



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Regulatory Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Colchester Prep and High School

December 2022

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School's Details

School College	Colchester Prep and High School			
DfE number	881/6015			
Address	Colchester Prep and High School Wellesley Road Colchester Essex CO3 3HD			
Telephone number	01206 573389			
Email address	info@colchesterhighschool.co.uk			
Headteacher	Ms Karen Gracie-Langrick			
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd			
Age range	2 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	302			
	EYFS	24	Juniors	78
	Seniors	200		
Inspection dates	6 to 8 December 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Colchester Prep and High School is a co-educational independent day school. Founded in 1882, the school has been owned and governed by the Cognita group of schools since 2005. The school comprises three sections: EYFS, for children aged 2 to 5 years; the prep school for pupils aged 5 to 11 years; and the senior school for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new headteacher in September 2020 and a new head of prep school in September 2022.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.2 The school aims to build a brighter future for all, preparing children to become the changemakers of tomorrow's world, through an inspiring education which builds self-belief and empowers individuals to succeed. It seeks to provide a holistic education which fosters a safe, happy and supportive environment in which each individual can thrive and feel a valued and respected member of an inclusive community.

About the pupils

- 1.3 Pupils come from a range of professional and business backgrounds. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average in relation to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 65 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, 44 of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for 22 pupils. All are supported by their classroom teachers and four receive additional individual support. Data used by the school has identified 87 pupils across all subjects as being the most able in the school's population, and the curriculum is modified for them.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a REGULATORY COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 In the prep school, the school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 At GCSE in the years 2017 to 2021, performance has confirmed that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.4 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.5 Pupils receive relationships education in the junior school and relationships and sex education in the senior school, except in so far as they are lawfully excused. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.6 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.7 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.8 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.9 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.10 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.11 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.12 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

2.13 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.14 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.15 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.16 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.17 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.18 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.19 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.20 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- Pupils of all ages and abilities make excellent progress throughout the school, reaching levels of achievement that reflect their potential.
 - Pupils are confident and articulate communicators with fluent reading and writing skills.
 - Pupils apply their excellent study skills to great effect in lessons and written work.
 - Pupils' numeracy skills and knowledge are excellent and applied confidently across the curriculum.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- Pupils' self-confidence is very successfully developed.
 - Pupils make an excellent contribution to the school and the wider community.
 - Pupils have an excellent understanding of right and wrong.
 - Pupils celebrate diversity and promote inclusivity with great success.

Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
- Enable younger teenagers to improve their understanding of the potential dangers of engaging in social media activity and their ability to make informed decisions when doing so.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Children make excellent progress in early years in preparation for their entry to the prep school. By the time they enter Year 1, the proportion of children achieving a good level of development is above the national average. Pupils in the prep school make strong progress in English and mathematics, often better than pupils nationally. During the years 2017-19 two-fifths of pupils received the highest grades at GCSE in English, mathematics and a range of subjects, particularly computer science, history and geography. Centre assessed grades in 2020 and 2021 show results were consistent with this attainment. Provisional indications are that the results in 2022 confirm this level of achievement. Pupils of all abilities benefit from challenging work that closely matches their abilities and aptitudes. Those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including social and emotional

difficulties or an education health and care plan, make excellent progress from their starting points. This is because learning support staff have the highest expectations for pupils, no matter what their learning difficulty or disability. The most able pupils make excellent progress across all subjects, with many achieving the very highest grades.

- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate excellent communication skills and are thoughtful and articulate, speaking with clarity and confidence. They listen well to others and are able to formulate coherent arguments when discussing or debating topics, knowing that their answers will be respected by their classmates. For example, in Year 10 PSHE, pupils engaged in thoughtful discussion on the causes and consequences of money mules and their impact on wider society. Children in the EYFS engaged enthusiastically with the repetition of sounds to consolidate their understanding about the sounds letters make. Pupils of all ages talked to inspectors enthusiastically about the books they are reading. They demonstrate fluency and read with excellent expression. Many Year 1 and 2 pupils write independently at a level much higher than that expected for their age group. For example, pupils used prior knowledge of adjectives, interesting verbs, adverbs and personification to analyse a very complex piece of Christmas writing. Year 7 pupils write excellent book reviews such as a recent evaluation of *Last of the Mohicans*. In Year 9 Spanish, pupils successfully expressed preferences and opinions and used recently learnt vocabulary in complex sentences.
- 3.7 Pupils demonstrate excellent study skills due to the school's recent leadership focus on pupils' active engagement with teacher feedback. Almost all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teachers are supportive and feedback and marking helps them to improve. They have a highly developed understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance. Pupils of all ages respond positively to regular encouragement to reflect, analyse and explain their thinking. In Year 11 English pupils successfully learn and analyse poems which they teach to their classmates as preparation for GCSE. Pupils develop excellent research skills and learn how to use appropriate sources of information. They can explain why they have chosen different skills to answer difficult questions and explore ideas and areas of interest. For example, Year 9 pupils used masterclass activities to generate information about matriarchy and the rise of feminist literature. Year 8 physics pupils competently brought together strands of knowledge such as the effect of friction on the redistribution of electrons between materials.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages demonstrate excellent numeracy skills. This is evident from the EYFS, where children used outdoor environmental learning to collect the correct number of similar items matched to number cards. Pupils across the school develop resilience with problem-solving because they are given interesting challenges to solve. For example, pupils in Year 5 plotted co-ordinates to generate an image or graphed a mystery picture using all four quadrants. Year 8 pupils used mathematical language accurately, talking confidently about bisectors and using these to show that all three sides meet at a point in a perpendicular triangle. Older pupils show high-level reasoning skills in science to interpret graphs and charts generated from investigatory work and when balancing equations in chemistry.
- 3.9 Pupils demonstrate very high levels of knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum. They have significant linguistic and mathematical skills which underpin their learning in other subjects. Throughout the school, pupils show that they can remember what they have previously been taught and use their knowledge to increase their learning. An overwhelming majority of parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching, including any online provision, enables their child to make progress. Similarly pupils agreed that their teachers know their subjects well. Teachers use a variety of activities to enable pupils to develop their skills. For example, EYFS children collected natural materials and leaves from forest areas and used them to write their names and to create hedgehog pictures. Year 8 pupils composed effective cyclic rhythms and polyrhythmic texture when composing tunes inspired by African music. They also demonstrated the ability to use open expressionist techniques in response to teachers' ambitious expectations when producing expressive landscapes. Year 9 modern language leaders told inspectors how their own skills improve

