

# School inspection report

1 to 3 October 2024

## **The Hammond**

Mannings Lane

Hoole Village

Chester

Cheshire

CH2 4ES

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. Whilst senior leaders and directors are systematic in their monitoring of the effective implementation of most school policies and procedures, they have failed to ensure that fire safety precautions in the boarding houses are observed.
2. Leaders have a generally secure understanding of risk and have put in place effective systems to manage the process of identification and mitigation. However, this is not effective with regard to the fire safety arrangements in the boarding houses.
3. Leaders are keen to ensure that all pupils have equal access both to the curriculum and the school's facilities and services. Suitable measures are taken to identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and teachers employ a wide range of strategies to ensure that they make good progress in their learning.
4. Leaders strike an appropriate balance between the vocational and academic strands of the curriculum, ensuring that all required areas of the academic curriculum are taught and carefully planned.
5. Teachers are effective in enabling pupils to acquire new knowledge, skills and understanding. Strong relationships between teachers and pupils are instrumental in creating an atmosphere which is conducive to effective learning.
6. Recreational activities focusing on performance provide a high level of stimulation and opportunities for creativity and teamwork. Activities beyond those relating to the vocational side of school life are limited.
7. The teaching of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) contributes to pupils' personal development and their understanding of and respect for everyone's right to be an individual.
8. Premises on the main school site are maintained to a high standard. Whilst adequate, the boarding accommodation is less well furnished and homely, particularly the communal living areas, and some dormitories are lacking in space.
9. The attendance policy was amended during the inspection to ensure that it now reflects what happens in practice and what is required according to statutory guidance.
10. Leaders provide pupils with suitable careers advice, catering for the majority who wish to pursue a career in performance as well as the minority who see that their career path lies elsewhere.
11. Leaders have created a pastoral and support structure to ensure that pupils' emotional and physical health are seen as being as important as their academic and vocational development. The management of safeguarding is robust, and adults fully understand their role in prioritising pupils' welfare.

## 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 not met.

### Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that:

- the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and
- they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- all risks relating to fire safety in the boarding houses are identified and mitigated
- fire drills are carried out with the required frequency in boarding houses in boarding time and while boarders are asleep.

### Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- extend the programme of recreational activities so that it enables pupils to pursue new interests and develop new skills
- ensure that the school's attendance policy reflects practice
- ensure that the standard of boarding accommodation is improved.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Leaders are appropriately challenged in their decision-making by a board of directors that meets regularly so that they are well informed and thoroughly involved in the life of the school. A collection of sub-committees and regular, systematic reporting by senior leaders ensure that directors are knowledgeable about various areas of operation. However, directors and senior leaders have failed to ensure that policies are implemented in the effective observance of fire safety precautions in the boarding houses. Risks relating to fire safety in the boarding houses are not fully identified and mitigated.
13. Leaders have an appropriate awareness of risk in many areas of the school's operation. There is a systematic approach to the management of most risks through a written risk assessment policy, appropriate training for staff and mostly effective risk assessments, which are monitored and reviewed to ensure they are being implemented. Leaders ensure that the range of risks identified includes those relating to harmful behaviours and pupils' wellbeing.
14. Leaders take a strategic approach to their evaluation of the school's effectiveness. They are very clear about their aim to create an environment where pupils can grow both as performers and learners. Leaders are equally clear about the importance of pupils being healthy, both physically and emotionally. A comprehensive personal development curriculum, supported by an effective pastoral and support structure, helps them to promote pupils' wellbeing, which is at the centre of all decision-making.
15. Leaders review information regularly to create a dynamic development plan, conscious of the need to be responsive to suggestions for change. For example, listening to pupils' views and the advice of medical and other staff, leaders recently took the decision to reduce the length of the school day, including the removal of Saturday classes. Leaders have been successful in ensuring that an appropriate balance is struck between the vocational and the academic curriculum.
16. Leaders, including those with responsibility for safeguarding, liaise promptly with external agencies such as the safeguarding children in education service or the police if they have any concerns about a pupil's welfare.
17. The school provides appropriate key information through its website and through other documentation provided to parents. This includes information about the school's aims and ethos and a statement of its boarding principles. There is an appropriate policy in place for the handling of parental complaints consisting of a three-stage approach with suitable time frames. The school responds promptly and thoughtfully to complaints in line with its policy.
18. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders are keen to ensure that no group is disadvantaged or discriminated against. Leaders implement a range of policies that are designed to prevent this. In doing so they make a clear statement about issues such as homophobia, transphobia and misogyny. The principles embedded in these policies are well understood by staff and pupils. Leaders have drawn up an appropriate accessibility plan which ensures that pupils who have SEND are not disadvantaged in accessing the curriculum or the school's facilities.

