

School inspection report

Date 14 to 16 November 2023

Highfields School

London Road

Newark

NG24 3AL

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 successfully fulfil the school's aim to prepare pupils for their future lives so that they are resourceful and independent learners, ready to make a contribution to their community. Leaders adopt a consistently collaborative approach, including staff and pupils in planning and evaluation and in sharing in the successes of the school. As a result, pupils develop self-confidence and enjoy learning.
2. Governors maintain effective oversight of the promotion of pupils' wellbeing through regular reports and meetings with school leaders. Leaders notify the local authority of pupils leaving or joining the school at non-standard times in relation to whom there are any safeguarding concerns. They are aware of requirements, and ensure that there is full transfer of relevant records between schools in respect of all pupils transferring at these times.
3. Governors regularly check the school's safeguarding procedures, including those relating to the recruitment of staff, although this process has not been sufficiently robust to identify a few minor errors. The omission of some dates from the single central record of appointments was corrected during the inspection so as to provide an accurate record of all checks.
4. Leaders have created a bespoke REALL (relevant, experiential, aspirational, lasting and laughter) curriculum which is taught within termly themes that capture pupils' interest so they identify meaning and purpose in their learning as they acquire new skills and knowledge.
5. Teaching is characterised by positive relationships and close attention to pupils' individual needs, so that pupils make progress and enjoy their learning. Leaders have recently drawn up a new programme to enable pupils to acquire enhanced computing and information and communication technology (ICT) skills. This has not yet been fully put into practice, so that pupils' skills in this area are not so well developed as in other curriculum areas.
6. Leaders have established systems and procedures for the protection of pupils' physical safety. Pupils feel safe in school because they understand the school's expectations of their behaviour and are confident that these are widely upheld. Leaders encourage pupils to take responsibility for their own health and wellbeing and provide a range of activities through which pupils enthusiastically develop their understanding of this responsibility.
7. The school is characterised by a culture of mutual respect and kindness which pupils value and promote through their own ideas and actions. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to contribute to the school and wider community so that pupils are aware of the importance of their actions and actively seek ways in which to help others.
8. Leaders provide a curriculum and other activities that inform pupils about their own and other cultures, so they develop a keen interest in how others live their lives. Leaders involve pupils of all ages in democratic processes and financial decision-making so they are well prepared for their future lives in British society.
9. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Pupils are confident that their concerns can be voiced and will be addressed, and staff understand their responsibilities. Suitable arrangements are in place for the recruitment of staff to the school.

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 ensure that:

- they notify the local authority of all pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard times
- teaching enables pupils to develop and extend both their computing and ICT skills.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders have good skills and knowledge relating to their responsibilities. They have drawn up suitable policies which are consistently and effectively put into practice so that the wellbeing of pupils is actively promoted. Governors provide both support and challenge to leaders through regular review of school policies and procedures, termly reports and discussions.
11. Leaders foster a high level of awareness of the importance of safeguarding in the school. They maintain good links with external agencies so that concerns about pupils are shared and their wellbeing is promoted.
12. Leaders promote a culture of collaboration and respect. They maintain a visible presence around the school and are actively involved in setting and maintaining the positive tone and atmosphere. This results in the effective support and engagement of pupils, and contributes to pupils' academic and personal development.
13. Leaders adopt an inclusive and collaborative approach when identifying next steps in academic and pastoral provision. They are open to suggestions from pupils as well as staff. This has resulted in initiatives such as the provision of additional spaces for pupils' relaxation and a review of the curriculum so that it supports and challenges pupils.
14. Early years leaders encourage staff to develop their expertise in their fields, lead different areas of the curriculum and share initiatives that work well. The curriculum is appropriate to the needs of each child whilst providing opportunities for challenge and extended learning. Leaders and staff foster positive relationships with parents so that a partnership is established to support the needs of the children.
15. Leaders successfully draw on the skills of all staff members through collaborative and collective leadership. Staff across the school play an active and committed role in putting the REALL curriculum into practice so pupils make good or better progress.
16. Leaders are diligent in ensuring that the school meets its requirements under the Equality Act and does not discriminate against pupils. A suitable accessibility plan is in place.
17. Leaders understand the need to assess risks in all aspects of school life so that the wellbeing of the pupils is actively promoted. Risk assessments relating to the school site and educational visits are reviewed and monitored regularly. Individual risk assessments relating to safeguarding and pupil welfare are drafted appropriately.
18. Leaders make information about the school, including key policies, available on the school website. Leaders actively foster strong and supportive links with parents which benefit pupils and help underpin their academic and personal progress. Leaders and governors respond to parental concerns and complaints and manage these in line with the school's stated procedures.