through opportunities to plan, support and evaluate the performance of Year 5 pupils. In Year 10 biology, pupils demonstrated confident use of vocabulary related to osmosis which deepened their understanding of osmoregulation.

- 3.10 Pupils are confident users of ICT both in regular teaching and as a tool for recording and submitting written work. From a very young age they develop effective software management and keyboard and control skills, using touchscreen laptops confidently across a good proportion of the curriculum. Pupils successfully use technology to analyse and present their work across a range of subjects as well as research projects and competitions. Older pupils complete accredited courses on how to harness digital transformation to create immersive and inclusive experiences that inspire lifelong learning. Members of the drone club have used their capabilities to great effect when taking part in competitions. This has included successful collaboration between pupils of different ages to use a drone to dispense seeds for planting trees so as to increase biodiversity.
- 3.11 Pupils achieve highly in and outside the classroom. They are very successful in competitions across a range of disciplines including traditional music, art and sport and more cerebral activities such as chess and ecowarriors. Children in the EYFS have won the ISA national Christmas banner competition on more than one occasion. Many pupils achieve success in English speaking board and LAMDA presentations with achievement of merit or distinction. Year 9 pupils received regional commendations and prizes for young translators. Individual excellence has been achieved in the United Kingdom mathematics intermediate challenge. Many pupils achieve bronze, silver and gold awards, with some progressing to the highest rounds of the competition. There have been many outstanding sporting successes, particularly at a regional level in team sports for squash, rugby, netball, swimming and football. Individual pupils have achieved success in regional athletics as well as selection for a premier league football club and national recognition with the England under 21 lionesses.
- 3.12 Pupils display excellent attitudes towards their learning. They are eager to learn and work very well with each other. Pupils collaborate without fuss and show a consistent enthusiasm for their work. Pupils arrive punctually to lessons, well equipped and keen to learn. They know what they are required to do in lessons and start to work quickly. Almost all sustain exceptionally high engagement at all times. Pupils organise themselves very effectively and are constructive and willing learners. They are capable of being independent in their learning but also work collaboratively with each other and their teachers. Year 11 pupils have a mature approach and take responsibility for ensuring they make the most of their study out of lessons as well as in class, particularly in preparation for mock examinations.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils are highly self-confident and self-aware. They are proud of their school and speak eagerly of their ambitions for the future. Pupils' work within the 'Character development programme' demonstrates their understanding of how to play their part as active and responsible citizens. This reflects the school's aims, refocused by school leadership and governance, to prepare children to become the changemakers of tomorrow's world as valued and respected members of an inclusive community. Pupils learn self-discipline by means of PSHE lessons and sporting challenges. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school helps their child to be confident and independent. Pupils grow steadily in confidence, consistently encouraged by staff, as they meet academic and other challenges. They are regularly encouraged to self-reflect and as a result, develop their self-knowledge and self-esteem.
- 3.15 Pupils of all ages demonstrate an excellent community spirit, as observed in the several Christmas nativity performances taking place during the inspection. They work together willingly in music and arts-related activities as well as in more academic subjects, responding positively to a supportive and cooperative learning environment. For example, Year 6 pupils used research skills both as a group and

independently to complete a mini-project that was presented to the whole school during the inspection. Most pupils, particularly in the senior school, contribute positively to the wider life of the school and the local community. For example, Year 9 volunteered to read to primary pupils in Colchester library. Individual pupils organise activities, such as in the diversity club to raise money for world AIDS day. Pupils accept responsibility readily and develop leadership and teamwork skills as a result. The oldest pupils in both prep and senior school act as excellent role models and relish the opportunity to take on leadership responsibilities such as prefects, house captains and sports captains. Through this rich experience and learning, pupils are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

