

School inspection report

27 to 29 February 2024

Sands School

48 East Street

Ashburton

Newton Abbot

Devon

TQ13 7AX

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. Effective health and safety arrangements are not fully embedded into the culture of the school. There is a lack of formal training for those with responsibility in this area and hence the health and safety policy is not fully implemented. At the time of the inspection, fire doors were not properly maintained, and some were propped open, some fire exits were not clearly signed, but were corrected during the inspection, and checks on fire extinguishers were not in date. In addition, while accident records are kept, these are not always detailed. Leaders have not acted on all the recommendations from the last fire safety audit in relation to storage of combustible materials.
2. Risk assessment in the school is not consistently effective and procedures for evaluating and mitigating risks are not comprehensive. Risk assessments are not completed for all areas of the site, storage and use of hazardous chemicals and those for educational visits are of an inconsistent quality.
3. The school aims to give pupils much control over their education with appropriate support from trusted adults. This approach is supported by committed leaders and staff. The school develops pupils emotionally and academically and builds the skills required to live successfully within a democratic society.
4. Pupils direct their own learning. They have the freedom to choose which activities and lessons to attend and consequently develop their personal interests and passions. Pupils learn through the choices they make and the consequences of those choices and this coupled with the individual attention they receive develops self-confidence, self-awareness and a love of learning.
5. The school meeting is the main forum for discussion within the school. Pupils and staff both have a voice in the management of the school. Through this experience pupils gain an understanding of a community based on democratic principles and the importance of tolerance and respect for the views of others.
6. Teaching ensures that pupils make good progress. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and are adept at planning lessons in accordance with the interests of their pupils. Pupils appreciate the verbal, individual feedback they are given and feel that it helps them improve their work. However, written feedback does not always provide pupils with equally useful guidance about how to improve their work.
7. Pupils have a well-developed sense of right and wrong. Through making their own decisions, they develop an understanding that when mistakes are made, valuable lessons can be learned.
8. Pupils have a tailored education where teaching is matched to the needs of individuals and provides one-to-one support for pupils. Pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported sensitively and effectively within lessons and in specialised one-to-one teaching sessions.
9. Pupils are well behaved and courteous. They show a mature ability to regulate their own behaviour and the behaviour of others through the school meeting. Incidents of bullying are rare, and, if an incident occurs, it is dealt with promptly and appropriately.

10. There is a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum taught through the general studies lessons and weekly tutorials for each year group. The senior year groups have completed the mandatory curriculum and lessons are now used for discussion of current issues, consolidation of information or topics requested by the pupils. However, the school's approach to PSHE and RSE in the senior years does not ensure that all pupils have access to the programme as set out in the school's scheme of work. This means that some pupils may miss important learning.
11. Safeguarding policies and procedures are thorough. There is effective oversight by the safeguarding governor and appropriate contact with outside agencies as required. The specific contextual risks of safeguarding related to the nature of the school are understood and acted upon.
12. The careers programme focuses on support for the senior years in preparation for their move to the next phase of their education. However, careers education in the younger years is not yet fully developed.
13. There is a wide range of extracurricular activities in the school offered in the specific afternoon allocated and before and after school. Opportunities for physical education are available for all pupils but their participation is not monitored to ensure that all pupils take an active part.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role, and
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently and
- actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils.

Leaders and managers must ensure that:

