



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

The River School

February 2020



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School's Details

School	The River School			
DfE number	885/6030			
Registered charity number	1171394			
Address	The River School Oakfield House Droitwich Road Worcester Worcestershire WR3 7ST			
Telephone number	01905 457047			
Email address	info@riverschool.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mr Adrian Parsonage			
Chair of Trustees	Mrs Elisabeth Cave			
Age range	2 to 16			
Number of pupils on roll	103			
	EYFS	31	Primary	38
	Seniors	34		
Inspection dates	4 to 6 February 2020			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The River School is a co-educational independent day school for pupils aged from 2 to 16 years, with nursery, primary and senior departments. Established in 1985, it is owned by the Worcester Christian Education Trust whose trustees govern the school.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection, the school has lowered the minimum age of admission from 3 to 2 years and has re-introduced an extended day to provide care for pupils before and after school.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 Founded on Christian principles, the school aims to enable pupils to become confident, well-rounded citizens with the best character qualities, skills, discipline and knowledge. The objective is that when pupils leave the school, they will have developed their potential and contribute to their community, seeking to honour God and to serve and love their fellow human beings.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of backgrounds, mostly from white British families living within a 15-mile radius of the school. The school's own assessment indicates that the ability of pupils is broadly average. The school has identified 14 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, all of whom receive additional specialist help. Three pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for two pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. The curriculum is modified for those pupils identified by the school as being the most able in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports 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. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was 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 report of which appears later in this document. 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. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. In addition, the standards relating to having due regard for the protected characteristics are also included.] 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 full regulations 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 primary school, the school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 Pupils take GCSE examinations in their final year at the school. The small numbers involved prevent reliable comparison with national averages.
- 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 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 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.

2.13 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 variously 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 well-being 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.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include 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 good.

- Pupils have positive attitudes to learning; they plan and organise their work effectively and confidently, showing good perseverance to complete tasks.
- All groups of pupils, including those with SEND, achieve well and make good progress relative to their starting points.
- Pupils demonstrate good communication and listening skills, are very willing to contribute in lessons and work well together when opportunities arise.
- Pupils do not always know how to improve their work and what their next steps in learning should be, and this sometimes restricts their progress and achievement.

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

- Pupils' spiritual understanding and appreciation of the non-material aspects of life are excellent, reflecting the school's aims and values.
- Pupils mix well across all age groups and are very supportive of each other, due to the strong community ethos within the school.
- Pupils have a strong moral understanding as shown by their excellent behaviour, empathy for others and commitment to treating the environment responsibly and respectfully.
- Pupils do not have sufficient awareness, appreciation and understanding of the diversity of British society and of others' faiths and beliefs.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Ensure pupils always know how to improve their work and understand their next steps in learning so that they can achieve even more.
- Ensure pupils develop a greater awareness, understanding and appreciation of the diversity of British society and of others' faiths and beliefs.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils have positive attitudes to learning, showing pride in their work, planning and organising it effectively. Pupils of all abilities demonstrate good perseverance with their learning to ensure they complete tasks. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), demonstrated determination to finish their number-line game in the time allotted by the teacher; older pupils showed great resilience, collaboratively reviewing their electrical circuits and testing the battery times. Pupils demonstrate excellent motivation to contribute during lessons, due to the aspirations and encouragement provided by staff. Younger pupils showed strong enthusiasm to share their creative stories of 'whatever next?', enabled by the positive relationships and working habits facilitated by the teaching staff.

