

School inspection report

28 to 30 January 2025

South Lee School

Nowton Road
Bury St Edmunds
Suffolk
IP33 2BT

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. Careful proprietorial oversight and effective school leadership are based on detailed knowledge of the Standards and a thorough approach to all aspects of policy making and implementation. Leaders and staff maintain successful, professional relationships with parents. They give pupils' wellbeing a high priority. As a consequence, a positive atmosphere prevails throughout the school and pupils show high levels of self-confidence.
2. Leaders liaise closely with external agencies in support of pupils' academic, emotional and physical development and security. The proprietor ensures that the premises are well maintained in accordance with health and safety legislation and takes appropriate action to mitigate risks. Suitable policies are in place so that the school meets the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and fulfils its obligations under equalities legislation.
3. Leaders provide pupils with a wide-ranging and interesting curriculum which covers a broad range of areas. In addition, they learn modern foreign languages and develop understanding of design and engineering. Well-planned teaching stimulates a love of learning and critical thinking so that pupils acquire knowledge and skills which they are readily able to transfer across different subjects.
4. Effective teaching in Reception ensures that children's knowledge of numeracy and the sounds letters make is well developed. Children are supported in suitably planned activities which enable them to acquire fine motor skills in preparation for learning to write and taking part in a range of creative activities.
5. Teachers provide pupils with both written and verbal feedback which contributes to the good progress that they make. Leaders have established a detailed framework for the assessment of pupils' learning. However, the information gained from assessment is not always used effectively to influence teachers' lesson planning. When this is the case, teaching does not meet some pupils' specific needs as well as it could.
6. Leaders have created a culture in which mutual respect and understanding are of paramount importance. A well-planned assembly programme and effective teaching of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and religious studies contribute positively to this.
7. Leaders ensure that pupils know the benefits of a healthy lifestyle and a balanced diet. Pupils have many opportunities for exercise through physical education (PE) and games lessons and outdoor learning in the forest area.
8. Social and economic education helps pupils prepare for future life. Groups such as the school council and food committee, whose members they elect, provide experience of democracy and opportunities for pupils to influence school policies. Entrepreneurial activities give them experience of budgeting and managing money. This is further developed in PSHE lessons which focus on matters such as mortgages, interest payments and taxation.
9. All aspects of safeguarding are managed effectively. No adult begins work at the school before all mandatory checks have been completed.

