ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

10 to 12 February 2026

Saint Felix School

Halesworth Road

Reydon

Southwold

IP18 6SD

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 are forward-looking and write coherent and ambitious plans that support the school's future development. They maintain effective oversight of the school to ensure that the Standards are met. Leaders place pupils' wellbeing at the centre of their work, offering a broad and balanced curriculum and a wide range of co-curricular opportunities to meet each pupil's needs. They foster a supportive community and nurturing ethos which embody the school's values of creativity, honesty, kindness, passion and respect. Leaders prioritise pupils' academic and personal development and promote their wellbeing.

2. Leaders constantly seek to broaden pupils' choice of curriculum options and enrichment opportunities. They ensure that the curriculum is carefully aligned to pupils' interests, abilities and aspirations. Leaders create opportunities for pupils to develop life skills and extend their learning through different curricular challenges. Pupils progress and achieve well at all levels, including children in the early years and pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). At its most effective, teaching across all ages and stages supports pupils to learn new knowledge, concepts and skills. However, teaching does not consistently meet the needs of older pupils in all subjects.

3. Pupils' physical, mental and emotional health are well supported. Positive relationships between pupils and staff and shared community values foster a deep sense of belonging. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes, alongside comprehensive mentoring, equip pupils to understand different perspectives and to make informed personal choices. Effective behaviour and anti-bullying strategies support a culture of kindness and tolerance among pupils and staff. Strong boarding house identities and inter-house competitions across the school foster opportunities for friendships between pupils of different ages. This supports the development of pupils' social and team skills, and their emotional wellbeing. The introduction of new co-curricular options broadens the sporting and wellbeing provision for pupils. These programmes contribute to the growing confidence, self-awareness and maturity of pupils.

4. Leaders implement effective safeguarding and health and safety measures to promote pupils' wellbeing. Effective deployment of staff ensures that pupils, including boarders and children in the early years, are well supervised. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and respond promptly to any absences. Suitable fire safety measures and medical provision promote a secure environment for pupils and boarders. Staff write risk assessments carefully to mitigate identified risks. However, leaders do not consistently ensure that appropriate actions are implemented effectively and within suitable timeframes. This oversight was rectified during the inspection.

5. Pupils learn about important values, such as respect and the rule of law. Through participation in school and boarding councils, they acquire practical experience of decision-making and democracy. Pupils gain a global perspective and broad cultural and spiritual awareness through assemblies, chapel worship, and the shared experiences of its local and international pupil body. Staff support pupils to make informed decisions about their future subject options and careers. Pupils develop economic and financial understanding and contribute to the local community.

6. Leaders create a culture of vigilance in their safeguarding work. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding, early years, boarding, pastoral welfare and healthcare work collectively and successfully to manage the wellbeing and safety of pupils. Leaders work closely with specialist

agencies when required, so that timely action is taken to support pupils' needs. The proprietor and leaders ensure that safer recruitment checks are carried out assiduously on adults before they begin work at the school. These are recorded accurately on the single central record of appointments (SCR). However, leaders do not consistently ensure that references are scrutinised and verified carefully. This oversight was rectified during the inspection.

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 staff consistently implement risk assessments in order to mitigate risks more effectively
- ensure that teaching across all subjects consistently meets the needs of senior school pupils
- ensure that employment references are verified carefully.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. The proprietor and advisory board members provide leaders with appropriate support and challenge. They oversee leaders' work relating to pupils' welfare and whole-school strategy. Advisory board members visit the school regularly to meet with pupils, staff and leaders, to understand the school's context and to discuss safeguarding, health and safety, and school development. Through analysis of reports from school leaders and discussions at committee meetings, advisory board members maintain a well-informed understanding of school life. They ensure that leaders are suitably trained and have the knowledge to lead effectively so that the Standards are met consistently.