- 3.6 All groups of pupils, including those with SEND and those with EAL, achieve well and make good progress relative to their starting points. Pupils with SEND make good progress because their needs are identified at an early stage and they receive effective classroom and individualised support. Attainment at the end of the EYFS is at least in line with national expectations in all areas of development and some children exceed these. In the primary department, pupils' progress judged on their observed performance in lessons, scrutiny of their work and results in standardised tests is good in both English and mathematics. As a result, by the end of Year 6, most pupils including those with SEND, achieve in line with average expectations. Senior pupils are well-prepared for their GCSE examinations and the most able achieve results which enable them to move on to sixth-form colleges, competing successfully for sought after places. Pupils are supported well by small class sizes and the high aspirations of staff who know them individually very well. They are encouraged by the award of fun stickers for their efforts and successes, and by regular and helpful feedback in some subjects. Pupils spoke highly about opportunities to negotiate and agree personal targets for English and mathematics. An over-whelming majority of parents in the pre-inspection questionnaire said that the teaching in the school enables their child to make progress and develop skills for their future. However, inspection evidence supports the view expressed by a few pupils, that the main focus is on English and mathematics and that pupils would benefit from better understanding what it is they are expected to learn in all of their subjects, with an increased focus on knowing how to improve and what their next steps in learning might be.
- 3.7 Pupils attain good levels of success in extra-curricular activities, both at school and locally. Pupils are keen to undertake activities due to the support and encouragement of staff. The successful participation and good achievement of pupils in dance, theatre and in singing at music evenings, where pupils of all ages perform, is notable. Pupils demonstrate strong performing skills across a number of genres; choir singing at school celebration events, acting in the Christmas nativity, or performing in the school talent show where they compare themselves to television celebrities.
- 3.8 Pupils basic skills for learning are good. They possess effective study skills for their age, producing good quality work. Pupils of all ages make good progress because of the strong relationships with staff and the constructive feedback they receive to support their learning. The strategic decision of senior leaders to keep class sizes small allows pupils to achieve well, in line with the school's aim to allow them to achieve their 'God-given potential'. Pupils appreciate being taught life-skills such as cooking and touch-typing, and develop good competencies in these activities.
- 3.9 Pupils communication skills are excellent, as evidenced by their very good standard of responses to teachers' questioning. They develop effective communication skills from an early age, due to the numerous opportunities to practise them in school, so that by the time they leave they are not afraid to present in front of large audiences; this prepares them well for the next stages of their lives. Children in the EYFS demonstrated excellent clarity and confidence when accurately singing and performing the lyrics from their nursery rhyme songs; younger pupils talked confidently during the 'show and tell' sessions about topics that interested themselves and their peers, such as excavating dinosaurs from the ice age, relating enthusiastically to the imaginative resource provided by the teaching staff, plastic toy dinosaurs frozen in water-filled balloons, cracked open with miniature pick-axes. All pupils listen attentively and carry out instructions when asked. Primary pupils in Years 3 and 4 showed an excellent ability to accurately recall and predict the storyline of the puppet show that they had scripted and performed to their parents. Senior pupils displayed versatile acting skills when performing scenes from Romeo and Juliet.

