



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Unicorn School

June 2023

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School's Details

School	Unicorn School			
DfE number	318/6069			
Registered charity number	312578			
Address	Unicorn School 238 Kew Road Richmond Surrey TW9 3JX			
Telephone number	0208 948 3926			
Email address	enquiries@unicornschoo.org.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Polly Fraley			
Co-chairs of governors	Mr Geoffrey Bayliss and Mr Mark Byatt			
Proprietor	The Unicorn School Limited			
Age range	3 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	172			
	EYFS	40	Infants	46
	Juniors	86		
Inspection dates	27 to 29 June 2023			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Unicorn School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1970 by a group of parents and teachers. The school is a registered charity and is administered by a board of governors. The school comprises three sections: the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged 3 to 5 years; infants, for pupils aged 5 to 7 years; and juniors, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has appointed a new head in 2021 and a new co-chair of governors in January 2022.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to be a successful, forward-thinking school that provides a dynamic, nurturing and creative environment. It seeks to encourage pupils to become independent, responsible, self-aware and, above all, kind young people who reap the benefits of what it intends to be a very broad curriculum to achieve considerable success.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Most pupils come from families with professional backgrounds in the surrounding area. Assessment data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average compared to others taking the same test nationally. The school has identified 22 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and sensory integration issues, all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHCP). English is an additional language (EAL) for 29 pupils, one of whom receives specialist support for their English. Where the school identifies pupils as being the most able in its population, 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 FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED 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. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

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 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 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.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, 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.

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 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.

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 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.

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 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 wellbeing of the pupils.

2.19 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Red Class	Nursery
Orange Class	Reception
Yellow Class	Year 1
Green Class	Year 2
Blue Class	Year 3
Indigo Class	Year 4
Violet Class	Year 5
UV Class	Year 6

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils' excellent levels of academic achievement are a result of consistently high expectations on the part of senior leaders and teachers.
- Pupils develop excellent communication skills, especially when speaking and presenting.
- Pupils develop excellent information and communication technology (ICT) skills throughout the curriculum.
- Pupils develop a range of well-developed study skills; however, the learning processes of analysing, hypothesising and synthesising are less evident in their work.
- Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils develop notably high levels of self-understanding, self-confidence, self-esteem and resilience.
- Behaviour in the classroom and around school is excellent as a result of well-developed moral understanding.
- Pupils develop notably strong social skills and enjoy opportunities to work together.

- Pupils are highly aware of the needs of others and are extremely willing to help each other both inside and outside the classroom.
- Pupils' respect for diversity and cultural understanding is excellent.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements.

- Enable pupils to develop a wider range of study skills drawing upon their higher-order thinking skills.
- Enable pupils to take greater ownership of their learning and to develop their independence as learners.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

3.5 Pupils achieve excellent levels of academic progress as a result of consistently high expectations on the part of senior leaders and teachers, fulfilling the school's aim to provide a nurturing and creative environment. Pupils' performance in entrance examinations to independent senior schools with competitive entry requirements is excellent. Around a quarter of pupils regularly gain academic, music, art and sport scholarships to senior schools. Constructive use of tracking and monitoring procedures enable teachers and leaders to analyse the performance of cohorts and individual pupils. This information is used dynamically by class teachers and learning support staff in termly progress meetings to develop effective interventions to support and stretch pupils where appropriate. By the end of Reception, the majority of children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) achieve a good level of development. The school's own assessments show that pupils' progress over their time in the school is at a level which at least fulfils their considerable potential and often exceeds it. All pupils, including those with SEND, EAL and the most able, make equally strong progress. In their responses to the pre-inspection questionnaires, the overwhelming majority of parents agreed that teaching helps their child to make good progress.

3.6 Pupils' knowledge, understanding and skills across the range of subjects is excellent. Pupils demonstrate strong recall skills as a result of the school's focus on retrieval practice, and they apply this knowledge effectively in a range of situations. For example, Nursery pupils demonstrated confidence when creating dances to accompany Ukrainian butterfly music as part of their topic on the life cycle of a butterfly. In science, pupils in Year 3 demonstrated their excellent understanding of a fair test and having one variable. They demonstrated curiosity, identified a number of facts and made well-considered predictions and explanations. In art, pupils in Year 5 skilfully made lifelike observational drawings of fruits and vegetables in preparation for carving them out of soap. They used shading and considered shape and proportion in their drawings, understanding the concept of negative space.