8. Leaders identify potential risks and develop effective systems, including a whole-school risk register, to mitigate them. Detailed risk assessments cover the school premises, educational visits and individual pupils who have particular health needs. Leaders act on the recommendations of fire safety specialists and employ enhanced security measures around the school site, such as CCTV. However, leaders do not ensure that risk assessments are implemented consistently, with clear timescales and confirmation that actions have been taken, to mitigate risks effectively.

9. The proprietor and leaders collaborate effectively to evaluate the school's strengths and identify areas for development. They ensure that strategic plans support pupils' welfare and strengthen educational provision. For example, leaders ensure that the number of GCSEs that pupils take supports their academic and personal development. For some pupils this means taking fewer GCSEs to facilitate undertaking other qualifications, which allows them to tailor their studies to their interests and strengths. Leaders provide a bespoke 'Saint Felix Diploma', mentoring and co-curricular programmes and a wide range of sports to further support pupils' mental and physical health.

10. In the early years, leaders maintain effective oversight and work collaboratively with staff to identify areas that require further development. For example, in the early years, leaders embed new assessments for English and mathematics into the curriculum which enable teachers to monitor children's progress effectively so that they achieve well and reach the expected standard by the end of Reception. Leaders maintain a positive and productive partnership with parents through regular dialogue on their child's progress.

11. Well-trained boarding leaders create a culture characterised by mutual respect, tolerance and kindness. They ensure that boarders have their voice heard through the boarding council and respond appropriately to feedback received. A well-planned programme of activities supports the personal development of boarders.

12. Leaders provide comprehensive information for parents through the school's website. They ensure that policies are reviewed annually so that they reflect current statutory guidance. Leaders take prompt action to follow up any informal or formal complaints submitted by parents so that they are suitably resolved. Parents receive regular written reports about their child's progress and attainment and have opportunities to discuss these with the teachers.

13. Leaders liaise closely with local authorities to support pupils' wellbeing. They make safeguarding referrals in a timely manner, as required, and complete local authority safeguarding reviews so that effective action is taken promptly. Leaders inform local authorities about pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. Leaders also provide local authorities with appropriate

information about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding.

14. Leaders ensure that pupils who have SEND benefit from appropriate support provided by well-trained staff. Individual learning plans (ILPs) set out clear targets for these pupils and enable them to make good progress. Leaders implement an appropriate accessibility plan. This includes initiatives and actions to ensure that pupils can access the curriculum and the school site. As a result, leaders fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

15. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

16. Leaders have put in place a broad and flexible curriculum that develops pupils' intellectual, aesthetic, creative and physical skills. The curriculum offer includes a unique 'Saint Felix Diploma', which enables pupils from Years 5 to 13 to pursue a number of age-appropriate optional modules, including car maintenance and environmental science, alongside GCSEs, Applied Diploma courses and A levels. In these ways, leaders enable pupils to pursue courses that support their individual needs and abilities.

17. Leaders provide a co-curricular programme that develops pupils' interests. It includes a variety of activities, such as debating, sailing and golf. Pupils engage enthusiastically with the school production of *The Addams Family*, enjoy outdoor learning or participate in the chamber choir. Collectively, these opportunities build pupils' skills, resilience and confidence in their own abilities.

18. Pupils display positive attitudes to learning. They engage well in lessons, complete tasks diligently, collaborate respectfully and respond positively to teacher questioning. For example, during information and communication technology (ICT) lessons in Year 4, pupils use software to code their designs and show determination in exploring their coding programme. Pupils in Year 9 work effectively in chemistry to calculate relative atomic mass. Pupils in Year 7 English lessons write sentences using suitable styles and appropriate language to convey different emotions.

19. Knowledgeable subject-specialist teachers plan engaging lessons which enable pupils to make good progress. In the most effective lessons, they provide pupils with clear targets and explanations and employ a variety of resources. In Year 4 mathematics, for example, pupils use a large hundred square to support their calculations. Teachers prompt pupils in Year 12 English lessons to think deeply about the meaning and structure of poems and analyse them successfully using suitable techniques. However, some lessons in the senior school do not provide sufficient challenge or support to enable a larger number of pupils to reach a higher level of thinking.

