ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

10 to 12 February 2026

St Hugh's School

Cromwell Avenue

Woodhall Spa

Lincolnshire

LN10 6TQ

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. Governors and senior leaders successfully promote the school's ethos. Leaders and governors actively engage with parents and pupils, taking onboard their feedback and creating a sense of community and family. They use this feedback to review and evolve provision in the school, constantly seeking improvement. Governors work closely with leaders to check on their effectiveness in leading and managing the school. Collectively, they ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently.

2. Leaders provide robust oversight and implement well-developed policies and procedures. They make most of these available via the school's website. However, not all of this information was available to parents at the start of the inspection. This was rectified during the inspection.

3. Leaders have developed a rich and broad curriculum, including a wide range of enrichment opportunities. Teachers use their knowledge of pupils when planning lessons, to create a positive, productive and engaging learning environment. Robust assessment and tracking of pupils' progress allows leaders to reflect and adapt the curriculum, when needed. Collectively, leaders ensure that pupils typically learn and achieve well across all phases in the school. Leaders have created a culture that encourages staff and pupils to reflect on their work and strive to improve.

4. However, some teaching does not provide pupils with precise guidance and feedback. This means that some pupils do not know how to improve their understanding or apply their learning in more complex ways, when they are ready to do so. This slows some pupils' learning and progress.

5. The emotional and physical wellbeing of pupils is well supported. The site is well managed, including the provision for pupils' medical and first aid needs. The curriculum supports pupils to understand the importance of looking after their mental and physical health. Positive relationships between pupils and staff ensure a culture of mutual respect, resulting in a calm and welcoming atmosphere. Pupils' opinions are sought and highly valued. Pupils strive to do their best. Their manners are impeccable, and their behaviour is positive. Staff know pupils well. They are adept at identifying any pupils who may require additional support from skilled and knowledgeable pastoral leaders.

6. Leaders ensure that admission registers are kept appropriately. They are knowledgeable about statutory guidance and ensure that there are robust procedures in place to follow up on pupils' absences. They work effectively with external agencies when pupils need more specialist help. However, incorrect, out-of-date attendance codes have been used for a small number of pupils' absences. Leaders' quality assurance mechanisms had not identified this administrative error in recording. This was rectified during the inspection.

7. Children in the early years thrive under the guidance of a skilled early years team. They learn through topics that fascinate them and participate in a range of activities including sport, music, art, cooking and outdoor learning. Children learn through a delicate balance of carefully planned activities and guided play. Staff actively engage in conversation with children to develop their language and communication skills. Children learn how to regulate their emotions and socialise with others and are given the space to do so by trained adults. Leaders use the outdoor areas effectively, in particular the forest school, to develop children's curiosity and independence while enhancing their physical development through active play.

8. A vibrant boarding programme has been developed by leaders to ensure that boarding pupils experience an environment which closely replicates that of a family home. Boarders' accommodation is maintained to a high standard and includes access to recreational areas and activities chosen by the boarders. Leaders provide a wide range of evening activities that promote boarders' mental and physical wellbeing. Boarding leaders have put effective systems in place to ensure that boarders are safe and happy.

9. Leaders have fostered a harmonious and inclusive community and a supportive family-like atmosphere. The curriculum helps pupils to know and respect important values and understand how to serve as positive citizens in British society. As a result, pupils respect and appreciate diversity. They take on leadership responsibilities and contribute to the community through charitable initiatives and local engagement. An effective careers programme provides pupils with exposure and guidance that equips them for the future and prepares them for the next steps in their education.

10. Staff are well trained and vigilant to any signs of concern. Leaders manage safeguarding concerns effectively and liaise with external agencies. Appropriate pre-employment recruitment checks are completed before adults work with pupils and boarders. Leaders have embedded a positive and effective safeguarding culture throughout the school and boarding.

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

The proprietor should:

- ensure that required policies and information are made available consistently to parents
- check that leaders' recording of pupils' absence consistently aligns with statutory guidance
- check that teachers provide pupils with guidance and feedback that helps them to improve their understanding and apply their learning in more complex ways, when they are ready to do so.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders and governors actively promote the school's aims and model the school's values. They have embedded these values with staff and pupils. Vigilant staff and high-quality pastoral care support pupils' wellbeing. This creates a caring and vibrant family community throughout the school.

12. Governors provide effective oversight of leaders' work. Governors undertake a range of activities, including regular visits, weekly meetings with the chair, discussions with pupils and staff, and review of documentation. Dedicated governance committees focus on specific areas of the school's development. Governors ensure that there is regular and up-to-date training for leaders, so that they can fulfil their roles. Through their work, governors ensure that the wellbeing of pupils is prioritised and that leaders have a coherent approach to the delivery of the school's aims. They ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently.

13. Leaders work closely with governors to ensure that they regularly review the strategic planning for the school. They look for ways in which they can continue to improve the school and provision for pupils, for example, through recently working with a wider range of independent schools to provide ongoing staff training and development. As a result, leaders are knowledgeable and skilled in their roles, including leaders in the early years and in boarding. Leaders ensure that policies and procedures are well implemented and create positive, supportive and caring environments for children, day pupils and boarders.

14. Leaders ensure that risk is assessed and managed thoroughly and proportionately. There is widespread recognition of the importance of risk management, including in boarding. Leaders have identified risk and put in place effective measures to manage potential risks in the curriculum, on site, during off-site activities and for individual pupils, where needed. Governors and leaders ensure that, among staff, leaders and governors, there is sufficient and up-to-date expertise in health and safety to implement risk management plans. Governors check that leaders are taking all reasonable action to mitigate and address any risks identified.

15. Leaders ensure that required information and relevant policies that should be made available to parents and other external agencies are detailed and thorough. They are consistently implemented and regularly reviewed. Leaders choose to provide most of this information through the school's website. However, some information relating to the school's relationships and sex education (RSE) policy and some previous inspection reports were not available as required. This was rectified during the inspection.

16. Leaders share relevant and required information about individual pupils with parents and external agencies as appropriate. They share information with parents relating to their child's performance through regular and detailed written reports. They inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave at non-standard transition points. Although no pupils at the school require an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), leaders understand their responsibilities should any pupils have one. They work closely with specialist external teams to support pupils' safeguarding and mental health needs.

17. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders have implemented a detailed accessibility plan, which is regularly audited to ensure that it enables all pupils to access all parts of the curriculum, physical activities and facilities.

18. Leaders have implemented a suitable policy for dealing with complaints. Leaders manage complaints within the required timescales set out in the policy. They reflect on complaints and take appropriate action in response. Governors are kept up to date with complaints, allowing them to identify trends and any learning points.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

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Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Leaders have designed a broad and enriching curriculum which plans for pupils' academic achievement, social development, physical health and emotional wellbeing. Comprehensive and detailed schemes of work are in place, ensuring that the curriculum is covered. The introduction of the Independent Schools Examination Board (ISEB) Project Qualification (iPQ), undertaken by Years 7 and 8, provides pupils with opportunities to research, experiment, report and present on a topic of particular interest to them. Pupils value this and feel that it enhances their learning and prepares them for the future.

21. Teachers plan lessons and select resources that are appropriate and engaging for pupils. They take into account pupils' prior learning, interests and learning styles. Teachers reflect on their practice to ensure that the curriculum and its delivery consistently provides pupils with engaging lessons and a wide range of experiences. Strong relationships between staff and pupils throughout the school ensure that pupils are enthusiastic about their learning and participate actively in lessons. Pupils develop positive attitudes towards their education and take pride in their learning and work.

22. The early years team know children well. They ensure that the curriculum provides an effective mix of planned and play-based activities, including through the outdoor curriculum. Teachers prioritise communication and language skills through a wide range of strategies such as circle times, question-and-answer sessions and small-group work. They ensure that children are well supported to develop their early reading, letter formation, counting and number skills. Children use these skills widely and enthusiastically. For example, children read the story of 'Three Little Pigs', build a house for them and complete artwork that retells the story. They make pancakes outdoors, play drums in music and make ladybird biscuits.

23. Leaders identify and support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. They provide teachers with guidance about how best to support pupils' needs. In lessons, pupils are well supported to access the curriculum alongside their peers, including through precise support from teaching assistants, where needed. Leaders communicate routinely with pupils and their parents to evaluate how well pupils are faring and what strategies need to be adopted.

24. At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils who spoke English as an additional language (EAL). However, leaders are well prepared to support any pupils who arrive in the early stages of learning English. They have appropriate provision to support any future pupils to develop important linguistic skills.

25. Leaders have implemented an effective framework for assessment. They use a range of assessment information to track and monitor how well pupils are faring across subjects. This starts in the early years where leaders use baseline assessments to understand children's starting points and regularly review how well they are learning and developing across a range of areas.

26. Across all year groups, leaders and teachers use assessment information to identify which pupils need more help and how well the curriculum is working for all pupils. Most teachers use this information to adapt teaching effectively. Most pupils learn well and develop the knowledge and skills that support them to transition successfully onto the next stage of their learning. However, some teachers do not provide pupils with precise feedback and guidance to help them improve their

understanding and their work. In particular, some pupils are not being sufficiently well supported to apply their learning in more complex ways, when they are ready to do so.

27. Pupils benefit from a wide range of activities, known as 'hobbies', that are provided for all pupils at the end of the extended school day. The range of extra-curricular activities is broad, and pupils are encouraged to make suggestions and recommendations for new activities. The well-planned and rich boarding programme enhances the boarders' engagement with and enjoyment of school life. Staff promote independence and confidence through, for example, house points, the 'chef's hat' awards and social activities that are chosen by pupils. Activities encourage boarders' participation, motivation, and personal growth.

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 have implemented a well-planned and taught personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum and RSE programme. Where needed, lessons are delivered by a specialist team of teachers to ensure the high-quality delivery of the most sensitive topics. Leaders consult effectively and regularly with parents, providing detailed information on the content covered. They ensure that the curriculum responds to the needs of pupils. This empowers pupils to develop an age-appropriate understanding of important topics, such as consent.

30. Leaders and staff support pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing. Morning activities see pupils welcomed in by staff and their peers, enabling pupils to have a positive start to the day. There are lots of opportunities for pupils to share their thoughts with leaders. Staff know pupils well. They are enthusiastic advocates for pupils, using lots of positive praise and active listening. Additional support for vulnerable pupils, including those who have SEND, includes drop-in wellbeing sessions and play therapy programmes.

31. Leaders use a nurturing approach to develop pupils' sense of confidence, self-esteem and spiritual understanding. The youngest children pause to think about nature as they look at plants and insects. Leaders provide opportunities for collective worship during the school day. Pupils are encouraged to share their faiths and learn about and respect the beliefs of others. Pupils across age groups and faiths pray together before meals.

32. The physical and emotional wellbeing of the youngest children in the early years is well catered for. Staff know children well. They help them to learn to understand their own emotions and how to manage them. They teach them how to think about the feelings of others. They role model positive interactions. Children benefit from a range of well-planned indoor and outdoor activities to develop their physical dexterity. As a result, children's emotional and physical abilities develop appropriately, and they are ready to transition to their next stage.

33. Leaders have designed a physical education (PE) curriculum that ensures all pupils access a wide range of sports, fitness and exercise. Teachers use assessment precisely to identify those pupils who need more help or those who are ready to try more complex activities. Pupils are encouraged to try newer sports and approaches to fitness, such as padel and Hyrox. This ensures that sport is accessible to all and develops pupils' fitness, co-ordination and teamwork skills.

34. Leaders have implemented an appropriate policy and procedure related to behaviour and anti-bullying. Staff reinforce high expectations for behaviour and support pupils when they need help to regulate their emotions. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour and have been instrumental in creating the school's 'pupil promise', which outlines expectations and encourages themes such as kindness and respect. Bullying incidents are rare, and when unkindness is encountered it is dealt with effectively by staff and recorded meticulously. Pupils raise any concerns in the knowledge that they will be listened to and supported.

35. