

# School inspection report

7 to 9 November 2023

## **Finborough School**

The Hall

Great Finborough

Stowmarket

Suffolk

IP14 3EF

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. The proprietor and leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. Leaders create a tangibly happy, vibrant and welcoming school that is nurturing and caring. Pupils become confident, independent and develop a love of learning.
2. The 'Finborough Way' is a framework of learning leaders have designed to develop positive character traits. It has a notably positive impact on pupils' view of themselves, their futures and their collective responsibilities to their fellow pupils and wider community.
3. The proprietor and leaders know the school well, and accurately identify areas for improvement. They have introduced a new behavioural management approach. This has achieved an improvement in some areas of the school, but it is not fully embedded. The school's programme and teaching for relationships and sex education (RSE) covers all the required aspects, but it is not always delivered consistently effectively.
4. Boarders are well cared for in comfortable boarding accommodation. Pupils feel at home and safe. Their welfare needs, mental health and emotional wellbeing are supported effectively.
5. Staff in the early years know the children well and create a welcoming learning environment. Teaching is carefully planned. Children make good progress and prepare well for their subsequent learning.
6. Pupils make good progress overall. Leaders use data effectively to track pupil attainment, and pupils understand their own progress and know the next steps in their learning. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make rapid progress because their needs are readily identified, and effective support is in place.
7. Pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) make good progress in developing their fluency in English because of the tailored support provided.
8. Facilities are well maintained and support the delivery of education, training and recreation in the school.
9. Safeguarding arrangements are effective, and leaders have developed positive working relationships with outside agencies.

## The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance, are 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 met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

## Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- embed the new behaviour policy in order to achieve a consistent impact on all pupils' behaviour.
- ensure the teaching of relationships and sex education develops pupils' understanding of the topics covered.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietor and leaders successfully promote the school's aims and values. Pupils benefit from the opportunities provided to build positive character and learning habits. This is evident in pupils' self-knowledge, respect for others and their good progress in academic studies.
11. The implementation of leaders' ambitious plans for the continuous improvement of the school have a notable impact on the learning experience and outcomes for pupils. They plan carefully for any changes, provide suitable resources and ensure staff are trained to implement them. Some of these recent initiatives, such as the approach to behaviour management, are not fully embedded.
12. Leaders report to the proprietor weekly, which helps to inform future strategic priorities. Effective communication between the leadership team and proprietor enables all to have an overview of any emerging safeguarding, behavioural and bullying issues. The autonomy of leaders of each phase of the school has a positive impact on pupils' pastoral care and academic progress.
13. Through their close monitoring of progress data and vigilance in providing support for individual pupils, leaders enable them to make good progress in their learning. Detailed records are kept, which are reviewed weekly by leaders. They are used to provide support which has a significant positive impact on pupils' wellbeing. Leaders work closely with the local authority and other external agencies as required.
14. Leaders and the proprietor are readily available to parents and deal promptly with any complaints. These are carefully recorded, and parents receive a prompt and appropriate response.
15. The school's leaders ensure effective arrangements to assess and manage risk in every element of school life, including trips and visits off site. They monitor risk assessments carefully to ensure their effectiveness and provide suitable training to all staff.
16. The boarding provision provides a homely, safe environment. Leaders are suitably experienced and trained. Boarders are well looked after, and their needs are met.
17. Leaders fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010, for example through the effective adjustments made to meet the individual needs of pupils who have SEND, to ensure they can access the full curriculum.
18. Communication with parents is effective. The relevant policies and procedures are provided through the school website or are available from the school. Some minor oversights in policies were corrected during the inspection.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively so that it is adapted to the needs of pupils and prepares them well for their future lives. At the heart of leaders' planning is the clearly articulated commitment for pupils to access a wide and ambitious range of subjects.
21. As a result of this breadth of curriculum, which also includes a range of vocational learning opportunities, pupils develop their knowledge and skills well across many areas. These include linguistic, scientific, technological and creative subjects. As a result, pupils' knowledge and understanding are well developed, particularly in science, mathematics and languages in the case of the older pupils.
22. Pupils make good progress overall. Results at GCSE and A-level examinations are in line or above those expected for their assessed starting points.
23. Leaders in the prep school provide a well-planned and well-resourced curriculum which prepares pupils well for their transition to the senior school. Younger pupils in the prep school progress particularly well in developing their literacy and communication skills. Pupils respond well to effective use of individual targets.
24. Teaching is well planned. Teachers are adept in using varied resources to help make lessons accessible and to motivate pupils in their learning. Pupils of all abilities are encouraged to participate actively in lessons to support their learning. Teachers know their pupils well and adapt their planning to meet their needs. This helps pupils to make good progress. Pupils receive regular individualised feedback which helps them to understand how to improve.
25. A clear and effective framework for assessment ensures that pupil progress is carefully monitored. Leaders' use of academic data is highly developed and effective in charting pupils' progress and providing suitable challenge and support.
26. Numerous extra-curricular opportunities for pupils outside lessons help pupils develop a range of subject specific and interpersonal skills. In particular, leaders provide numerous opportunities and extensive resources to support a range of performing arts. Pupils participate enthusiastically in these, and standards in this area are high. Many pupils achieve well in national examinations in music and public speaking, as well as in developing their collaborative skills and self-confidence performing in front of an audience.
27. Leaders provide a wide range of activities for boarders which add to the pupils' sense of community and help sustain a positive boarding culture where pupils feel happy, cared for and secure.
28. Leaders provide extensive support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to ensure that their needs are identified and met. As a result, these pupils typically make rapid progress from their starting points.
29. Pupils with EAL are also supported effectively. Specialist teachers are used to support the pupils' language development so they achieve a secure fluency in English and can fully access the school's curriculum.