20. Early years teachers provide a stimulating environment that supports children's development in reading, writing and numeracy. Children learn to read and build their vocabulary using phonics, song and rhyme. Staff model appropriate language and prompt children to explain their ideas and decisions in order to promote their communication and language skills. In Reception, staff teach children addition and subtraction skills through measuring height and comparing children who are taller or shorter using cubic counting blocks. Teachers prepare children successfully for the next steps in their learning and for the transition to Year 1.

21. Leaders implement effective processes to identify and support pupils who have SEND. They share ILPs with teachers and provide appropriate support for pupils who have an EHC plan. Teachers use digital software and audio books to support pupils, who also benefit from individual specialist tuition as required. These strategies ensure that pupils who have SEND make good progress.

22. Leaders assess pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) to identify their needs and provide them with effective support. Specialist teaching and specific strategies, such as the use of translation cards and vocabulary lists, enable pupils who speak EAL to learn well, make good progress and become confident, competent users of English.

23. Leaders provide an effective assessment framework. This includes standardised tests, end-of-topic tests, and end-of-year examinations. Teachers use this data to track pupils' progress and target

support appropriately. Teachers' written and verbal feedback enables pupils to identify their strengths and how to take the next steps in their learning. Pupils at all levels are well supported by their teachers and understand how to improve their work.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. Leaders create an inclusive environment rooted in the school's core values of kindness, honesty and respect. Through assemblies, weekly mentoring sessions and discussions in the boarding houses, staff support the development of pupils' emotional maturity and moral values. Pupils make friendships across year groups and with those from different backgrounds and faiths.

26. Through weekly chapel services, hymn singing, the religious studies curriculum and visits to places of religious worship, leaders foster spiritual awareness among pupils. Pupils gain insights into other world faiths from fellow pupils who share their experiences in assembly or chapel. This helps pupils to reflect more deeply on their own beliefs and spirituality. Pupils from different backgrounds are supported in their faith and have their dietary needs met.

27. Leaders implement comprehensive and coherent programmes to promote pupils' emotional wellbeing and positive mental health. Staff use assemblies, tutor periods and PSHE lessons to teach pupils how to care for their mental health. Pupils in need of support can visit the wellbeing hub and receive guidance from pastoral leaders. Co-curricular activities, such as mindfulness and yoga, and celebration of World Mental Health Day, help pupils to develop resilience and positive coping strategies.

28. Pupils benefit from a well-planned and effectively taught physical education (PE) curriculum. Pupils select from a wide range of options, including equestrian sports, squash, archery, circuit training and pickleball. This supports pupils' physical development as they can find what best matches their interests and needs, from team sports to more individual leisure pursuits. Children in the early years benefit from regular opportunities for physical activity that support healthy routines. They learn hand-eye co-ordination through ball games and interact socially with one another at snack times.

29. Staff teach an effective RSE programme through a well-considered PSHE curriculum. Pupils learn about consent, how to build healthy relationships and the harms caused by alcohol, drugs, gambling and addiction. Teachers equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to make informed, responsible decisions.

30. Polite, courteous pupils behave well and treat others with consideration and respect. They open doors for one another and apologise if they have upset another person's feelings. Leaders promote pupils' good conduct through the merit system and an effective anti-bullying strategy. Pupils learn about cyber-bullying and understand the harm caused by discriminatory behaviour. Staff apply the code of conduct fairly and consistently. Leaders maintain thorough behaviour records, analyse these closely to identify any patterns, and take suitable actions in response.

31. Early years staff use praise to bolster children's self-esteem. They encourage children to try new activities and take risks in their learning to promote positive outcomes that support emotional wellbeing. Children learn to work co-operatively and share resources and ideas. Teachers model appropriate behaviour and read stories that promote an understanding of moral values.

32. Leaders maintain accurate admission and attendance registers. They monitor pupils' attendance levels carefully and follow up promptly and supportively with parents if their child's absence causes concern.

