ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

12 to 14 May 2026

Cottesmore School

Buchan Hill

Pease Pottage

RH11 9AU

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders promote a clear vision for the school and foster a culture characterised by kindness and mutual respect. Leaders prioritise pupils' personal development and foster positive relationships between staff and pupils, which creates a supportive environment in school.

2. However, the proprietors do not ensure that leaders demonstrate the required knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively in all areas. Consequently, the school does not meet all the Standards. The processes for management of risk are not effective. The school's written risk assessment policy is not consistently implemented. Leaders do not consistently identify and mitigate potential risks to pupils including risk assessments which are insufficiently matched to the trips or activities being undertaken. The arrangements to promote the health and safety of pupils and the maintenance of the school's premises and accommodation do not meet the relevant Standards.

3. Leaders provide the required information to parents including updates on their child's progress. The published complaints policy is followed and complaints resolved in a timely manner.

4. Pupils make good progress because teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic, enabling pupils to engage positively with their learning and foster their natural curiosity about the world. Staff know pupils well and provide effective support, including for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), who make good progress due to the individual support provided by teachers. However, teachers do not always use assessment data to inform future planning and build on pupils' prior learning.

5. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress from their starting points because teachers are aware of their individual needs and the curriculum is adjusted to focus on the development of their language skills.

6. Leaders have established a supportive and well-structured learning environment, underpinned by clear and consistent routines that help pupils feel secure and confident. Teachers know the pupils well and foster a kind, inclusive community where positive relationships support learning and wellbeing. The boarding house is characterised by a happy, purposeful atmosphere in which pupils interact with respect and develop a sense of belonging.

7. Leaders in the early years promote a purposeful and engaging learning environment which takes into consideration the individual needs and interests of children. Children experience a range of guided and independent activities that support the development of their communication, numeracy and physical skills. These approaches enable pupils to engage confidently, build independence and apply their learning across different contexts.

8. Pupils take part in a wide range of co-curricular opportunities and engage positively in these experiences. Through this participation, they develop confidence, teamwork and wider personal and social skills.

9. Staff apply behaviour and anti-bullying policies consistently, helping pupils to take responsibility and reflect on their actions. Leaders and staff model high behaviour expectations and a culture of kindness that is then reflected in the pupils.

10. Leaders prepare pupils well for life as responsible citizens. Pupils understand the difference between right and wrong and show respect for people with different backgrounds, beliefs and experiences. Through a range of school activities, pupils develop their understanding of diversity, democracy and individual liberty.

11. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Staff are suitably trained and know how to report any safeguarding concerns. The school responds appropriately to any concerns that arise. The school's safer recruitment procedures are managed competently.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are not met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:

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

so that:

- there are effective processes to identify and mitigate any risks or hazards, in line with the school's risk assessment policy
- effective health and safety arrangements are implemented so that the school premises are maintained to the required standards.

Recommended next steps

- Leaders should ensure greater consistency in the use of assessment data to inform planning and facilitate progress for all pupils.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. The proprietor, supported by the board of governing advisors, maintains oversight of the school. Members of the board of governing advisors are knowledgeable, visit school regularly and provide challenge and support when needed. However, leaders' oversight of health and safety and risk is inconsistent.

13. The school does not identify or mitigate risk with sufficient rigour. Risk assessments for site security did not recognise all potential routes of public access to school buildings, nor do they consider the additional risks associated with external hirers operating in school grounds. Leaders do not provide sufficient oversight of the school's risk assessments or ensure that identified control measures are implemented consistently. This includes risk assessments which are not sufficiently robust in considering the risks relating to the specific nature of each trip or activity undertaken. As a result, weaknesses in the management of risk reduce the effectiveness of arrangements to protect the welfare of pupils.

14. Leaders foster a positive school culture promoting the school's ethos to place equal importance on academic achievement and personal development. Leaders and staff know pupils well, and use this knowledge to support academic progress, wellbeing and personal development. Pastoral systems are effective, with comprehensive record-keeping, which informs the care of the pupils, including support for pupils facing personal difficulties.