3.7 Pupils are highly confident communicators. They develop an excellent range of speaking skills across their time in the school and are adept when reading aloud, speaking in front of peers and taking on roles in drama. For example, pupils in Year 5 were highly expressive when acting out scenes from *Charlotte's Web*. In a school council meeting, pupils enthusiastically and maturely articulated their thoughts and feelings on the arrangements for swimming lessons. They listened attentively to their peers and made astute observations, picking up on and developing the views of others. Pupils from a young age develop excellent writing skills, learning to write for a range of purposes and in different genres. The youngest children make rapid progress from emerging mark making in the Nursery to formal letter formation in Reception. They are encouraged to write in full sentences from an early age. By Year 6, pupils regularly write letters and stories using sophisticated language. Reading is highly

valued by all pupils, who enjoy their weekly visits to the comfortable and well-resourced library. The youngest pupils make excellent progress in learning sounds and developing pre-reading skills. Year 1 pupils confidently identified words with a *ch* sound, sharing their ideas with their talking partners using *chip*, *chick* and *chin*.

- 3.8 Pupils' numeracy skills are highly developed. In Nursery, pupils demonstrated mathematical curiosity when playing in the sand tray, investigating volume and capacity. Pupils in Year 2 demonstrated an excellent understanding of positional language, consolidating their own learning in a physical game in which they used appropriate language to give instructions to their peers. Pupils in Year 5 successfully recalled the names of quadrilaterals and in groups, correctly identified the properties of several shapes. Pupils used appropriate mathematical language, such as obtuse, acute, symmetry and vertices with confidence. Pupils recognise that they can skilfully transfer their well-developed numeracy skills to situations beyond mathematics lessons. For example, pupils in Year 3 carefully and accurately measured liquids in science. Pupils in Year 6 discussed how they used measurement in art, and in science they use their numerical skills when calculating averages and recording data in graphs.
- 3.9 Pupils' information and communication technology (ICT) skills develop rapidly in a variety of ways throughout the curriculum as a result of the school's innovative approach to device use. Children in Reception confidently control the mouse to navigate their way around the screen. They are able to use their clicking and dragging skills to complete tasks and demonstrate dexterity and logical thinking to complete challenges. As they progress through the school, pupils are highly adept at selecting the most appropriate application to use for a range of specific tasks and use their devices as an extension to their battery of other resources. For example, pupils in Year 3 used their tablets to select appropriate components with which to write letters to their next class teacher, and pupils in Year 4 discussed the correct and incorrect use of apostrophes as used in online examples. In science, pupils in Year 4 used tablets successfully to take photographs of beam bridges they had built, then successfully transferred their photographs to the teacher's device using wireless communication technology. Pupils readily access homework tasks online and use research skills as a regular part of their canon of learning.
- 3.10 Pupils apply strong study skills when accessing a range of sources and using their knowledge to achieve progress in assessments and problem-solving tasks. Pupils in Year 4 analysed the impact that the addition of triangular structures made to the strength of a truss bridge. They draw upon facts and information from previous learning experiences and are adept at successfully achieving progress from one task to another. For example, in art, pupils in Year 5 reviewed their observational drawings as they progressed, making changes to improve the quality and technical accuracy of their output. However, whilst they are able to make predictions in subjects such as science, art and mathematics, pupils' higher-order thinking skills are less well developed across the curriculum. The learning processes of analysing, hypothesising and synthesising are less evident in pupils' work than the success of the more binary outcomes of right and wrong. Year 6 pupils explained how highly they value opportunities, such as in current affairs, to analyse and discuss news articles; and how philosophy lessons for example when they considered the concept of 'nothing', provide them with rich opportunities to develop their creative reasoning skills.
- 3.11 Pupils achieve considerable success beyond the formal curriculum. They consistently achieve local and regional success in many sports such as netball, hockey, football and cricket. Swimming features highly in the pupils' annual successes. All junior pupils play in regular matches and tournaments, supporting the school's philosophy of sport for all. Pupils regularly attain a high proportion of merits and distinctions in public music examinations in a range of instruments. In particular, the success of singing exams – 100% distinctions. Singing is a particular strength of the musical life of the schools and all candidates in singing exams achieve the highest results. They deploy these vocal skills as keen members of choirs and regularly win local choral events and take part in the plethora of concerts throughout the year. Pupils' dramatic skills develop through their regular drama lessons and as they contribute to class productions linked to their class topics. Shakespeare always features in the annual