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

19. Standards are not met consistently in relation to the safeguarding of boarders, fire safety and risk assessment.

**20. 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

21. Leaders provide pupils in Years 7 to 11 with a suitably broad and balanced academic curriculum, alongside a stimulating programme of vocational training in dance or theatre arts. The academic curriculum is well planned in detailed and progressive schemes of work. Leaders provide pupils in Years 12 and 13 with a programme, tailored to individual needs, aptitudes and preferences, that integrates vocational training and optional academic study. The range of qualifications open to pupils prepares them effectively for the next stage of their lives, with the majority aspiring to a career in performance.
22. There is an appropriate system in place to identify pupils who have SEND. Leaders then put in place support strategies and review their effectiveness. The school provides training for teachers to ensure that schemes of work are accessible to pupils, including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Teachers are provided with individualised summaries suggesting a wide range of support strategies that allow pupils who have SEND to make progress in their learning. Leaders ensure that pupils with an EHC plan receive additional tutoring for English and mathematics to support their learning where necessary. Effective communication between the learning support team, the pastoral team and parents ensures that the school meets the emotional as well as the academic needs of pupils who have SEND.
23. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) have access to various levels of support, including additional time with teachers to develop their written work, access to laptops and translating software, and vocabulary lists for specialised or advanced work provided by the teaching staff.
24. Teachers are skilled in enabling pupils to acquire new knowledge, skills and understanding. They achieve this through careful planning, engaging pupils with well-chosen activities, and by successfully transmitting the passion they have for their subjects. Teachers allow pupils the space to think for themselves, thereby deepening their understanding. Teachers use assessment information effectively to ensure that they gauge progress and provide the necessary support or challenge for individuals as appropriate. Positive and respectful relationships between teachers and pupils prevail in the classroom so that not only is misbehaviour exceptionally rare, but interactions are positive and purposeful. Pupils are motivated and take joy in their learning.
25. Leaders have developed an effective system for tracking pupils' progress, including for those pupils who have SEND and who speak EAL. Assessment data are used to inform conversations between teachers and pupils about academic or vocational targets and strategies for improvement. Assessment data, including public examination results, also inform departmental development plans as leaders reflect on the effect teaching has on pupils' performance. Pupils achieve well across a range of vocational qualifications.
26. The programme of activities for pupils of all ages is heavily focused on the performing arts. These activities are instrumental in ensuring that pupils are stimulated emotionally, creatively and physically. Additionally, there are a few lunchtime clubs, but the end of the extended day is devoted to classes in dance and theatre. Consequently, pupils do not have the opportunity to experience a broad range of activities to expand their horizons and interests beyond the world of performance. Leaders provide suitable recreational activities for boarders whilst being aware of the need to give them space to relax, especially at the end of a long day or week.

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

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



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

28. Aspects of fire safety have not been implemented effectively in the boarding houses, including a lack of required fire drills to ensure that boarders know the procedures to follow, when an evacuation is required during their sleeping time.
29. Leaders monitor other aspects of health and safety protocols, training and record keeping to maintain safety in the main school site. This involves the regular checking of plant and equipment to ensure that risks are minimised.
30. Leaders have put in place a comprehensive PSHE programme, supplemented by regular tutor time sessions, where pupils learn about the importance of accepting and valuing difference. Leaders create a community in which it is easy to be different and where discrimination in any form is not tolerated. The PSHE curriculum incorporates coverage of the statutory content for RSE. The added dimension of teaching pupils performance etiquette helps them to deepen their understanding of respectful relationships. Such relationships are a feature of the boarding community.
31. Leaders recognise the importance of supporting young performers in their general wellbeing, especially for boarders. As part of the school's wellness programme leaders have introduced Wellbeing Wednesdays with their focus on mindfulness. Leaders further promote the development of pupils' self-esteem and self-confidence through the many and varied opportunities that they have to perform in public. Self- and peer-evaluation are a central part of everyday life and pupils embrace opportunities to explore how they can improve their performance, whether academically or vocationally.
32. The curriculum's particular focus on music, dance and drama mean that pupils have the opportunity to explore their spirituality and moral awareness. Discussion of moral dilemmas, for example, is a regular feature of pupils' study of literary texts, whilst the promotion of pupils' spiritual awareness comes not only from learning about different religious beliefs as part of the curriculum, but also the development of their appreciation of artistic creativity.
33. The school's behaviour policy is well understood by staff and pupils and it is applied fairly and consistently. There is little serious misbehaviour. Leaders' messages to pupils about bullying are clear so that kindness and tolerance prevail. Leaders impress on pupils that they are part of a 'company', where playing your part as a team member and the concept of camaraderie are essential. Older pupils are keen to look after their younger counterparts.
34. Leaders provide appropriate and sufficient opportunities in the curriculum for physical education, for example through vocational work such as dance and through promoting pupils' awareness of different types of fitness. Pupils are encouraged to set their own fitness goals by tracking their participation in different sports and physical activity. Pupils' physical and mental health are supported effectively, not only by a school nurse but also through access to on-site physiotherapy and external services such as counselling.
35. The school provides suitable toilet and changing facilities, as well as appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical needs. The premises on the main school site are clean and maintained to a high standard. However, whilst accommodation in the two boarding houses is adequate, some