15. Leaders provide parents with all required information and policies through the school's website. Leaders and staff provide parents with suitable reports of their child's progress recognising effort and attainment and identifying development needs. This information is supported by annual parents' meetings.

16. Leaders actively promote kindness, good behaviour and manners which helps to ensure pupils consistently reflect these qualities in their daily interactions. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Pupils develop a conscientious attitude to academic study and a keenness to pursue their interests and talents, for example art scholars attend supervised recreational sessions to complete their portfolios.

17. Leaders in the early years promote children's wellbeing effectively. They set clear expectations, provide well-resourced indoor and outdoor facilities, and support pupils to make good progress. Staff know the children well and monitor their progress with care, sharing this with parents. Leaders use a wide range of evidence including baseline information, moderation and assessment records to identify needs and adapt the provision appropriately.

18. Leaders maintain clear systems of reporting safeguarding concerns. There is appropriate information-sharing with staff, who understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Regular training means staff are alert to safeguarding risks. Leaders engage constructively with external agencies to evaluate and improve safeguarding processes, which has led to the development of safeguarding processes and procedures within the school. Leaders monitor attendance and appropriately inform the local authority of a pupil whose attendance is a concern or about pupils who join or leave the school at a non-standard transition point.

19. The school implements an effective complaints procedure to respond to parental concerns in a timely manner. Records of complaints are maintained and reviewed regularly by leaders to identify any recurring themes or patterns. Where appropriate, leaders act to address issues and maintain records of these.

20. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The accessibility plan outlines appropriate and inclusive strategies to ensure the curriculum and school premises are available for all pupils.

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

21. Standards are not met consistently with respect to risk management and maintenance of the school premises.

22. Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not met.

23. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Leaders provide a broad and balanced curriculum that is aligned to the ages, aptitudes and needs of pupils. Pupils make good progress from their starting points and are successful in gaining places at a wide range of day and boarding schools at age 13. Leaders prioritise reading through the expansion of a structured reading programme across the school.

25. Pupils are curious and enthusiastic and extend their learning beyond the classroom, for example by participating in science challenges. Pupils develop effective skills for study and become increasingly independent in their learning. In lessons, pupils engage thoughtfully in discussion, ask insightful questions and apply their learning effectively. For example, pupils in Year 6 develop their understanding of circuits and how electrical components function together. Practical science lessons allow pre-prep pupils to explore the school grounds to develop their understanding of plants. Older pupils demonstrate articulate reasoning when investigating famous explorers.

26. Teachers use creative strategies and draw on comprehensive subject knowledge to support learning. This ensures teaching is effective and pupils make good progress. For example, musical beats are used to support accurate pronunciation in language lessons in Year 1. In Year 8 English lessons, teachers draw on film clips to enable pupils to gain understanding of compare and contrast techniques. Teachers regularly check pupils' understanding during lessons. Teachers provide helpful feedback that supports progress; however, not all teachers use assessment information consistently to inform planning so that they can build systematically on pupils' prior learning.

27. Provision for pupils who have SEND is integrated into classroom practice, including in the early years. Leaders ensure that pupils' needs are identified promptly and that personalised adaptations are shared with staff enabling pupils to access learning and make good progress. Pupils with high prior attainment benefit from opportunities for more analytical thinking, including specific provision for pupils seeking scholarship and extension challenges which helps pupils to be engaged in their learning. For example, in history lessons, pupils respond confidently to challenging questions and apply essay writing techniques to structure their written work.

28. Pupils who speak EAL are catered for with supportive teaching adapted to their needs, including the use of keyword glossaries and partner work, alongside one-to-one lessons. Pupils make good progress developing their skills and comprehension in English.

29. Children in the early years are provided with a broad curriculum including phonics, role play, outdoor exploration and physical activity. Children develop communication and language skills supported by staff modelling vocabulary, reading stories and questioning. Staff adapt the provision using the children's interests and needs as the starting point for learning. Children engage with learning tasks including phonics and tricky word activities and draw on prior knowledge and vocabulary to talk about seasonal changes in the natural world.