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33. Staff qualified in first aid, including paediatric first aid, provide appropriate medical care to any pupils who are injured or unwell. Pupils benefit from suitable medical accommodation and leaders ensure the safe storage of any medicines.

34. Leaders support pupils' sense of security by ensuring effective supervision during the school day, in the boarding houses at night, and when participating in educational visits. This contributes positively to the good relations that prevail in the school. Early years leaders maintain the required adult-to-child ratios and ensure that children are always within sight or sound of an adult.

35. Leaders ensure suitable maintenance of the premises, equipment and accommodation, including the boarding houses, in line with health and safety standards. Leaders instigate regular fire evacuation drills, including at night for boarders, so that pupils know how to respond appropriately in case of an emergency. Leaders implement systematic monitoring and maintenance, including for fire and water safety and dangerous substances and hazards, to support a safe learning environment.

36. Boarding leaders promote mutual respect and harmonious community living. They provide warm, comfortable, well-maintained accommodation which promotes boarders' sense of security, independence and wellbeing. Boarders complete their homework in supervised study sessions and enjoy a variety of activities during their free time, in the company of their friends.

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. Leaders provide well-planned opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of social responsibility and the importance of service to others. Pupils across the school collaborate and help to plan purposeful activities that support their local community. For example, pupils in Year 4 plan a sports event to raise money for their chosen charity. Older pupils tend to the allotment at 'The Old Hospital' and take pride in the produce being used in the kitchens for hot meals. Other pupils enjoy coaching children from local primary schools who visit the school for PE. Older boarders volunteer at charity shops and a local steam rally. They visit elderly people in residential homes and organise a Christmas shoebox appeal.

39. Pupils explore and learn about important British values such as mutual respect and tolerance in assemblies and through the wider curriculum. In religious education, pupils explore different cultures, beliefs and practices. Pupils in Year 6, for example, study Hinduism, and those in Year 8 learn about Islam. Pupils deepen their understanding of different cultures by sharing personal insights. For instance, older pupils present on their cultural background in assemblies. A whole-school 'cultural day' enables pupils to work collaboratively in mixed year groups, selecting cultures of interest and participating in a range of activities to further their understanding.

40. Pupils experience democracy in action. They elect the heads of school and council members and vote to determine the school values. Pupils represent the school on the East Suffolk Youth Council and share their experience of politics in action with the wider school community. Leaders foster an understanding of democracy and the rule of law through planned activities in PSHE and by promoting UK Parliament week. Pupils learn to respect alternative opinions and viewpoints and to represent them fairly in school or boarding council meetings.

41. The house system encourages pupils and boarders to contribute positively to their house community and to become responsible citizens. They undertake a variety of responsibilities, for example, head boy and head girl roles, and house boarding council representatives. These opportunities develop leadership skills and promote confidence, responsibility and independence.

42. Early years staff teach children to understand the wider world and appreciate other cultures. For example, children in Reception learn about Chinese New Year celebrations and how to write the word 'horse' in Mandarin. In Nursery, children help to make decisions about which charities to support, run their own cake stalls and learn to handle money.

43. Pupils learn about the rule of law in PSHE, as well as how to distinguish right from wrong and the consequences of their actions. They make amends when they have behaved inconsiderately towards others. In the early years, children learn to take responsibility for their actions, share resources and take turns during activities.

44. Leaders teach pupils about finance and the role of money. Younger pupils in Year 6 complete 'Make £5 Grow', designing a business and gaining understanding of planning, costs and spreadsheets. In Year 9 they progress to the '£10 challenge', which includes understanding of budgets, marketing and sales. Pupils in Years 7 to 11 learn about money management, such as savings, subscriptions and pensions. Sixth-form pupils participate in a six-week programme on personal finance delivered by a financial adviser and explore effective budgeting, saving and borrowing. They have the opportunity

to extend their understanding through a more advanced course and learn how to read financial statements and build a simple investment plan.