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 assessment information is used effectively to inform planning so that all pupils' needs are met consistently.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietor works effectively with the school's leaders, who demonstrate appropriate knowledge and skills and fulfil their roles effectively. Leaders focus well on ensuring that staff maintain high standards in their teaching and pastoral care of pupils. The school is characterised by an environment based on intellectual aspiration, kindness, tolerance and mutual respect between staff and pupils. This enables the proprietor to promote the aims and ethos of the school successfully.
11. Leaders implement the required policies successfully and consistently. Policies are reviewed regularly, kept up to date and follow all applicable guidance. Policies are shared appropriately and are understood well by staff and pupils.
12. Governors actively monitor the school's performance to ensure that the required Standards are met consistently. They visit the school regularly to understand what is happening there and assure themselves that the education being provided is appropriate. Leaders report regularly to governors, providing information which enables them to identify areas for development and take decisions to better meet pupils' needs.
13. Leaders liaise appropriately with a range of external agencies including social services, the local authority, educational psychologists and occupational health specialists to ensure that pupils' academic, physical and mental health needs are met effectively.
14. The school has a suitable risk management policy that is implemented well. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the skills and knowledge to manage and reduce risks effectively. Suitable risk assessments cover the premises, activities on site and educational visits. Leaders provide staff with appropriate guidance on completing risk assessments. Governors and leaders review risk assessments regularly and amend them as required.
15. Parents benefit from the school's provision of regular and relevant information. Leaders are available at drop-off and pick-up times for informal discussions with parents. This is supported by the comprehensive website, weekly newsletters, formal parents' evenings and regular reports about pupils' academic and pastoral development. Leaders provide the local authority with required information about the use of funds relating to any pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
16. The proprietor provides a suitable complaints policy so that parents can raise any concerns. Leaders implement this effectively and respond to any parental concerns promptly. Detailed records of all complaints are maintained and these include the actions taken in response, whether formal or informal.
17. Leaders recognise their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and take action to ensure they are met. A suitable policy to meet the needs of pupils who have SEND is implemented effectively. The accessibility plan is appropriate, reviewed regularly and updated as required.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders provide a curriculum which is well matched to pupils' ages and abilities, equipping them with the knowledge and skills they need for their future lives. Detailed schemes of work cover an appropriate range of subjects and there is much stimulating work, notably in science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Pupils develop impressive listening, speaking and literacy skills and demonstrate high levels of engagement and enthusiasm for learning.
20. Staff in Reception provide children with a variety of carefully planned activities. These enable children to learn the different sounds that letters make and progress in recognising and ordering numbers and learning how to count. Specialist French language teaching, and investigation of different cultures and their festivals, helps children to learn about the wider world.
21. Teaching is typically well planned and effective. Teachers manage class time and pupils' behaviour well. As a result, pupils make good progress across the curriculum. Teachers' subject knowledge enables them to teach carefully structured, suitably paced lessons. These make use of a range of varied and appropriate resources which support both independent and collaborative learning and encourage creativity and critical thinking. Teachers employ different teaching methods and assessment strategies both to support and challenge pupils. They inspire pupils to take responsibility for their learning, apply intellectual and creative effort and demonstrate self-motivation and perseverance.
22. The early identification of children with additional needs ensures appropriate interventions and adaptations are put in place so that they can access the full curriculum. Pupils who have SEND receive the support they need to be successful. They benefit from teaching that is adapted to suit them and enables them to complete tasks successfully. Pupils' needs are met and they make good progress from their starting points.
23. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported in class through the use of word banks and teaching of subject-specific vocabulary. They also receive individual support prior to some lessons so that they are better able to understand the concepts and skills being taught. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress. In particular, children in Reception who speak EAL reach a standard of fluency which ensures they can benefit from the opportunities available in Year 1.
24. Leaders have established a detailed framework for the assessment of pupils' learning. Teachers provide pupils with regular, thoughtful and supportive feedback, both written and oral, about their work. As a result, pupils understand their strengths and areas where they can develop further. The use of standardised testing, end-of-topic assessments and teachers' observations provides further detailed information about pupils' progress. However, this information is not analysed carefully enough by leaders. It is not used as effectively as it might be to inform teachers' planning. As a result, teaching is not always closely matched to pupils' needs. Where this is case, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
25. Pupils enjoy a wide range of activities which further enhance their knowledge and skills. The well-managed sports programme includes football, rugby, cricket, netball and hockey. Pupils also have opportunities to swim and play tennis and table tennis. An interesting selection of extra-curricular activities offers pupils, amongst others, coding, printmaking, cookery and touch-typing.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

27. Governors and leaders work successfully to create a 'family' atmosphere. Calm, professional staff maintain positive relationships with pupils and model kindness and compassion. Leaders provide a PSHE curriculum which promotes respect for others and teaches pupils that discrimination based on characteristics such as race or religion is wrong. Pupils learn about different cultures and family structures and how to manage conflict and friendships better. As a result, pupils are happy, confident and at ease with themselves and others.
28. A clear and well-understood behaviour framework encourages pupils to regulate their own emotions carefully, act responsibly and treat others with respect. As a result, behaviour in school is good. Instances of poor behaviour are rare and managed effectively. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying strategy which ensures that concerns are quickly identified and addressed with support for both the victim and perpetrator. As a result, instances of bullying are rare.
29. Specialist teaching of PE and games helps pupils to acquire important skills and maintain their health. They learn how to swim, develop their ability to throw and catch and take part in strength and conditioning training. Pupils also learn how to live a healthy lifestyle through PSHE education. They benefit from the balanced diet provided in the dining hall. In Reception, staff teach the children about the importance of oral hygiene, supported by presentations from a visiting dentist.
30. Reception staff plan suitable activities that support children's personal, physical and emotional development. Cutting, drawing, painting, use of play dough and activities such as den-building in the forest area enhance their creativity and develop their physical skills. These activities also enable children to learn to co-operate and collaborate successfully.
31. Leaders provide effective, sensitively taught RSE through the PSHE education programme. Parents are consulted about the content of the RSE programme which includes topics such as physical growth and change, different sexualities and body image.
32. Leaders ensure there is highly effective pastoral care of pupils. Staff meet regularly with pupils to check on their wellbeing. Pupils have access to a 'wellbeing room' which they can use if they require a period of quiet and calm reflection. Staff training in mental health awareness and the key role of the mental health leadership team ensure that the pupils' emotional wellbeing is supported effectively.
33. Pupils have access to well-maintained outdoor spaces, including the forest area. Playtimes are purposeful, inclusive and well supervised. Leaders' effective deployment of staff ensures that supervision of pupils is effective throughout the day. This contributes positively to the provision of a secure environment.
34. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and provide support for families when necessary. Admission and attendance registers are accurately maintained. Local authorities are informed about pupils who leave and join the school at non-standard times of the year in accordance with statutory requirements.