30. The boarding provision contributes positively to pupils' wider personal development. Boarders develop organisation, independence and resilience. They are encouraged to work effectively as a team. As a result, they develop positive attitudes towards their academic work and engage confidently in learning. They respond enthusiastically to the evening and weekend programme of on- and off-site activities, which enhances their physical development, creativity and social skills.

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31. Leaders provide an extensive range of recreational and co-curricular activities at breaktimes and through the provision of clubs including golf, fishing, snooker, e-sports and railway club. These activities enable pupils to extend their skills, develop new interests and build positive social relationships.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. Leaders support the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of the pupils which develops their self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils are listened to and supported by staff, who promote a culture of respect and mutual trust across the school, which is reflected in pupils' positive daily conduct and interactions with one another.

34. However, leaders do not consistently apply their knowledge and understanding of health and safety with insufficient controls preventing unsupervised public access to school buildings. In the boarding house, pupils had access to unalarmed fire escape stairs. Staff do not always provide suitable supervision of pupils during breaktimes given the nature of the school site. As a result, the Standards are not consistently met.

35. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, which incorporates delivery of the relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum, ensures statutory requirements are met. Pupils learn about online safety, managing emotions, respectful relationships and how to seek help when needed and, as a result, pupils develop the confidence and understanding to make informed choices and build positive relationships with others.

36. Pupils understand the importance of managing their mental health. Pupils are confident to talk about their feelings, interests and life experience. A small-group tutoring system allows pupils to reflect on their week discussing topics such as losing in sport, family news and upcoming holidays. The school's 'happiness charter' ensures that pupils know how to seek support. Pastoral information is disseminated to staff through weekly staff meetings supporting the care of the pupils. There are appropriate behaviour and sanction records, which help to identify patterns, trends and actions taken.

37. In the early years, children are taught to be polite towards each other. Children learn how to share activities and resources and the importance of treating each other with kindness. Children share and take turns in their play which develops positive relationships and respect for others. Leaders with responsibility for the early years provide effective activities to develop both fine and gross motor skills. Children are skilful in manipulating materials using both hands, and use whole-body movements to pretend to be trees changing and moving in different seasons.

38. There is an effective induction for new boarders. Boarders know who to turn to if they need support, approaching boarding staff for guidance as necessary. A varied programme of activities such as karting, baking and visiting Brighton Pier further supports the boarders' wellbeing in school.

39. The school's medical and first aid arrangements support pupils' physical wellbeing. The medical staff provide a caring environment for pupils who are unwell or injured, with clear systems for recording incidents, administering medication and informing parents. All staff are qualified in paediatric first aid and trained in administering first aid. Leaders ensure appropriate arrangements for fire safety including well-marked exits and regular fire drills which include boarding house evacuations.

40. The behaviour policy is consistently implemented in school. The system for rewards and sanctions is understood and respected by pupils. Pupils are awarded stars to celebrate success and understand

the consequences of their actions. Leaders create opportunities for pupils to reflect on inappropriate behaviour, including writing a letter of apology.

41. Pupils learn what bullying is and understand the impact and consequences of their actions. Staff address bullying promptly and in line with the school's anti-bullying policy. On the rare occasions that it occurs, staff support pupils effectively, take appropriate steps to address the issue and support all those involved.

42. Pupils learn about the beliefs and values of different world religions and the importance of showing mutual respect through weekly theology and philosophy lessons. Cultural diversity is celebrated with events for Lunar New Year, Diwali and Christmas. Pupils show respect and understanding of their time in chapel, which gives pupils an opportunity for spiritual reflection.