- 3.10 Pupils possess good written skills for their age due to the encouragement and high expectations of staff, who provide regular feedback and advice. From an early age, children are able to recognise, pronounce, identify and form letters to a good standard in their writing; children in the EYFS wrote and spelled their names correctly using their prior understanding of vowel sounds. Older pupils clearly explained the high standards of handwriting they had to achieve as part of their application to be considered as an ambassador for the school. Younger pupils celebrate their strong writing skills when entering their work for a television competition.
- 3.11 Pupils of all ages demonstrate good progress in mathematics and diligently apply numeracy with enthusiasm in a range of situations. Children in the EYFS eagerly recognised number formation and calculated the addition or subtraction of bricks when building a tower. Younger pupils spoke highly of how the online learning system had helped them to improve their literacy and numeracy skills through playing fun games and completing tests. Not only are they competent in their multiplication calculations but they have to prove they are right. Senior pupils particularly commented on the new initiatives that have recently been put into place to develop their mathematical skills and enable them to achieve better results, and were appreciative that this had been recognised and dealt with by the leadership team.
- 3.12 Pupils' information, communication and technology (ICT) skills are strong due to the opportunities to apply these skills across other subject areas as well as in timetabled weekly computer lessons taught by a specialist teacher. Pupils develop confidence in the use of ICT as it is introduced from an early age. Children in the EYFS begin to develop fine motor skills when operating battery-powered toys. Pupils explained how they had successfully used the internet and hyperlinks for research, together with software to present the results when exploring Greek history or conducting a fact finding project on the Amazon rainforest.
- 3.13 Pupils are very willing to participate in lessons due to the encouragement and support provided by teachers and the 'have a go' attitude instilled in all pupils from the day they join the school. The school's mission to promote independent learning, and the encouragement of pupils to learn from their mistakes are key factors in enabling the pupils' positive learning attitudes. Pupils show enjoyment in their learning, contributing enthusiastically in lessons and sharing ideas with each other. Pupils discussed the parable of the Good Samaritan, adeptly and sensitively considering the feelings of the different characters and pondering on deeper philosophical questions such as 'The nature of God'.
- 3.14 Pupils demonstrate very effective collaborative team working skills. The outdoor and environmental education provided through the woodland learning area, is loved by all of the pupils. They show team work, develop resilience through lighting fires and building dens and cook their own home-grown vegetables. They delight in getting muddy, and excitedly ring the bell when they have scaled the ladder up a tree. They talk knowledgeably about what protective clothing is needed when procuring honey from the bees and the school has the honour to be the only one registered with the Worcester Bee Keeping Association.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.15 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.16 Pupils have excellent self-esteem and self-confidence. They greet visitors with politeness and courtesy, and they confidently show pride in their work. This is celebrated in the primary school through 'well done' assemblies, where effort, achievement and perseverance are rewarded and praised. Senior pupils in Years 9, 10 and 11 show resilience and independence through engagement in a project to promote responsibility, servant-heartedness and discernment. This enables them to work personally with a mentor for the benefit of their well-being. Older pupils confidently described how they had taken inspiration from reading 'The Flour Babies' which opened their eyes to the experiences of caring for others. Pupil's self-confidence is enhanced by the many opportunities to perform in front of audiences at celebration events, the school talent show or choir singing at a local festival.
- 3.17 Pupil's strong self-esteem is developed through the staff's highly effective use of encouragement and praise, and through conscientious pastoral support which is tailored to their individual needs. Pupils know they can freely approach members of staff for help or advice and do so with confidence. Pupils said that teachers help them to become more resilient and to persevere with tasks; for example, when asking for help they were not allowed to say, "I cannot do it" but to say, "I cannot do it yet". Their self-esteem grows as they move through the school, as they benefit from regular opportunities to celebrate their achievements together in assemblies, or praising each other during singing and dancing sessions.
- 3.18 Pupils make age-appropriate decisions in their learning, understanding how they can be the determinates of their own success. Their capacity for decision making is well established throughout the school, where pupils freely choose activities of interest, supported by well-organised resources and encouragement from staff. For example, younger pupils recognise that they can choose peers to help them in lessons when they are unsure of an answer, and are invited to 'phone a friend'. Older pupils make well-considered personal decisions about their career paths. Pupils have extended their personal development in new areas of study, such as computer science and child development, because the school has responded to their requests for these programmes by arranging additional specialist teaching. School ambassadors understand the importance of allowing their peers to help inform their decisions about which charities and community projects to support over the next year.
- 3.19 Pupils mix well across all age groups and are very supportive of each other, due to the strong family and community ethos within the school. Pupils of all ages naturally sit and play together at lunchtimes. They actively seek opportunities to take on responsibilities and contribute positively to the well-being of the school and wider community through the broad range of opportunities provided for them. Children in the EYFS readily enjoy helping each other to tidy up at the end of the day; older pupils enjoy volunteering for school 'service', successfully taking responsibility for a range of classroom tasks such as running errands or undertaking peer mentoring with younger pupils. School ambassadors spoke highly about the chance to make a difference, by acting as role models to enable high standards of behaviour in the school and for the benefit of the well-being of their peers.