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. The curriculum is relevant, experiential and aspirational. It is drawn up through close collaboration with staff. Leaders systematically evaluate the effective application of schemes of work so pupils acquire the skills and knowledge they need for the future, building on their learning as they move through the school. As a result, pupils acquire skills and knowledge in all subjects. They make good progress and are well prepared for their senior schools.
21. Teachers adapt the curriculum in response to termly whole-school themes. They plan their lessons well and utilise good resources in a range of activities that inspire pupils' interest and effort. Pupils are highly motivated and well behaved in class, achieving well as a result.
22. Leaders use data effectively to scrutinise pupils' attainment and progress. Teachers build on this to identify where individual pupils are making good progress and areas for development. They continuously adapt the provision of individual support and challenge in response to pupils' progress and attainment within lessons and over longer periods of time. Teachers identify and provide the support required for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Leaders and teachers work together effectively so pupils of all ages and abilities make good progress.
23. Teachers provide targeted feedback in lessons and written work. Pupils have a clear understanding of the importance of feedback in enabling their progress. They respond positively and purposefully to the guidance they are given, which contributes to their progress. The needs of pupils with English as an additional language are assessed on an individual basis and met through targeted support in lessons, so that they make good progress in line with their peers.
24. The curriculum develops pupils' communication skills, which are used effectively in all subjects. Pupils acquire confidence and skill in mathematics through activities which enable them to establish and then extend their learning. Pupils demonstrate advanced knowledge and skills when undertaking investigations and analysis in their science and humanities lessons. Leaders have not ensured consistent teaching of computing or opportunities for pupils to use their ICT skills, which are less advanced as a result. A newly-introduced computing programme has been introduced. However, it has not yet been fully implemented so that it is too early to assess its impact. Pupils are very successful in external examinations in drama and music and perform with confidence and skill from a young age. Their well-developed artistic skills are evident in the varied and carefully crafted artwork on display around the school.
25. Children develop skills and knowledge in all areas of learning through the early years curriculum. Staff make effective use of a range of resources so that children learn to explore, investigate and think creatively. Children enjoy their learning, engaging with enthusiasm in activities which are planned in response to their interests, and which foster their critical thinking skills. Staff adjust their teaching strategies appropriately to the needs of individual children so they have the confidence to develop their own ideas and learn independently. Staff continuously assess children's progress and attainment, providing support and advanced work as required so that children make good progress from their starting points.
26. Leaders foster pupils' engagement with their learning through a wide range of trips and visitors to the school. These experiences stimulate pupils' interest in their work, contributing to their

understanding and progress and helping them to understand how their learning helps to prepare them for their future lives.