- they take a strategic, comprehensive and effective approach to identifying and managing potential risks of harm to pupils
- the health and safety policy is implemented effectively by appropriate training of the persons responsible and of all staff
- fire safety procedures and arrangements are effective by regular monitoring of the arrangements and action on the recommendations of the fire audit.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that all written feedback provides pupils with equally useful guidance as verbal feedback does about how to improve their work
- ensure that the careers provision enables pupils, particularly those in the younger years, to make considered option choices and have a wider understanding of different career pathways
- monitor the delivery of the PSHE and RSE programme in the senior years to ensure that all pupils have access to the programme as set out in the school's scheme of work
- monitor sport and physical activity provision, to ensure that pupils take an active part.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. Leaders understand the need to promote the wellbeing of the pupils but in some areas, particularly health and safety, fire safety and risk assessment, leaders lack the knowledge and training to discharge their duties effectively.
15. Risk assessment in the school is not consistent and procedures for evaluating and mitigating risks are not comprehensive. Risk assessments are not completed for all areas of the site, the storage and use of hazardous chemicals and risk assessments for educational visits are of inconsistent quality.
16. The oversight of the school by governors is not sufficiently effective in ensuring that the leaders have the skills and training that they require to ensure that the Standards are met consistently. Self-evaluation by the leaders of the school is not systematic and lacks the detailed analysis to ensure compliance with all regulations.
17. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective. Safeguarding leaders are trained in accordance with current statutory guidance. The safeguarding governor is in regular contact with the school and there is an annual audit of the safeguarding policy and procedures. The regular staff meetings provide opportunities for safeguarding updates and discussions about the welfare of individual pupils.
18. The weekly school meeting for all members of the community is the forum for discussion and decision-making by the whole school. Here, pupils may have the majority vote. Leaders recognise the risks inherent with this approach and ensure that all discussions are balanced, and decisions are made in full knowledge of all the facts. Decisions can be challenged within two weeks of the meeting, giving pupils and staff the time to reflect and raise concerns. Further controls are in place via non-negotiable sanctions, for example, for bringing illegal drugs or alcohol into school.
19. Parents are provided with regular reports on their child's progress and required policies and other documentation is available on the school's website and on request.
20. The school has an appropriate complaints procedure, with clear guidance on how complaints will be managed, and the time scales involved. Leaders deal with any concerns raised promptly and appropriate records are kept. The school has a comprehensive accessibility plan and provision which meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

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

- 21. Standards relating to risk assessment and governance, leadership and management are not met.**
- 22. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Leaders' approach to the curriculum is to provide a holistic, individually tailored education for each child based on their emotional, social, physical, and academic development. Pupils have much control over the direction in which they take their learning. Pupils in all year groups attend lessons in which they make progress in the mandatory aspects of the curriculum as required by the Standards and supplement this with decisions about their areas of interest, project work and independent study. If they wish to pursue a particular academic interest, such as an in-depth study of the history of Rome, the school provides the expertise and resources to enable them to do so.
24. Leaders treat pupils with individual consideration, their needs are assessed on entry to the school and provision made to meet them by a programme of education tailored to their specific needs. Pupils make good progress and develop their skills and knowledge. They develop skills in numeracy and literacy through the mandatory parts of the curriculum and the range of activities offered. Pupils are encouraged to develop at their own pace and in many lessons work individually and successfully with teacher support.
25. Pupils who have SEND are catered for sensitively with extra support offered smoothly within the learning environment. Teaching assistants are deployed effectively throughout the school and the progress of pupils who have SEND is tracked and monitored within the SEND department, allowing targeted support to be offered to the pupils as required. The progress of pupils who have SEND is reviewed every term and reported to parents. Classroom support, one-to-one lessons, access arrangements and additional individual support is effective in helping these pupils successfully access the curriculum.
26. Pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) are offered support on a one-to-one basis by the English department, to develop their vocabulary and hence improve their understanding and increase their participation in lessons.
27. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and enthuse pupils through their passion for sharing their knowledge. Pupils are challenged by their teachers and in return will often ask detailed questions which sometimes result in a change of direction of lessons, allowing development of topics in line with the interests of the pupils. At times discussion in the lesson coupled with the pupils' thirst for knowledge leads to ideas and concepts more usually studied in higher education being covered in class, developing the maturity of thought of the pupils. Teachers know their pupils well and there is a consistent rapport between pupils and teachers based on mutual respect and trust.
28. Teachers use resources appropriately, often using different resources for each pupil to accommodate their needs and level of attainment, and offer a wide variety of activities. In science, younger pupils are given a choice of topic through which the teacher embeds concepts and skills. The individualised support given in lessons continues with one-to-one discussions allowing the pupils to consolidate their learning and develop their interests at their own pace. This is supported by the school's approach to the GCSE programme, designed so that pupils can take examinations when they are ready to do so.
29. Pupils may attend lessons out of their year group depending on their ability and benefit from the stretch and challenge that this offers. Having choice and responsibility in which lesson they go to and for how long is part of what motivates pupils to attend school, engage and to learn. The choice given

to pupils means that pupils are motivated and engaged in lessons but also means that some tasks and projects are not completed, particularly by younger pupils. Pupils develop skills of concentration and resilience in their learning as seen in older pupils, particularly with respect to their GCSE studies and participation in the Level 2 Higher Project Qualification, investigating a topic of their choice.