30. Leaders in the early years ensure the delivery of the curriculum across the seven areas of learning is carefully tailored to meet individual needs. A stimulating learning environment and caring teachers who know them well ensure children are highly responsive and engaged learners. All pupils meet the early learning goals by the end of Reception.

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

**31. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

32. Leaders have recently introduced the 'Finborough Character Charter', which emphasises personal responsibility and aims to help pupils manage poor behaviour through reconciliation. This approach is understood by pupils, who can articulate the benefits of this approach in ensuring good behaviour, but it is not fully embedded in practice. Pupils are clear about leaders' expectations of their behaviour. Pupils mostly behave well, both in and out of the classroom, particularly younger pupils and those in the sixth form. However, some pupils occasionally fall short of leader's expectations, exhibiting low-level unkindness to others.
33. Pastoral leaders are beginning to use behavioural data to analyse trends and patterns to address these issues. Bullying is rare in school. When it does occur, leaders provide a variety of ways for pupils to raise concerns, including anonymously through an app. When incidents are brought to the attention of pastoral staff, they are quick to respond.
34. Form tutors are responsible for teaching personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE), which is also included in the science curriculum. Lessons are supplemented by visits from external providers. Whilst these lessons cover the required content, the extent of pupils' learning can vary. In some cases, there are limited opportunities for discussion of sensitive topics. Pupils do not always find these sessions as helpful and their progress is therefore not as consistent.
35. Pupils display high levels of self-confidence and strive to be 'the best version of themselves'. They are proud of developing positive character traits and strive to meet their personal development targets. The effective use of discussions in form time, assemblies and regular visits to church in the prep and pre-prep departments greatly impact pupils' self-knowledge, self-esteem and moral understanding. Pupils show mutual respect and contribute to discussions in a supportive, respectful way.
36. The academic mentoring scheme promotes positive relationships between pupils of different ages and a sense of responsibility in older pupils. Pupils help each other to check the accuracy of their work and younger pupils are supported by their sixth-form mentors in the sports and performing arts programmes.
37. Staff in the early years setting model positive behaviour and kindness, which children observe and seek to emulate. As a result, they behave well and learn to respect each other, to take turns and share items such as play equipment.
38. Leaders promote the wellbeing and mental health of pupils effectively, complementing the caring, individual approach from staff. Pupils learn yoga and undertake other stress-management activities. Staff meet regularly with pupils in small pastoral groups. As a result, pupils are able to forge positive relationships with their tutors. Staff become more aware of issues and can deal with them promptly, rather than allowing them to escalate.
39. Leaders create an environment where the needs of all boarders are met. A range of staff, including the school nurse, are readily available to boarders throughout the day and overnight. Effective care

plans are in place for pupils where needed. Through well-established routines and consistent oversight, staff ensure that pupils are well supervised.

40. Leaders give a high priority to the development of pupils' physical health. Many pupils represent their school with pride in a wide range of sports and achieve success in competitive fixtures. Teachers provide regular opportunities for physical development and activity. Pupils of all ages and abilities enjoy these and know that physical education is part of a healthy lifestyle.
41. Leaders ensure there are effective arrangements for health and safety, fire safety and first aid. This is made possible through clear policies and responsibility and regular oversight meetings. Pupils feel safe and secure in school. Pupils are well supervised by staff.
42. Attendance and admission registers are properly maintained and stored. The destinations of pupils who leave or join are followed up and reported, and pupil attendance is carefully monitored.