furnishings are in need of refurbishment, communal living areas are not as homely as they could be, and some dormitories are lacking in space.

36. Leaders provide appropriate supervision throughout the school day and in the boarding houses so that pupils feel safe in the knowledge that there are adults close by in the event of an emergency or incident.
37. Leaders guard against the risks of children being absent from school or missing education by ensuring that appropriate registers are kept and informing the local authority of any issues, including when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points. The school is following statutory guidance for attendance. However, the school amended its attendance policy during the inspection to reflect practice.

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

38. Standards are not met consistently in relation to fire safety, and in consequence ISSR paragraph 8(b) is not met.
- 39. 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

40. Understanding and respecting different cultures and backgrounds, promoting inclusivity and diversity and addressing bias and discrimination are key concepts in the school's personal development curriculum. Opportunities for pupils to consolidate their learning by translating these values into action include, for example, leading an assembly on dyslexia and participation in world sign language day and Chester Pride. These events and others promote cohesion, kindness and supportive relationships.
41. Through assemblies, tutor time and off-timetable days devoted to PSHE, pupils develop an understanding of values such as democracy, tolerance and respect for the rule of law. Pupils are prepared and encouraged to challenge potentially offensive behaviour or prejudicial language.
42. The same programme of assemblies, PSHE days and tutor sessions teaches pupils about British institutions, public services and the law so that pupils know their rights and how to look after themselves. Democracy is put into practice by pupils who are elected to the *Hammond Parliament*. As well as learning decision-making and leadership skills which they model for younger pupils, members of the parliament are able to feed back pupils' views to leaders and effect change. Pupils participate in events such as National Parliament Week so that they gain an understanding of British politics from an impartial perspective.
43. In addition to topics taught as part of the geography, history and religious studies curriculum, pupils receive human and social education through a range of assemblies and other activities, from holocaust memorial week to the celebration of Martin Luther King day and an assembly on the plight of refugees across the world.
44. Leaders instil in pupils the need to reflect on right and wrong. This manifests itself in the school's practice around challenging misbehaviour through individual pupil behaviour review meetings, as well as in pupils choosing causes to champion. For example, the school's 'Every Body' movement, firmly rooted in the promotion of equality, was introduced following pupil feedback in order to challenge the performance industry's unhealthy attitudes towards conformity with ill-conceived norms. For example, a movement was introduced following feedback from pupils to challenge attitudes around body shape in the performance industry.
45. The school prepares pupils for life beyond school by providing impartial careers advice, including mentoring from the industry and outreach team which prepares pupils for pathways related to careers in the performing arts. Pupils also receive advice about alternative careers to those in the performance industry. This is supplemented by work experience weeks that are not related to dance or theatre. Leaders provide older pupils with information and guidance about the university applications process and the broader world of work.
46. The pastoral team provides appropriate support for those pupils who realise that a career in performing arts is not possible. Building resilience and preparing pupils for disappointment and the realities of the performance industry are central to the school's ethos.
47. Leaders have built into the curriculum suitable opportunities for pupils to learn about financial literacy so that they understand, for example, principles of budgeting, credit, mortgages and debt.

Pupils in Years 12 to 14 receive specific advice on the financial aspects of the performance industry, including issues such as contracts and agents' fees.