30. The individualised teaching means that the progress of pupils is continually monitored by their teachers and discussed at the weekly staff meetings. Typically, pupils are given helpful feedback on their work. This feedback is mainly verbal and on a one-to-one basis in lessons. In some subjects, written marking is detailed and includes targets and areas for improvement, in others there is very little effective written feedback and hence a lack of guidance for pupils to reflect on and improve their work.
31. There is a wide programme of extracurricular activities in place on Friday afternoons, adapted to the interests of the pupils. Activities include The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE), LAMDA, river swimming, cooking, gardening, and bouldering, giving a balance to the academic studies undertaken and enabling pupils to develop leadership and social skills. Music and drama play an important part in school life, with regular performances for the wider community.

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. Pupils develop their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence through the academic curriculum, pastoral care and the responsibility given to them through the democratic management of the school. They work together with the whole school community to make informed decisions which impact on the school. This responsibility, along with the freedom of choice that pupils experience, means that the pupils develop skills of communication and self-awareness well. Relationships between pupils and adults are mature and positive.
34. Pupils are encouraged to think deeply and widely and reflect on their own and others' beliefs. Through discussions in class and the school meeting they develop a knowledge of and interest in the wider world and of issues such as climate change and sustainability. Their spiritual development is seen through the artwork on display in the school and in the annual mural where all pupils are represented if they wish in a form that they decide. Through tutorials, the school meeting and the PSHE programme, pupils learn how to become confident in who they are, to manage their emotions and to become caring and considerate members of the community.
35. Pupils' moral understanding is developed in lessons, tutorials and in the school meeting. Leadership of the school is shared through the whole community. The elected school council of six students deals with concerns and passes recommendations to the school meeting for discussion and decision. Pupils take their responsibilities seriously and discussions are measured and factual showing a mature approach to the issues in hand.
36. There is a comprehensive programme of PSHE provision, including RSE, in Years 7 to 9 covering the statutory RSE provision. In the senior years PSHE is taught throughout the curriculum and in tutorials. However, the provision is not adequately tracked in terms of the topics covered and pupil attendance. Therefore, the school does not have a clear picture of provision and consequently elements of the course may be missed to the detriment of the pupils' education in this area.
37. Pupils are happy, kind and considerate of each other and their teachers, they are proud of their school, of its small size and its family feel. Pupils of all ages mix in lessons and in social time. There is very little bullying or poor behaviour in school and pupils are confident that any incidents will be dealt with immediately.
38. The school promotes equality between all individuals and so minimises the potential for an imbalance of power and the democratic structure encourages openness amongst staff and pupils including in discussions in lessons and around the school. Incidents of bullying are investigated thoroughly and records kept; support is provided for the bully and the victim based on restorative justice. The school has a core set of rules agreed by the school meeting and positive behaviour is encouraged through collective responsibility where pupils learn to set their own and respect others' boundaries.
39. Supervision is discreet, unobtrusive and effective; hence pupils are allowed to develop and manage their appreciation of the risks and hazards they encounter. The high staff to pupil ratio means that pupils and staff are nearly always in sight of each other. The attendance of pupils is monitored effectively, with any non-attendance followed up on the first day of absence. Admissions and attendance registers are kept as required, and care is taken to check on pupils absent from lessons.

40. In line with its ethos, the school endeavours to provide a large variety of sporting provision to match individual choice, such as table tennis, hockey and climbing. These activities are provided before school and at lunchtimes. However, this provision is not monitored, and some pupils may not take an active part, particularly when the weather precludes outdoor activities.
41. Leaders understand the need for promoting the wellbeing of the pupils in principle, but in some areas, particularly health and safety, fire safety and risk assessment, leaders lack the knowledge, training, and experience to discharge their duties effectively. Those with responsibility for health and safety are not trained appropriately for the role, and there is a lack of health and safety training for other staff. The policy is not embedded in the practice of the school.
42. Fire safety arrangements are not secure in terms of fire exit signage, fire extinguishers, storage of combustible materials and fire doors blocked open. Recommendations from the fire safety audit with reference to storage of combustible materials have not been addressed.
43. First aid arrangements are suitable. Many staff have regular first aid training. First aid boxes are checked monthly for supplies and dates. Accident reporting is adequate but not always detailed. Medication is safely stored and the dispensing of medication is recorded.