45. The school supports pupils to make considered choices about GCSE and A-level options, university courses and careers. Pupils learn about apprenticeships in Year 10 and the sixth form, ensuring that they are aware of the range of future study options available to them. Older pupils attend university and careers fairs and receive independent and impartial advice on their options. Pupils, including those in prep, learn about different jobs in the community from parents who visit the school to tell them about their careers. Pupils reflect on their goals in weekly mentoring sessions. Consequently, pupils are supported well in their transition to future higher education, apprenticeships and careers.

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. Appropriately trained leaders with responsibility for safeguarding provide staff with comprehensive training, including at induction. They provide staff with regular bulletins and scenario-based discussions, so that staff have strong safeguarding knowledge and know how to respond promptly to any serious allegations about adults working at the school.

48. Safeguarding leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, including local authorities and children's services. The safeguarding team refers concerns promptly to these agencies and takes appropriate actions so that pupils receive the support they need. Leaders keep detailed records and store these securely. As a result of these measures, pupils' wellbeing is promoted consistently and thoroughly.

49. In assemblies and PSHE lessons, staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. All sixth-form pupils undergo safeguarding training so they can respond appropriately to younger pupils. Leaders implement an effective internet filtering and monitoring system. They respond promptly to notifications of any potentially inappropriate use. Teachers monitor pupils closely and respond promptly to any concerns they may have.

50. Early years leaders ensure that the welfare of the children is promoted at all times. Facilities are kept safe and the handover processes to parents at the end of the school day are suitably robust. Well-trained early years and prep school staff monitor children during mealtimes and are alert to the dangers of choking.

51. Boarders receive a suitable induction programme and are readily able to identify a trusted adult they would go to with a concern. Leaders ensure that all boarders have access to an independent person who they know and can easily contact.

52. The proprietor provides thorough and systematic oversight of the school's safeguarding procedures, through regular visits to the school, discussions with leaders and scrutiny of documentation. They receive detailed safeguarding reports, which they discuss and analyse. The proprietor reviews the safeguarding policy annually to ensure it meets current statutory requirements and is available to parents and prospective parents on the school's website.

53. Leaders ensure there are appropriate safer recruitment checks for staff before they begin work at the school, which are accurately recorded on the SCR. However, when the inspection began, leaders did not ensure that all references from potential employees received were verified thoroughly. This oversight was rectified before the conclusion of the on-site inspection.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Saint Felix School
Department for Education number	935/6007
Address	Saint Felix School Halesworth Road Reydon Southwold Suffolk IP18 6SD
Phone number	01502 722175
Email address	schooladmin@stfelix.co.uk
Website	www.stfelix.co.uk
Proprietor	Inspired Learning Group
Chair	Mr Amit Mehta
Headteacher	Mr Matthew Oakman
Age range	2 to 19
Number of pupils	235
Number of boarding pupils	34
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 February 2023

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Information about the school

55. Saint Felix School is a co-educational day and boarding school for pupils aged 2 to 19 years old. It is situated near Southwold in Suffolk. The school is owned by the Inspired Learning Group and the chair is the chief executive officer of the group. The proprietor provides governance of the school through the advisory board. Since the previous inspection, a new headteacher was appointed in September 2023.

56. There is one mixed boarding house for pupils aged 11 to 16 years old and another mixed boarding house for pupils aged 16 to 19 years old. There is provision for full, weekly and flexi-boarding at both houses.

57. There are 38 pupils in the early years comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.

58. The school has identified 71 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Seventeen pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

59. The school has identified English as an additional language for 25 pupils.

60. Saint Felix School aims to provide a holistic educational experience that supports the academic, social and emotional development of its pupils. The school's mission is to enable every pupil to thrive, flourish and become the very best version of themselves. It aims to offer a broad and engaging curriculum that excites, inspires and elicits curiosity. The school also aims to prepare pupils with the skills, qualities and characteristics necessary for the future, ensuring a wide range of co-curricular opportunities to develop expertise and mastery across different areas.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	10 to 12 February 2026

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

62. 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 advisory board chair and the proprietor
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

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

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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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