- 3.20 Pupils' moral understanding and behaviour is excellent; this was exemplified by how well the older pupils were seen to look after the younger ones during playtime, and the way in which they all enjoyed skipping together. Pupils exhibited very good behaviour across all age and ability groups. Pupils stated that they naturally look out for each other regardless of their age, background or religion. Pupils clearly stated that they would never leave someone alone who needed someone to play with. They develop a strong sense of empathy and compassion for each other, due to the numerous opportunities to build on their friendships during team events, or when in prayer. Pupils know how to distinguish right from wrong, and the impact that the power of forgiveness can bring on them and others. All pupils demonstrate a respect for the rules and systems that govern school life. Older pupils spoke highly of the opportunity to negotiate and create their own classroom rules at the beginning of the year with their teachers. Staff and leadership model excellent behaviour and respect, setting consistently high standards of expectations, underpinned by the strong Christian values within the school.
- 3.21 Pupils demonstrate a natural empathy for and appreciation of those less fortunate than themselves, as demonstrated by their spiritual reflection in assemblies and charity fundraising. Pupils articulate how they consider what happens to people as they age, what it means to be blind, and how they enjoyed the experience of playing wheelchair basketball. Involvement in such reflection gives them a strong values base for contributing to the wider community. Pupils enjoy and learn about caring for others from the opportunities available to them to undertake good deed challenges, such as providing food for a local homeless charity, or choir singing at a local residential home for the elderly.
- 3.22 Pupils exhibit a highly developed sense of spirituality with a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. Founded on strong Christian principles, the school encourages pupils to live boldly with God, supported by staff who have high aspirations for them to fulfil their God-given potential. Pupils have numerous opportunities to reflect on their own faith and spirituality through discussions in assemblies, praying or quiet contemplation time. Younger pupils spoke fondly in assembly time about how they had used prayer to ask God to help make the older pupils do well in their GCSE examinations. Pupils enjoy the opportunities to reflect on how God would want them to behave through a comprehensive programme of 'heart concepts' which are embedded in all aspects of learning and school life, whether this is encouraging their peers when participating in team sports or going on a worship walk to admire and thank God for the wildlife and nature all around them. Caring for the environment is a major theme which runs through the heart of the work of the school and gives all the pupils an excellent concept of global responsibility for our world. The EYFS children understand the effects of plastic pollution on our seas through their project on fantastic plastic, whilst primary pupils make eco bricks and display a genuine respect for and commitment to recycling. Seniors considered the effects of fossil fuels and sustainability on brown and greenfield sites, demonstrating concern for the impact of these issues on the environment. This develops a strong sense of moral responsibility.
- 3.23 Pupils are very accepting of those of different backgrounds; pupils representing different ethnic and cultural backgrounds work together in an entirely respectful and inclusive manner. Senior pupils gain some understanding of a range of other cultural and religious practices through the school's comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHEE) programme. Primary pupils mainly focus on Christian Bible stories and therefore their knowledge and understanding of other faiths, beliefs and worldviews is more limited. Although those pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire unanimously agreed that the school encourages them to respect and tolerate other people, reflecting the school's strong Christian ethos of respect and inclusivity, all pupils' awareness, understanding and appreciation of the diversity of British society and of others' faiths and beliefs are underdeveloped.

- 3.24 Pupils know how to stay safe online, due to the school providing clear guidance about the risks. Younger pupils spoke confidently that they would report anything unusual or they did not like when online to their teachers, or to their parents if they were at home. Pupils demonstrate a very good understanding of how to stay safe or how their actions could affect the safety of others. They all recite the 'think' acronym which relates to the use of social media, to check whether it is true, helpful, important, necessary and kind. Pupils demonstrate a good range of understanding about having a healthy lifestyle and diet; children in the EYFS explained that apples are good for you and older pupils described how being outside in the fresh air was healthier for you than just staying inside at weekends playing computer games.
- 3.25 An overwhelming majority of parents in questionnaire responses agreed that the school supports their child's personal development and meets their pastoral and welfare needs effectively. Throughout the school a sense of enjoyment and social awareness is evident as a result of encouraging leadership and caring staff, who have ensured that pupils fulfil the schools' aims, developing into confident, compassionate and caring individuals who are well prepared for the next stages of their education.

4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with a group of trustees, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended registration and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Sandra Teacher	Reporting inspector
Mrs Kate Corbin	Compliance team inspector (Deputy head pastoral, HMC school)
Mr Matt Donaldson	Team inspector (Headteacher, ISA school)
Mrs Rani Tandon	Team inspector (Deputy head pastoral, GSA school)

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