- 3.16 Pupils have an excellent understanding of right and wrong. They have a clear understanding of the importance of responsibility and recognise that this is closely linked to making good choices in their school lives. Pupils have a great respect for the school rules and the systems in place to underpin them across all age groups. For example, Year 3 discussed what might happen if there were no rules, understood the consequences if rules were broken and were able to create important school rules of their own. Year 8 pupils who spoke to inspectors said that the system of consequences and points was considered fair and enforced fairly. This contributes to their understanding of appropriate and inappropriate behaviour. Pupils are highly supportive of each other in lessons. They listen to their classmates' explanations respectfully and collaborate successfully when working in pairs or groups.
- 3.17 Pupils have an excellent understanding about what tolerance and respect means and celebrate diversity within the school community. All parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Groups such as the global citizenship and diversity club have raised awareness by compiling a 'significant events' calendar. Pupils have led events to inform others about different issues or groups, through the production of materials for assemblies or for use in form time. An example of this was the celebrations organised by the LGBTQ+ safe space group during pride month. Pupils across the school are very respectful of one another and accept each other's differences, stating that they are free to express their views and answer questions without fear of humiliation. Older pupils display a respect for others, their cultures and backgrounds as well as recognising the similarities with their own. They successfully produced comparative work on the creation of the world as conveyed by several different religions. Pupils who have joined the school from other cultures told inspectors that they feel respected and welcome. Pupils celebrate equality, diversity and inclusion through activities such as sign language, Yom Kippur and International Women's Day.
- 3.18 The pupils are confident decision makers, and they understand how making mistakes is as valuable as getting things right. Pupils of all ages are given a significant degree of choice in the presentation of their learning and this encourages a range of creative outcomes. In the EYFS, children move around the Nursery and Reception area calmly, sharing resources and helping each other. Pupils across the school embrace a positive philosophy and recognise that putting effort into their work helps them to improve. As a result they consider the impact of decisions made and how these contribute to their own success. Those who choose to apply for membership of the school council recognise its importance as a debating and decision-influencing body to bring about positive change within the school. Older pupils develop a strong sense of agency from their involvement in the activities and clubs they attend by choice. They are very well informed about issues relating to their well-being and believe this enables them to make good choices for GCSE options.
- 3.19 Pupils demonstrate an excellent sense of spirituality. They actively share beliefs, feelings and values. Pupils demonstrate an appreciation of the importance of world religions and cultures. In the EYFS, children celebrate different cultural and religious events, using these festivals to demonstrate creativity through art work and early story telling activities. Year 1 and 2 pupils talked to inspectors in awe and wonder about the natural world during environmental and woodland learning. Year 6 pupils demonstrate excellent appreciation of the importance of design and art conventions in Islam. Year 7 reflected on the meaning of 'Jesus is the light of the world' and the implications of why light is used as a metaphor in religion.

- 3.20 Relationships between teachers and pupils are harmonious and positive, creating an environment in which pupils make rapid gains in their learning. A very large majority of pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school teaches them how to build positive relationships. A few, mostly Year 9, did not agree that pupils are kind and respect each other or that the school treats pupils fairly. However, inspection evidence from school records and pupil discussions indicated that younger and older pupils in the school did not share this view. An overwhelming majority of parents who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school helps their child develop strong teamwork and social skills. Pupils work well together and respond well to adults during lessons, and around the school at break and lunchtimes. They participate in discussion with confidence and listen carefully to and build upon the ideas of others. Pupils have a high level of social awareness and collaborate effectively with each other in lessons. They collaborate effectively in activities such as house events as well as the numerous and wide ranging sporting opportunities. Pupils look after each other and demonstrate very high levels of care and friendship. There is a strong culture of shared support between the pupils as expressed by pupils in Years 7 and 8 who told inspectors that they are part of a collective who are there for each other.
- 3.21 Pupils all have an excellent understanding of how to keep safe and healthy. They know how to keep themselves safe in school and in their local community. A very large majority of parents and pupils, in the pre-inspection questionnaire, agree that the school provides a safe environment to learn and a similar number of pupils agreed that school is a safe place to be. Pupils understand the importance of physical and emotional health and well-being and this contributes to their success in gaining the highest possible grades. Older pupils spoke enthusiastically about body image, social media, mental health and mindfulness sessions. They have a sophisticated understanding of how the internet works and can explain how to stay safe when online. However, younger pupils are not always able to confidently distinguish potentially malign influences they may encounter on social media or respond appropriately to such behaviours. Wellbeing ambassadors demonstrate through their actions and plans the promotion and support of wellbeing in the school community. Pupils appreciate the need for exercise and hugely enjoy many interactive activities in the curriculum, at lunchtimes and in extra-curricular sessions. Their engagement in a wide variety of sports promotes healthy lifestyles.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietorial chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr Desmond Dunne	Reporting inspector
Mrs Ruth Loveman	Accompanying Inspector
Miss Jacqueline Zugg	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head, GSA school)
Mr Richard Follett	Team inspector (Deputy head, HMC school)
Mr Andrew Selkirk	Team inspector (Former deputy head, SofH school)