Year 5 plays and pupils from all junior years enthusiastically opt to take part in the much-loved annual musical theatre productions. Pupils excel as public speakers and debating is a particularly strong skill developed by many. Celebration assemblies, pupil parliament and 'soap box' talks further develop pupils' confidence in front of an audience. Individual pupils gain successes in national art, reading and writing competitions.

- 3.12 Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. They relish opportunities to collaborate with others to approach problem-solving, for example when measuring and noting the absorption rates of urine in nappies in science. They demonstrate initiative by extending their learning at home and often bring artefacts into school which demonstrate this, such as the many items exhibited in a Year 2 display. Opportunities to develop their independent thinking skills and to take leadership of their learning are less well developed in the classroom and in their output. They describe 'fun' lessons as those which engage them in such skill development but note other lessons are more focused on test-based approaches. They cite that the open-ended nature of outdoor learning and practical challenges like sailing, enable them to develop team-working and independent skills. In the questionnaires, the vast majority of pupils agreed that most lessons are interesting, that their teachers know their subjects well, and understand how to help them learn.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 The school successfully fulfils its aim to encourage pupils to become independent, responsible, self-aware and, above all, kind young people. Pupils throughout the school demonstrate high levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-understanding and resilience, supported by the strong pastoral care they receive from their teachers and the highly positive relationships developed at all levels. Pupils are confident that the school will support and encourage them to succeed in all they attempt and as a result, when given opportunities to be challenged in their learning, they respond with enthusiasm and confidence. From an early age, children are encouraged to learn from their mistakes and pupils spoke about how they measure their progress in terms of their success in assessments and tasks. A comprehensive approach to marking and pupil feedback helps pupils to reflect on their learning and to plan and understand their next steps. In the questionnaire all pupils said that this helps them to improve. Self-reflection is encouraged, particularly through the traffic light system, used at the end of tasks. Residential experiences and outdoor learning opportunities contribute significantly to pupils developing self-confidence, self-esteem, resilience and character. The vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school helps their children to be confident.
- 3.15 Pupils understand the importance of making the right decisions. They know how their choices might impact on those around them and affect their own successes. The daily routines of the youngest children, enable them to choose activities. Teachers' planning is flexible and follows the children's interests, so that from an early age children understand that they can make decisions. The school council and eco warrior group empower pupils to make decisions and work democratically to look at ways of improving and developing their school environment and experiences. Pupils feel that they are listened to and that their ideas have an impact on school life, for example, the acquisition of a fish tank and the renovation of the pupils' toilets. The restorative 'three questions' used when pupils have made mistakes around behaviour, focus on pupils considering the wisdom of their actions. Pupils recognise that residential trips give them opportunities to become more independent and to make decisions. For example, they had to choose appropriate clothing to wear to suit the demands of the weather and impending physical activities. Pupils in Year 6 spoke maturely about being actively involved in discussions with their parents and staff regarding their next schools.
- 3.16 Pupils display a strong awareness of the non-material aspects of life. A spirit of caring and openness is evident throughout the school, and this filters down from the leadership and results in pupils who are open-minded and curious about the world around them. The youngest children demonstrate an

eagerness to learn as they explore a wealth of interesting activities. Many begin to recognise and articulate their feelings because staff place a high priority on this area of their development. In a celebration assembly, for example, acts of kindness were celebrated. Throughout the school pupils gain a mature awareness of their place in society as they reflect on those who are less fortunate than themselves in and beyond their community. They demonstrated great empathy and compassion when they discussed their emotional responses to meeting a visiting refugee from Syria. The artwork displayed around the school evidences the pupils' confident ability to express their feelings through the medium of colour, texture and design. Their response to musical performances is considered, supportive and appreciative. The whole school demonstrated exceptional enthusiasm when singing a sea shanty with great gusto and cheerfulness. Pupils recognise the value of mindfulness as offering opportunities for moments of self-discovery. Pupils in Year 6 spoke animatedly about the beautiful views they had experienced on a ski trip to Norway and how sad they were to leave the country.