35. The pupil leadership programme provides pupils with specific duties and responsibilities appropriate to their age. This promotes leadership, teamwork and service to the community. Younger pupils benefit from structured mentoring and support from older pupils, reinforcing the school's ethos of care and community involvement.
36. Health and safety policies and procedures are robust, ensuring compliance with statutory requirements. Frequent site checks and prompt remedial action, when required, ensure the premises are well maintained. Leaders act appropriately to mitigate the risk of fire. Termly fire drills, with outcomes carefully reviewed to refine procedures, ensure that pupils know how to respond to emergencies. Accidents and 'near-misses' are dealt with appropriately, carefully logged and reviewed to check for any patterns. Leaders use this information effectively to inform risk assessments and staff training.
37. Staff receive appropriate first aid training, including paediatric first aid training for staff working with early years children. There is suitable medical accommodation and pupils receive appropriate medical support, when required. Staff ensure that medication is stored safely and maintain accurate records of the provision of first aid and medication.

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

38. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

39. Through the assembly programme, PSHE education, religious studies and creative and critical thinking, governors and leaders foster a culture of respect, tolerance and inclusion. This ensures that pupils develop a confident understanding of diversity and the importance of respect for the differences between people such as age, race and religion. They have opportunities to discuss ethical issues such as discrimination, justice and freedom. Younger pupils learn about different relationships, care for the wider world and British values such as democracy and tolerance. In these ways, pupils across the school learn the difference between right and wrong and behave accordingly.
40. The careers programme helps prepare pupils for life beyond school and teaches them about public services in England. Presentations from a variety of speakers, such as veterinary practitioners, dentists, police officers, lawyers and charity workers, enhance pupils' knowledge of different institutions and occupations. They also complete an online careers assessment which helps match their interests and aptitudes to possible jobs.
41. Children in Reception learn about key British institutions and wider society through regular visits from the police, the fire service, doctors and dentists. Educational visits to an armed services museum and a dinosaur-themed adventure park widen children's experience of society and enhance their social skills through conversations with different adults.
42. The school prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education. As older pupils prepare to move on, leaders give them interview practice and they attend presentations about individual senior schools from their pupils and teachers. Most pupils are successful in winning places at academically selective senior schools and many are awarded scholarships. For all year groups, there is a 'moving-up morning' at the end of the summer term that helps pupils progress confidently from one year to the next.
43. Pupils learn about democratic ideas and contribute positively to school development. There are elections to the school council, the eco-council, the food committee and the academic focus group. These groups help to determine how the curriculum is developed and how funds raised for charitable purposes are distributed. Older pupils visit the Houses of Parliament to learn about the country's democratic processes.
44. Leaders typically use their links with businesses and services to provide opportunities for pupils to take an active role in the local community and understand how they can contribute to it. For example, the school's relationship with a house-building company results in inspiring activities such as an art competition in which pupils designed the principal bedroom for a show home. Older pupils visit a local nursing home and join the residents for lunch, play board games with them and engage them in conversation. Choirs sing at both a hospice and a residential home for the elderly.
45. Throughout the school, pupils learn about how money works and basic economic principles. Children in Reception are involved in selling cakes, biscuits and hot chocolate to raise money for charity. This gives them practical experience of setting prices, counting change and calculating profits. Older pupils take part in 'The Fiver Challenge' where they are given money to start their own

business. This introduces them to project management, pricing and budgeting. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about loans, mortgages, savings, debts and taxation.