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

44. Standards are not met consistently with respect to health and safety and fire safety.
45. Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are not met.
- 46. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.**

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

47. Pupils develop an understanding of their responsibilities as individuals, leaders and as part of a community where pupils are in closely involved in executive decision-making. Through opportunities to set up their own activities or committees or through participation in DofE tasks and challenges, pupils further develop their leadership skills.
48. Pupils are aware of their responsibilities to their local community and seek to give back by contributing both time and sponsorship funds to local charitable causes through for example, organising bake sales, helping at a local foodbank and undertaking sponsored swims giving them both financial experience and the understanding of the importance of contributing to the community.
49. Through activities of this nature and participation in DofE activities, pupils develop their appreciation of the value of service. Useful work, such as washing up or hoovering is carried out by all members of the school community at the end of the school day, creating a spirit of community service and an appreciation of the responsibility of all to maintain a safe and clean environment.
50. Leaders have recently revised the careers guidance for pupils. Current provision is focused on Years 10 and 11, where the school uses the services of an external provider. Pupils in these year groups specifically benefit from group instruction and individual tutorials giving guidance on choices for their next stage in their education either in a sixth-form college, apprenticeships or in the world of work. In the younger years careers guidance is informal and less effective. Leaders are aware that this area needs to be developed and have generated plans for a new careers programme for pupils in Years 7 to 9. However, these plans have not yet been implemented.
51. Pupils gain an insight into economic education through the PSHE programme and practical experience through such initiatives as running the box office for the school play. In the school meeting pupils are involved in financial decisions in consultation with staff giving them an understanding of the effect that such decisions can make on themselves and the school.
52. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of their responsibilities as future citizens in British society developed through the study of such topics as core values of society in the PSHE programme. The democratic basis of the school provides the pupils with an understanding of the importance of rules and responsibilities. In a discussion on the rules around attendance, pupils considered the problem in a mature and sensible manner taking the ethos of the school regarding choice into account. Pupils of all ages take turns to chair the school meetings where such issues as climate change, current world issues and the political climate are discussed.

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

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

54. Safeguarding arrangements in the school are effective and in line with current statutory guidance and locally agreed procedures. A suitable safeguarding policy is in place and appropriate and timely referrals are made to external agencies. There is a culture of monitoring and oversight, led by the safeguarding leaders including governors. There is regular contact between the safeguarding governor and the safeguarding leaders regarding any current cases and a termly meeting to review cases and lessons learnt.
55. Those with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained for their role. All staff undertake comprehensive initial safeguarding training on induction to the school and regular annual update training. In addition, there are regular safeguarding discussions for all staff at weekly meetings. Leaders and staff are aware of the contextual safeguarding risks associated with the culture of the school and with the vulnerability of some of their pupils and put appropriate measures in place to manage any risks.
56. Pupils feel safe in school and their relationships with staff means that there is always a trusted adult that they can talk to with any concerns. Suitable safeguarding policies and procedures are in place for example for cases of child-on-child abuse, handling low-level concerns and allegations against staff. Record-keeping is thorough. There is also an anonymous method of reporting concerns available to pupils.
57. The elected body of pupils who make up the school council have safeguarding training. They carry out their duties responsibly guided by the school council protocols and with a mature understanding of the sometimes-complex situations that they are dealing with.
58. Pupils learn how to stay safe online in PSHE and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. There is appropriate filtering and monitoring in place, overseen by safeguarding leads.
59. Appropriate safer recruitment checks are made on the suitability of staff and volunteers to work with children prior to their commencement of work at the school. Leaders maintain accurate records of the checks made on a record of appointments. The safeguarding governor checks the record termly.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The relevant Standards are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that –
16(a)	the welfare of the pupils in the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
16(b)	appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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

The relevant Standards are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 11	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the relevant health and safety laws are complied with by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written health and safety policy.
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.

School details

School	Sands School
Department for Education number	878/6042
Registered charity number	299714
Address	Sands School 48 East Street Ashburton Newton Abbot TQ13 7AX
Phone number	01364 653 666
Email address	enquiry@sands-school.co.uk
Website	www.sands-school.co.uk
Proprietor	Sands School Limited Charity
Chair	Mr Diarmid Mackenzie
Headteacher	Mr Sean Bellamy
Age range	11 to 17
Number of pupils	73
Date of previous inspection	14 January 2020

Information about the school

61. Sands School is an independent co-educational day school situated in Newton Abbot. It is overseen by a board of directors.
62. The school has identified 27 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for two pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to give pupils as much control as possible over their education with strong support from experienced adults. It intends to ensure that pupils are encouraged to make decisions and to consider their consequences, to develop respect for themselves, each other, and the environment and to foster the skills, capabilities and qualifications to live successfully within a democratic society. The school seeks to run itself on democratic principles.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

27 to 29 February 2024

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

66. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the 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 samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school
- attending the school meeting of staff and students.

67. 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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