- 3.17 Pupils demonstrate an extremely well-developed sense of moral responsibility. All parents and pupils responding to the questionnaire agreed that the school expects pupils to behave well. Pupils understand the need to be kind towards each other and demonstrate an excellent understanding of what is right and wrong. They value the opportunity to reflect when they get things wrong and learn how to make better choices next time. Behaviour in the classroom is excellent and pupils approach their work with ardour and commitment. Behaviour around the school is positive, friendly and engaging. Pupils listen respectfully and carefully to their teachers and peers. They understand the system of rewards and sanctions although they say that sanctions are rarely required. Members of school council review the code of conduct annually with the head. Older pupils spoke eloquently about discussions they have in philosophy about why war happens and whether it is ever right. Pupils have valued learning about world poverty and human rights and work hard to make their school community a happy place for everyone.
- 3.18 Pupils develop strong social skills and enjoy opportunities to work together. They learn the advantages of teamwork as they participate in sports teams, charity events and performances organised by the school. Pupils demonstrate a strong sense of loyalty and pride in their school. In keeping with the aims of the school to be responsible, self-aware and kind, they undertake their roles and responsibilities with dedication and work happily together. Pupils trust their teachers who act as excellent role models. The warmth and openness in the relationships between staff and pupils is tangible. In a celebration assembly, pupils listened with respect as representatives from classes talked about what had been achieved during the last half term. They happily clapped and celebrated their peers' successes in gaining certificates and other awards.
- 3.19 Pupils are highly aware of the needs of others and are consistently willing to help each other both inside and outside the classroom. They gain valuable leadership skills as heads of school, monitors, eco warriors, smiley people, librarians, and music and sports captains. Junior pupils regularly share reading books with Nursery children and assist teachers at play times. Pupils value the roles they undertake, describing them as being important to the school as well as themselves. Role modelling by older pupils is a very positive aspect of the relationship between pupils across the school community. Pupils are passionate in their efforts to raise money for those less fortunate than themselves, choosing three school charities each year. Choirs sing at residential homes for the elderly, and older pupils design and sell products at the annual summer fayre. Pupils enjoy writing and receiving letters from their peers in a partner school in Ethiopia.
- 3.20 Pupils' respect for diversity and cultural understanding is excellent. They respect and value the culturally diverse society in which they live. They are respectful of others and enjoy opportunities to find out about their cultures. Pupils spoke of the sharing of Spanish, French and Japanese food at lunchtimes as being positive and memorable experiences. Books in the library reflect the multicultural and socially diverse nature of the school and local population. Pupils are protective of those peers with different backgrounds and have the confidence to challenge inappropriate views and behaviours. Pride posters around the school were the initiative of the older pupils. EYFS children learn at an early

age to celebrate everyone's uniqueness. They understand that everyone is special in their own unique way. There are numerous opportunities for pupils to learn about the festivals and customs of world religions and other cultures and older pupils spoke animatedly about their work in *Black History Month*.

- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent understanding of the importance of exercise, good mental health and a well-balanced diet in order to keep healthy. Physical education lessons, sports fixtures and outdoor learning contribute to pupils' physical development. They understand how to stay safe when using ICT and were able to list the positive and negative aspects of online behaviour. Pupils enjoy the healthy lunches and value the level of choice they have. Pupils in Year 6 embraced the challenge of running a mile a day, 25 laps around the school playground. Pupils appreciate the numerous opportunities they are given to understand the importance of mental health and emotional wellbeing. Mindfulness club, *Well-Being Wednesday* and the services of the school listener have all been well received by the pupils. Pupils in Year 6 learn how to use public transport, which helps them to understand wider safety issues. Pupils feel confident and well prepared for the increasing number of opportunities to become independent young people.

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 a group of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration sessions 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 Alexander Mitchell	Reporting inspector
Mrs Virginia Jackson	Compliance team inspector (Former deputy head, IAPS school)
Mrs Helen Snow	Team inspector (Former head, IAPS school)