48. The Hammond's community day encourages students to understand the role of charity and to reflect on ways in which they can enhance the lives of people from the local and wider communities. Pupils have opted, amongst other initiatives, to support a charity for young people suffering from terminal illness by organising charity football matches, non-uniform days and collections at performances. Pupils showcase their skills and talent in local primary schools and put on workshops for the children's benefit. They arrange performances in care homes, including Christmas carolling. Leaders provide various opportunities for pupils to offer service, including through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE).

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

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

## Safeguarding

50. The school's safeguarding culture and procedures are robust. Leaders, including the school's directors, monitor the work of the safeguarding team to ensure that the school responds promptly and appropriately to situations that arise. Pupils are confident that there is always a trusted adult to whom they can turn and that they will receive timely and decisive assistance from the student support team. Consequently, they feel safe and cared for.
51. The school's directors and those with responsibility for safeguarding receive the necessary training to provide them with the knowledge and skills to manage safeguarding effectively. Leaders provide staff with comprehensive and relevant training, both at the beginning of the academic year when responsibilities and procedures are revisited, and through weekly briefings. Staff understand the risks to which pupils may be exposed, including those relating to radicalisation.
52. Staff are equally alert to the vulnerability of boarders who are away from home for the first time, as well as the pressures faced by young performers. The pastoral support team is alert to the risks of pupils' anxiety around body image and offers practical advice about nutrition. Because they know their pupils well, staff are quick to spot concerning signs and understand how to report and record them.
53. The school has established strong relationships with local external agencies, including the police and the safeguarding children in education service. This enables leaders to seek guidance when issues arise that require expert knowledge and access services for pupil support.
54. Online safety is a key focus for school leaders. The PSHE curriculum provides pupils with the tools and strategies needed to stay safe in everyday situations online. Leaders have also prioritised decisions around the types of devices permitted in school. Robust systems are in place for filtering and monitoring online activity. These are regularly checked to ensure their effectiveness.
55. The school's recruitment processes are rigorous, with all required checks completed before adults are allowed to begin employment at the school.

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

- 56. 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 <sup>1</sup> Part 3, paragraph 16	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that-
16(a)	(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)	(b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
NMS <sup>2</sup> 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.
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 2.8	The records specified in Appendix B are maintained and monitored by the school and action taken as appropriate.

<sup>1</sup>The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

<sup>2</sup> National Minimum Standards for boarding schools ('NMS')

### 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)	(b) such arrangements have regard to the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools or, where applicable, the National Minimum Standards for Residential Special Schools.
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 12	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.
NMS 10.2	The school complies with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 and ensures alerting systems are accessible and there are clear evacuation plans for all children subject to their needs.
NMS 10.3	In addition, fire drills are regularly (at least once per term) carried out in 'boarding time'. At least one drill per year should be carried out overnight, unless the school has assessed that this would be detrimental to boarders' welfare.

## School details

<b>School</b>	The Hammond
<b>Department for Education number</b>	896/6016
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1022427
<b>Address</b>	The Hammond Mannings Lane Hoole Village Chester Cheshire CH2 4ES]
<b>Phone number</b>	01244 305350
<b>Email address</b>	<a href="mailto:jennifer.roscoe@thehammond.co.uk">jennifer.roscoe@thehammond.co.uk</a>
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.thehammond.co.uk">www.thehammond.co.uk</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Hammond School Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Kathy Cowell OBE
<b>Principal</b>	Ms Jennifer Roscoe
<b>Age range</b>	11 - 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	265
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	89
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 to 24 September 2021



## Information about the school

57. The Hammond is an independent co-educational day and boarding school specialising in the performing arts. It is located on the outskirts of the city of Chester. The school is overseen by a charitable trust and is run by a board of directors who are also trustees of the charity.
58. There are two mixed-gender boarding houses which are located approximately two miles from the main school site. One house is for pupils in Years 7 to 10; a second, smaller house is for pupils in Year 11.
59. The school has identified 59 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
60. English is an additional language for nine pupils.
61. The school states that its aims are to inspire, nurture, and educate the next generation of performers by fostering a culture of excellence, curiosity, storytelling, and innovation. It seeks to develop healthy, confident, and life-long learners who are able to thrive in an ever-changing performance landscape, regardless of social, cultural, or financial background.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

1 to 3 October 2024

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

63. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of the board of directors
- 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 staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. 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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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)