadth of knowledge. This promotes pupils' progress and enables them to be self-motivated and successful learners.

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

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

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

25. Leaders' focus on individual development and building respectful relationships has a highly positive impact on pupils' wellbeing. Teachers model the mutual respect prevalent throughout the school. They use effectively daily periods of calm, 'candle time', which include breathing and meditation, to discuss issues with pupils and, alongside yoga sessions, to help allay any anxieties. Consequently, teachers understand their pupils well, and pupils themselves develop self-awareness and an understanding of self-care. For instance, they recognise when they need to have a movement break after focusing for some time. Pupils enjoy physical challenges and being active outside, particularly in woodland activities. They learn a range of team sports which some choose to pursue competitively in external clubs.
26. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual and moral understanding in gatherings that celebrate religious and spiritual events such as Harvest, Equinox or Diwali. Teachers facilitate pupils' frequent interactions with the natural world where they develop a mature understanding of the inter-relationship of living things. Leaders ensure that a suitable programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) is followed throughout the school. Teachers' effective integration of PSHE into topics, 'candle time' and woodland learning deepens further pupils' understanding of themselves and their relationships with others.
27. Teachers in the early years build positive relationships which enable children from an early age to gain self-confidence, for example, to perform to an audience. Teachers develop older pupils' self-esteem through tasking them with the preparation of individual research projects. In presenting these, pupils develop personal expertise and gain a sense of accomplishment. Staff also use focused praise and encouragement effectively. As a result, when pupils find aspects of a lesson challenging, they are willing to try, unafraid of making mistakes. In the many opportunities given for discussion in class, pupils articulate their ideas and opinions clearly and respond respectfully to the views of others. They are conspicuously non-judgemental in their interactions with their peers.
28. Behaviour is good but, in keeping with the school's ethos, not driven by extrinsic rewards and sanctions. Pupils are supported well by staff who respond to any incidents by exploring with them the underlying circumstances and helping them to consider the consequences. This approach is successful since pupils indicate a mature understanding that behaving well is of mutual benefit to themselves and others. Bullying behaviour is, therefore, rare and addressed effectively if it occurs.
29. Staff in the early years have a perceptive knowledge of each child, developed through partnership with their parents. This enables children to build strong attachments with their key person who supports them in learning to manage their feelings and articulating their needs. This is particularly effective for the few children for whom English is not their first language. Staff encourage them to converse in their mother tongue as well as English, which boosts their confidence until their English skills develop.
30. The school's premises are maintained in good order. Health and safety arrangements, including for fire safety, are implemented effectively. The school proprietors ensure that all areas of the site are secure, including the woodland areas, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of all the pupils.

31. The admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained. Unexplained absence is promptly followed up and the local authority notified of pupils who join or leave during the school year. Leaders ensure that pupils are always supervised, and pupils feel safe at school.
32. Arrangements to care for pupils' first aid and medical needs are thorough, and they are implemented by suitably trained staff, including paediatric first aiders. The school maintains comprehensive records of first aid and medication administered which are shared appropriately with parents. Pupils with long-term health needs have an individual health-care plan which informs staff of the care they require.