43. All pupils develop their physical skills and their understanding of a healthy lifestyle in physical education (PE) and outdoor learning activities. Leaders ensure that the PE curriculum is well planned and provides a wide range of sports and activities to promote physical health. Leaders promote participation in sport for all, enabling all pupils to develop a positive attitude to exercise. Pupils benefit from the school hosting outreach events for local schools such as a Harry Potter-themed festival with the pupils playing quidditch, and a chess congress. Through these events, pupils develop self-confidence and communication skills.

44. Close and continuous supervision in the early years is provided during mealtimes to ensure children are safe and appropriately supported, including from the potential risk of choking. Staff apply consistent routines to minimise hazards and observe children attentively.

45. The school manages admissions and attendance registers in line with statutory guidance.

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

46. Standards are not met consistently with respect to the maintenance of the school premises.

47. Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are not met.

48. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

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

49. Pupils are encouraged to hold positions of responsibility such as school councillor, committee members, captains and monitors to provide help, support and guidance to others. Pupils participate in charitable and outreach events including an egg-buggy challenge and visiting a local care home which promotes social conscience and develops responsibility. Pupils' involvement in committees including charity, kindness, sustainability, food, library and boarding enables them to influence school life constructively and understand the impact of their actions.

50. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of fundamental British values, including mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths, backgrounds and beliefs. They show a clear understanding that people may differ in relation to race, gender, disability and neurodiversity, and treat others with kindness, equality and respect. As a result, pupils develop positive relationships and contribute to an inclusive and welcoming school community.

51. Pupils engage confidently in democratic processes, including voting for leadership roles, selecting menu items and choosing evening activities. Boarders express their views confidently through meetings, surveys and suggestion boxes, and see the positive impact of their feedback on their school experience.

52. Pupils develop cultural understanding and mutual respect through positive interactions across the school community. They celebrate different nationalities through food, language and traditions, while assemblies, PSHE, chapel and shared activities promote tolerance, equality and respect for different cultures and beliefs. Pupils respect one another, build inclusive relationships and contribute positively to the school community.

53. Leaders promote the development of pupils' social and moral awareness. Projects such as the early years and pre-prep Kenya project, allow the pupils to hear of first-hand experiences of a country and the challenges that people face. This extends pupils' understanding of global communities, equality and social responsibility. As a result, pupils show empathy and an appreciation of different perspectives.

54. Pupils' respect for the law and public institutions is developed through the curriculum, the PSHE programme and through visiting speakers who encourage pupils to consider different aspects of law and justice. Pupils also take part in activities such as leading a government for the day, which supports their understanding of democracy, public life and decision-making. Political issues are represented in an impartial manner, and pupils are encouraged to consider differing views.

55. Pupils develop an early understanding of the world of work and the economy through mathematics, PSHE lessons and enterprise opportunities. Pupils learn about credit cards, mortgages, family budgets and financial choices. Pupils take part in practical business activities including a business workshop, budgeting and a 'Dragon's Den' project. As a result, pupils develop confidence in managing money, problem-solving and decision-making, preparing them well for future responsibilities.

56. Pupils are prepared for the next stage of their education and life in modern British society through a programme of guidance, careers education and visiting speakers. Parents and former pupils visit

school so they gain an understanding of different roles and skills they might require. They develop an informed understanding of future pathways and contemporary issues, including the influence of social media and artificial intelligence on society and employment. As a result, pupils make informed decisions and develop confidence in preparing for their future lives.

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

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

58. Leaders ensure that safeguarding arrangements are effective and that there is a proactive safeguarding culture throughout the school. The board of governor advisors maintains oversight of the school's safeguarding policy and practice. Its members are suitably trained, regularly visit and communicate with the school's leadership to maintain an effective understanding of the school's safeguarding processes.

59. Leaders ensure that all required pre-appointment checks are completed in line with statutory guidance. The single central record of appointments (SCR) is maintained accurately, and appropriate checks are carried out for all adults living on site. Staff receive safeguarding training and induction on appointment so that they understand safeguarding procedures and their responsibilities in keeping pupils safe. Guardianship arrangements are monitored closely to ensure boarders are safeguarded when away from school.

60. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe, including when online. They understand the risks associated with online activity and how to manage them responsibly. Leaders recognise the potential risks linked to the use of technology and ensure appropriate internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place. Any concern relating to online activity is followed up promptly and effectively to safeguard pupils.

61. Staff in the early years demonstrate a secure understanding of children's safety needs. They adhere consistently to the policy prohibiting the use of mobile phones.

62. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately trained and knowledgeable about local thresholds. Leaders devise and implement effective plans for pupils who need support and maintain comprehensive records of safeguarding concerns. Leaders work effectively with external agencies and collaborate with West Sussex local authority.

63. Leaders promote a culture that safeguards pupils effectively. Leaders respond appropriately to any safeguarding concerns. Staff are well trained and receive appropriate updates. Leaders and staff share information through weekly meetings and regular discussions about the pastoral care of pupils. Staff understand how to log concerns about pupils as well as report any low-level concerns or allegations about an adult, should they arise. Pupils know how to report concerns. Boarders know how to access the independent person should they have concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

64. All the relevant Standards are met.

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR[1] Part 3, paragraph 16	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that -
16(a)	the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
16(b)	appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
NMS 2.1	The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school and takes appropriate action where necessary.
NMS 2.2	The school's leadership and management, including its governing body where appropriate, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required.
NMS 2.4	The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met.
NMS 2.5	The school's leadership and management and governance actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
NMS 9.3	The school ensures that the welfare of boarders at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
EYFS[2] 3.91	Providers must ensure that they take all reasonable steps to ensure staff and children in their care are not exposed to risks and must be able to demonstrate how they are managing risk. Providers must determine where it is helpful to make some written risk assessments in relation to specific issues, to informs staff practice, and to demonstrate how they are managing risk if asked by

[1] The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

[2] Early years foundation stage statutory framework ('EYFS')

	parents and/or carers or inspectors. Risk assessments should identify aspects of the environment that need to be checked on a regular basis, when and by whom those aspects will be checked, and how the risk will be removed or minimised.

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

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 8	Where section 87(1) of the Children Act 1989 applies in relation to a school the standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—
8(b)	such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools or, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools or the National Minimum Standards for Accommodation of Children under Eighteen by Further Education Colleges.
ISSR Part 5 paragraph 25	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
NMS 9.2	The school premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured, and they are provided a safe environment in which they can live and learn.

School details

School	Cottesmore School
Department for Education number	938/6008
Address	Cottesmore School Buchan Hill Pease Pottage West Sussex RH11 9AU
Phone number	01293 520648
Email address	office@cottesmore.com
Website	www.cottesmoreschool.com
Proprietor	Cottesmore School Limited
Chair	Mrs Cathryn Rogerson
Headteacher	Mr Thomas Rogerson
Age range	4 to 13
Number of pupils	205
Number of boarding pupils	87
Date of previous inspection	17 to 18 May 2023

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Information about the school

65. Cottesmore School is a co-educational day and boarding school located in Pease Pottage, West Sussex. The school was founded in Hove in 1894 and moved to its current location in 1946. The school is owned and governed by the proprietors, who are supported by an advisory body consisting of five members. The early years foundation stage and classes up to Year 3 make up the pre-prep section and Years 4 to 8 form the prep section.

66. Boarders live in dormitories in the main house of the school. This accommodation is separate from the parts of the school used by the pupils during the school day. There are 87 boarders.

67. The school has identified 90 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Currently, no pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

68. The school has identified 57 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

69. The school states that its aims are to provide an excellent all-round education both academically and through a range of extra-curricular activities that give opportunities for all and allow those who are especially talented to reach the highest levels of attainment. Leaders seek to develop in each child independence, commitment and enthusiasm, and to foster a spirit of mutual respect and kindness, encouraging everyone to do their best for the community. They seek to encourage every child to participate fully in life and to learn about themselves and their place in the world.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	12 to 14 May 2026

70. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

71. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the proprietor
- discussions with the chair and other governor advisors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

72. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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