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 prioritise pupils' wellbeing. They ensure that an appropriate safeguarding policy is available to parents on the school's website and that policy and practice reflect current statutory guidance. The safeguarding leadership team, including the governor responsible for safeguarding, is suitably trained. They ensure that members of staff receive appropriate training, including at induction, and regular updates about key issues and procedures.
48. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. They know how to respond to any allegations about adults working in the school and how to manage any concerns raised by pupils. They do so promptly and confidently, when necessary. Staff recognise the importance of maintaining vigilance about safeguarding matters.
49. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with the local authority, children's services and the police, as appropriate. When required, they make referrals to external agencies in a timely manner.
50. Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are completed before any adult begins working at the school. They maintain an accurate single central record of appointments.
51. The proprietor checks the quality of the school's safeguarding procedures regularly. The safeguarding governor visits the school frequently to check the single central record and personnel files. Staff are interviewed to check their understanding and implementation of the safeguarding policy. Governors receive termly reports from safeguarding leaders and conduct an annual review of the safeguarding policy and its implementation.
52. Pupils are taught how to stay safe beyond school, including road safety. They also learn about online safety. Leaders implement appropriate filtering and monitoring of the school's internet. Designated safeguarding leaders respond promptly in the event of any breaches. Pupils can raise concerns, anonymously if they so wish, with trusted adults who know them well and respond promptly and thoughtfully.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

The quality of the early years foundation stage in the registered early years provision

Overall effectiveness: the quality and standards of the early years provision

54. The overall effectiveness of the early years provision requires improvement.
55. Leaders have not maintained sufficient oversight of the registered setting. The early years leader has not completed regular monitoring in all rooms to ensure that children experience the same quality of teaching and opportunities for learning and development.
56. Staff deployed in the pre-school room have a clear understanding of how children learn, and they create a stimulating environment. They consider what it is that they want children to learn, and they precisely plan the curriculum and the environment to support this. This helps children to develop new skills and knowledge. In other rooms, staff have a less clear understanding of how young children learn and their attempts to create an enabling environment are less effective. This leads to some children having less positive attitudes to learning.
57. On the whole, children's personal development is well supported by staff. Children form secure attachments with their key person. Staff establish positive communications with parents from the outset and continue this dialogue with them to ensure that care routines meet the needs of the individual child.

Quality of education

58. The quality of education requires improvement.
59. Leaders have a vision for the curriculum. However, there are inconsistencies in how this is delivered and in the quality of teaching between different rooms. In some rooms, staff decision-making around resourcing and planning for children's learning is clear. This contributes to positive behaviours and attitudes towards learning. In other newly established rooms, staff do not organise the environment as successfully to support children's needs and interests. For instance, they do not recognise when they could use spaces and resources even better to support learning. They similarly do not identify and respond to children's levels of engagement and make adaptations to follow their interests. This means that at times children are not engaged in enjoyable and purposeful learning.
60. Staff promote communication and language development. For example, they maintain eye contact with babies as they narrate their play. In some rooms, staff help children to learn by communicating using strategies such as Makaton, and toddlers go on to use signs to say 'please' during snack time. The leader has put targeted provision in place to help children learn and use new vocabulary. She evaluates the impact of this frequently and this is supporting children's development in the pre-school.
61. Children in the pre-school room are successfully supported to develop early reading skills. Staff precisely consider how to help them learn. Children benefit from well-paced structured sessions where staff sing songs and use actions to help them recognise letter sounds and match them to letter shapes. Staff have secure subject knowledge, and they address any misconceptions effectively.

Behaviour and attitudes

62. Behaviour and attitudes require improvement.
63. During adult-initiated activities, children generally demonstrate positive attitudes to learning. However, at times, including when activities are less structured, staff do not plan, observe and adapt activities with enough focus on learning. This affects children's levels of interest. Sometimes staff, including leaders, do not readily identify where they should deploy themselves or members of their team. They similarly do not recognise when or where they could introduce a wider variety of resources into the environment to capture children's interest. This results in periods of time where children's responses and engagement are less positive. For example, children wander around, stand on the periphery of the room or seek attention from visitors.
64. Relationships among children, parents and staff reflect a positive and respectful culture. Leaders and staff take prompt and effective action to support parents and signpost them to other services where this is helpful. For instance, they establish and maintain two-way communications with parents when developing a joint approach to support challenging stages of child development, such as when children do not have the language to express their frustration and so do this by other means.
65. Staff help pre-school children to develop an age-appropriate understanding of feelings and behaviours. For example, at the start of the day, pre-school children are invited to say how they are feeling. Children use vocabulary, such as happy, sad, excited, nervous, scared, tired, surprised or angry. They explain why they are feeling like this, and they begin to empathise with others.