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

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

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

34. Leaders encourage pupils to offer their ideas and make appropriate choices. Consequently, as they grow older, pupils show initiative, independence and are willing to take responsibility. This prepares them well for the next stage of their education and adult life.
35. Throughout the school, staff provide a nurturing environment which, for instance, enables children in the early years to develop a sense of belonging and contributing to the wider school community. This was apparent in their enthusiastic and confident performance in the school's Christmas concert. As they play together, children learn to share resources and make friends. Staff encourage the younger children to assist them, such as helping to clear up, and children learn to do this purposefully.
36. Teaching's emphasis on investigation and discussion contributes to pupils' ability to reflect deeply. Pupils have a mature understanding of right and wrong, so that some older pupils are aware of moral dilemmas arising from everyone's right to an opinion. Both through the curriculum and external visits, older pupils develop a suitable understanding of the law and Parliament and are keen to know more, for example, questioning whether the King ever makes laws.
37. Pupils readily undertake roles to assist teachers, such as in preparing the room for yoga or helping with book bags. Throughout the school, pupils are taught practical life skills such as cookery, woodwork and sewing. They learn about money, how to budget and the impact of financial choices. Their resulting competence in finding solutions, handling tools and self-reliance is effective preparation for later life. Whilst pupils who are due to move to the next stage in their education are aware that they will need to adjust to a larger environment, they feel well prepared in terms of their own personal development and the skills they have acquired.
38. Staff use activities such as 'candle time' to teach pupils about British values, particularly tolerance and respect. In a regular topic on cultures and beliefs, pupils develop greater understanding of a range of societies and traditions. The school gives pupils the opportunity to be elected to the school council and eco-committee. As well as developing pupils' ability to discuss and plan effectively, this affords them an informed understanding of democratic process. Members of these committees are proud that they provide ideas and raise funds to help the school community. For example, pupils agree priorities for purchasing play equipment.
39. Pupils develop an age-appropriate awareness of social responsibility through taking part in wider community events such as annually decorating a Christmas tree in the local church and producing a large map for a local bus shelter. They are mindful that they can help the less fortunate, baking and selling pancakes to raise funds for earthquake victims, planting trees and tending them at a local children's forest and donating to children who do not have access to books.
40. Teachers provide many opportunities for collaborative working so pupils understand what it means to be part of a team and why teamwork is important. They work co-operatively with each other and respectfully challenge ideas. Through carefully planned outdoor activities and guided by their teachers' specialist subject knowledge, pupils demonstrate an insightful understanding of their responsibility to care for the local environment and confidently explain why we need to protect the world.

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

41. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

42. The proprietors and school leaders ensure that there are effective arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. The school's safeguarding policy, published on the website, is well understood by staff who receive regular training, including in the 'Prevent' duty. They are signposted to additional training suitable to their roles and experience through the school's professional development programme. The school's designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputy are trained at the appropriate level for their duties, and the proprietor has undertaken training for safeguarding governors which informs his responsibility for oversight.
43. Staff are confident in their abilities to recognise and handle safeguarding concerns. They know what to do and who to talk to about any matters which relate to pupils' welfare and safeguarding. They have a keen awareness of their responsibility to record and report promptly any concerns to the DSL. The DSL has a suitable knowledge of local safeguarding referral thresholds, keeps clear records and liaises promptly with external agencies when appropriate.
44. Leaders ensure that all pupils have a trusted adult they can speak to, and pupils confirm their willingness to share any worries with staff with whom they have close and warm relationships.
45. Staff are aware of the vulnerabilities of pupils who have SEND and spend time discussing with all pupils the safest response to a variety of scenarios. Both staff and pupils have received suitable training in online safety. Pupils clearly understand what to do if they are confronted with something worrying whilst using the internet. The school's filtering and monitoring arrangements are secure.
46. The school carries out staff recruitment checks thoroughly, and these are recorded accurately on the single central record. The proprietor checks this regularly.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Annan School
Department for Education number	845/6059
Address	Annan School Annan Farm Lewes Road Easons Green Uckfield East Sussex TN22 5RE
Phone number	01825 841410
Email address	office@annanschool.co.uk
Website	annanschool.co.uk
Proprietors	Mr Mark Hunter and Mrs Deborah Hunter
Principal	Mrs Deborah Hunter
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	98
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 February 2020

Information about the school

48. Annan School is a co-educational day school for pupils between the ages of two and eleven situated in a rural location near Uckfield. Its pedagogy is underpinned by the Froebelian philosophy of learning. The school is a limited company managed and governed by its two directors, one of whom is also the school's principal.
49. The school has two early years classes; Kindergarten and Reception. Reception is linked with Year 1, in accordance with the school's ethos.
50. The school has identified 16 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
51. English is an additional language for two children in the early years.
52. The school aims to value, nurture and educate each child to be knowledgeable, compassionate, responsible, creative and respectful. It seeks to foster each child's concept of self, self-esteem and confidence, to enable him or her to become an autonomous, creative and original thinker. By following a Froebelian pedagogy which fosters each child's intellectual, emotional, social and physical wellbeing, the school aims to develop children's love of learning and to be a centre of excellence and innovation in early childhood and primary education.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 December 2023

53. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

54. 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 proprietors
- discussions with the principal, school leaders and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

55. 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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