27. Pupils develop physical skills in lessons and through participation in sporting fixtures. They make full use of the school's wide resources during recreational play. A wide programme of extra-curricular activities enables pupils to further develop their skills, as does participation in events outside the school.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Leaders promote a culture of kindness and respect, which is modelled by staff throughout the school. Adults offer praise, encouragement and support so that pupils' achievements are recognised by all in the community. As a result, pupils develop self-esteem alongside an appreciation of the talents of others. They are self-possessed and ready to share their views and ideas with others, understanding the importance of maintaining their own health and wellbeing.
30. Leaders foster pupils' personal development through the personal, social and health education (PSHE) curriculum, assemblies and regular opportunities for pupils to learn about and discuss topics such as difference, behaviour and their own feelings. Pupils are respectful and are confident that everyone is welcome in their school, whatever their differences might be.
31. Through the relationships and health education programme, pupils learn how to maintain healthy relationships alongside their own health and wellbeing. Pupils are aware of the importance of good mental health. They can explain their fears and identify means by which they can be overcome. Pupils are confident that when they experience difficulties they will be supported by the school in overcoming them.
32. Staff in the early years maintain secure and supportive relationships so that children feel safe and secure in the setting. Children are actively encouraged to take risks, test out their ideas and talk about what they discover. They demonstrate curiosity and enjoyment in their learning, taking pride in their achievements and persevering to achieve their goals. Children develop positive and healthy relationships with each other, valuing their peers and the activities they undertake together. They are quick to understand the kindness and respect that is expected of them and to respond to the guidance of adults in the setting.
33. Leaders implement the behaviour and anti-bullying policies effectively so that pupils are confident that any incidents are appropriately addressed and bullying is rare. Pupils appreciate the school's high expectations of behaviour and understand the benefits of reflecting on their actions when they do not live up to these.
34. The school premises are well maintained to provide a safe physical environment in which pupils can learn. Pupils are supervised appropriately throughout the school day and in after-school activities. First aid is available when needed from suitably qualified staff. There are suitable arrangements in place for the maintenance of admissions and attendance registers. Leaders notify the local authority of all pupils leaving or joining at non-standard times in relation to whom there are any safeguarding concerns. They are aware of their obligations, and have consistently ensured that there is appropriate transfer of records between schools in respect of other pupils transferring at non-standard times. They keep full written records of these exchanges of information.
35. Leaders provide an extensive programme of physical education activities which enables pupils to learn how to stay fit and healthy. Pupils understand the importance of their engagement in this programme and of making healthy choices at lunchtime. They are actively supported in this through the encouragement and guidance offered by staff in the dining room.

36. Children in the early years develop an appreciation of the environment around them and of their friends. Older pupils value the readiness of leaders to listen to and act on their ideas and suggestions. Pupils have instigated new activities, fund-raising events and the establishment of a “chill room”. They are confident that leaders take their views seriously in regular pupil surveys and that they can make suggestions at any time. Pupils value the freedom to engage in physical activities and explore the nature in woodland environment, understanding the important contribution this makes to their wellbeing.

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

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

38. The PSHE programme provides pupils with many opportunities to prepare for life in modern Britain. This is taught alongside assemblies, school events and daily activities in which teachers reinforce the importance of respect for others and the importance of taking personal responsibility for one's actions. Pupils have a well-developed sense of responsibility and respect for others, together with an understanding of right and wrong and the effect their behaviour and attitudes have on other people.
39. Children in the early years are encouraged to take responsibility for their classroom environment. Simple tasks such as tidying up or being line leader are taken seriously, and pupils quickly move on to more substantial responsibilities such as school council membership as they move through the school. Responsibilities are appropriate to pupils' needs and interests. Pupils fulfil their roles conscientiously. They take pride in their contributions to the school community, which include planning assemblies, leading physical education warm-ups and supporting younger pupils as class prefects.
40. Leaders involve pupils in helping each other to feel safe and happy in school. A representative team of wellbeing ambassadors volunteer to support other pupils. The team members understand the importance of the role they play and other pupils appreciate this and value their help.
41. Leaders encourage pupils' sense of responsibility to those outside their school community through the support of local and national events and charities. Pupils regularly engage with the local community, including by socialising with older residents and supporting a charity for the homeless. They actively seek new ways in which to contribute to the lives of others outside school, and receive support for their initiatives from school leaders.
42. Leaders have established a curriculum which provides pupils with a good knowledge of their own culture. This is complemented by trips, such as to the Houses of Parliament, and visitors to school, such as the police. Pupils also develop a mature knowledge and appreciation of other cultures, enhanced by events, assemblies and other activities in which they share their different experiences and backgrounds. Leaders encourage pupils to take charge of activities such as organising assemblies about their faiths. Pupils appreciate these as a means of learning more about their friends' lives outside school.
43. Leaders enable pupils to develop a practical economic awareness through opportunities to raise, spend and save money. Older pupils bring in cast-off items from home each year which are sold to younger pupils, who in turn have to budget and choose what to buy. Pupils are awarded points as part of the rewards system which they save and spend at the school shop in preparation for managing money in the future. Pupils take great care in deciding whether to purchase smaller items or save up for larger treats such as designing the lunch menu.
44. Pupils appreciate the importance of democracy. They vote for school council representatives, choosing classmates who they are confident will listen to their ideas and represent them well. All pupils from Reception to Year 6 take part in the voting process for head boy and girl and prefects, with even the youngest children able to explain this process.