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

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

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

44. Through the concept of 'service', leaders ensure that pupils engage in a variety of activities that prepare pupils well for the next stage in their education and to play an active role in modern society.
45. Leaders have developed a character centred approach founded on the '7 Habits', which teaches life skills and promotes the need for pupils to make the right moral choices. Pupils are made aware of global issues, and they show empathy and understanding for those suffering from disaster or misfortune and readily offer to support charitable initiatives.
46. Pupils are prepared very well for their future careers. Pupils are supported effectively in making subject choices for GCSE, A-level and vocational courses. Teachers help them to prepare their applications for universities and apprenticeships. Pupils attend a careers conference which helps them consider higher education or career options, and teaches skills to help them apply, such as mock interviews. Older pupils visit workplaces of interest to them, which supports their decision making for their chosen career path.
47. Through the PSHE programme, pupils learn about British society and institutions and the need for rules and laws. Pupils reinforce their understanding of democracy by voting for the peers to undertake positions of responsibility. Pupils are able to understand and respect that an individual's opinions might differ from their own. There is also a focus on the development of financial skills. Pupils learn about finance and how to manage money in preparation for life after school.
48. Pupils are actively engaged in inter-form challenges with community service at their heart. These have recently included charity-based activities, for example organising donations to food banks and raising funds for hospitals. The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, which attracts a high number of pupils, reinforces an understanding of their responsibilities and further develops in pupils the importance of contributing to wider society.
49. The school's development of character and 'learnability' is emphasised through the appointment of pupils who exemplify these values to leadership roles in school. Leaders encourage all pupils to be ambassadors and to develop the skills of leadership to influence the school. This gives pupils a sense of how to be agents of change inside school and in later life.
50. Leaders actively encourage pupils to provide academic support to younger pupils. Pupils recognise and are proud of the development of their skills and the difference their mentoring roles have on each other and their community. Leaders' expectations are clear and pupils are warm and welcoming to those new to their community.
51. Leaders ensure that children in the early years learn the value of respect and kindness. Children understand the role of public services and the importance of rules to help keep them safe.
52. Leaders create an inclusive culture, irrespective of religion, ethnicity or sexual orientation and other characteristics. Leaders ensure that differences are recognised as an important part of the school community. In their conversations with pupils, teachers promote tolerance. Pupils show respect to one another and appreciate the strong sense of family in the school community, recognising how this contributes to their sense of wellbeing.

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

**53. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

54. Leaders ensure suitable safeguarding procedures are in place. They work effectively with external agencies in a timely manner to safeguard pupils when concerns arise.
55. Leaders are alert to ways in which they can strengthen safeguarding procedures. They recently completed a self-evaluation of safeguarding which highlighted areas for development. This led to the introduction of new arrangements for online filtering and monitoring and enhanced lessons to ensure that pupils know how to stay safe online.
56. There is regular communication between the leaders of safeguarding, and detailed record keeping helps to ensure the safety of pupils. Leaders provide prompt support and intervention, including undertaking welfare risk assessments where needed.
57. Safeguarding training is included in the induction process for all staff working at the school. They are clear of the school's policies and practices and their safeguarding obligations, including those relating to child-on-child abuse, radicalisation and extremism. Staff receive regular updates, and training of the safeguarding team is up to date.
58. The school's written safeguarding policy required some minor amendment at the beginning of the inspection to make clear the safeguarding team structure.
59. Leaders ensure safer recruitment checks are undertaken for all who work or volunteer. These checks are accurately logged in a central record.
60. Leaders are fully aware of the safeguarding risks posed by the boarding setting and mitigate them effectively.
61. The proprietor maintains a suitable oversight of safeguarding and undertakes an appropriate annual review.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Finborough School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	935/6062
<b>Address</b>	Finborough School The Hall Great Finborough Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 3EF
<b>Phone number</b>	01449 773600
<b>Email address</b>	cbaker@finboroughschool.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	finboroughschool.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Mr James Sinclair
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Steven Clark
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	661
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	101
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	June 2021

## Information about the school

58. Founded in 1993, Finborough School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. The main school building, a seventeenth-century manor house, occupies a rural setting surrounded by a range of new buildings, including a new performing arts centre, sports centre and a science and art building.
59. Boarding provision is available from the age of seven upwards and is located on the same site as the other buildings.
60. The early years setting is accommodated in 'Little Finborough', a separate pre-prep building on the same site as the prep and senior sections of the school.
61. The school has identified 96 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are 12 pupils in the school who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. English is an additional language for 8 pupils.
63. The school states that its aims are for each of its pupils to be known, valued and cherished for their individual abilities and attributes. Finborough aspires for children to be the best version of themselves through its aim of providing a nurturing character development approach, high expectations, aspirations and relentless individualised support.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

7 to 9 November 2023

64. A team of 7 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

65. 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 head, 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

66. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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