Personal development

66. The personal development of children requires improvement.
67. Leaders have ensured that there is an effective key-person system. Staff have recently received training to improve handover times, when parents drop off and collect their children. Parents comment that they particularly appreciate these times to share information with the key person. Staff also frequently share information with parents, such as through an online system and end of room reports that they receive before their children move on to the next room.
68. Staff ensure that children are provided with a healthy and nutritious diet. Leaders regularly review food preparation practices to protect children aged five and under. For example, they ensure that the school chef understands how different foods need to be prepared to reduce the risk of choking. However, on very rare occasions, some staff do not follow procedures consistently to ensure that the planned checks in relation to food preparation for children are completed. Children are closely supervised when eating and there are appropriate levels of staff with paediatric first aid training in place.
69. Leaders understand the importance of promoting health and hygiene. Staff follow policies well in relation to supporting children who require medicines. However, procedures in relation to child handwashing were not implemented by some staff during the inspection, such as before and after meals. The early years leader took prompt and effective action to rectify this. Procedures were reviewed and implemented so that children have suitable opportunities to develop these self-care skills.

Leadership and management

70. Leadership and management require improvement.
71. Leaders have a clear vision for the setting. However, their recent focus has been on developing the offer for pre-school children. This means that not enough time or attention has been given to monitoring practice in the toddler rooms and inconsistencies in teaching have not been fully identified or addressed.
72. Leaders actively liaise with a range of professionals to seek advice and support. This is particularly effective for children who have additional needs. Staff ensure that they follow guidance from professionals so that children experience the same strategies at home and in the setting to support their learning. Staff also liaise with professionals, such as the health visitor, to ensure that parents get the right support and advice at the right time.
73. Leaders ensure that staff have time within their working hours to complete their duties. The early years leader has an open-door policy so that staff can come to her at any time. Staff are also able to seek support from the school nurse if required.
74. Leaders have made attempts to notify Ofsted, the regulator, of changes to the nominated individual to ensure that their suitability is checked as per requirements. However, this was not successful. This was rectified during the inspection and there is no impact on children as the school completed the appropriate suitability checks for this individual.

Safeguarding

75. Safeguarding is effective.
76. The designated safeguarding leads have a good understanding of their roles and responsibilities, and they ensure that staff complete regular safeguarding training. This helps to ensure that their knowledge remains up to date. Staff know what to do should they have a concern about a child or staff conduct. The safeguarding governor regularly visits the setting to check staff knowledge and ensure that safeguarding checks are completed.
77. Staff have a secure understanding of signs and symptoms of abuse. They are able to describe signs of neglect, physical abuse and sexual abuse. Staff can describe what they would do in particular situations, including if a different person comes to collect a child, there is an intruder alert or a choking incident

Recommended next steps

The proprietor should:

- make sure all staff fully and consistently implement policies and procedures relating to food preparation
- strengthen monitoring and oversight of teaching and learning to ensure that, where required, staff receive coaching to improve their practice

- review and improve the learning environment to ensure that the available resources meet all children's needs and interests and promote their focus on learning effectively.

The extent to which the school meets the requirements of the early years foundation stage

78. The school's registered provision for childcare meets the requirements of the Childcare Act 2006.

School details

School	South Lee School
Department for Education number	935/6025
Registered early years number	2623216
Registered charity number	310491
Address	South Lee School Nowton Road Bury St Edmunds Suffolk IP33 2BT
Phone number	01284 754654
Email address	office@southlee.co.uk
Website	www.southlee.co.uk
Proprietor	South Lee School Ltd
Chair	Mr Stephen Honeywood
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Catchpole
Age range	0 to 13 years
Number of pupils	192
Number of children in the early years registered setting	87
Date of previous inspection	15 to 17 September 2021

Information about the school

79. South Lee School is a co-educational day school. It is located in the town of Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk. The current headteacher took up her post in September 2024. The school is overseen by a board of governors.
80. There are 96 pupils in the early years comprising four Nursery classes and one Reception class.
81. The school has identified 36 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
82. The school has identified English as an additional language for five pupils.
83. The school states its aims are to instil a lifelong love of learning in each child by developing their skills and nurturing their growth as individuals.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 January 2025

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

85. 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 chair and other governors
- 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

86. 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**.

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For more information, please visit isi.net