45. Leaders introduce pupils to current affairs using resources appropriate to their ages, so that they develop a mature understanding of the world in which they live. Teachers discuss such matters with pupils sensitively and without bias.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. Leaders effectively implement arrangements to safeguard pupils in line with statutory guidance. They promote a culture of safeguarding in which pupils and staff confidently share any concerns. The means by which pupils can confide in adults are visibly displayed, alongside clear explanations and reasons why they may need to do so.
48. Leaders respond appropriately to concerns, liaising with parents and external agencies as required. Staff know and understand the particular vulnerabilities of pupils with SEND, ensuring they are listened to and supported. Leaders manage concerns relating to racial or sexual harassment between pupils sensitively and appropriately.
49. Safeguarding records are kept as required. In the case of pupils who are or have been at risk or in need, leaders are diligent in ensuring that next schools have the information they need to support these pupils' wellbeing.
50. Staff, including those with leadership responsibilities and governors, are suitably trained. Staff have a clear and comprehensive understanding of the importance of an active and positive approach to safeguarding. Those working in the early years have a secure understanding of safeguarding procedures in the setting.
51. Leaders manage allegations against staff and concerns about adults working in the school sensitively and in line with statutory guidance. Pupils understand how to stay safe when they are online. Suitable arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of internet access are in place.
52. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff and governors. Leaders assess any associated risks thoroughly and appropriate measures are taken to reduce these. A suitable single central record of appointments is kept, having been updated during the inspection to include records of all barred list checks.
53. Leaders are diligent in assessing the risks associated with safeguarding. They have identified the means by which these may be mitigated through the drawing up of detailed risk assessments relating to the safety and wellbeing of pupils in the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Highfields School
Department for Education number	891/6000
Registered charity number	528261
Address	London Road Newark NG24 3AL
Phone number	01636 704103
Email address	finance@highfieldsschool.co.uk
Website	www.highfieldsschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Newark Preparatory School Limited
Chair	Mr William Bicknell
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Lyons
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	111
Date of previous inspection	28 February 2022

Information about the school

55. Highfields School is an independent coeducational day school situated in Newark. The school consists of the nursery, the pre-prep and the prep departments. It is a charitable foundation, governed by a board of trustees.
56. There are 27 children in the Nursery, which caters for those aged from two to four years. Nine children are in the Reception class, which is included in the pre-prep department.
57. The school has identified eight pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
58. English is an additional language for three pupils.
59. The school aims to provide a supportive environment with well-embedded values. It seeks to provide pupils with a wealth of learning experiences and to enable them to realise their potential and discover new talents. The school aims to prepare its pupils for life in their next schools and beyond as independent thinkers and learners with a love of adventure and a strong sense of identity. It aims to foster a sense of responsibility towards others alongside an appreciation and understanding of different opinions and beliefs.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 November 2023

60. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. Inspection activities included:

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

62. 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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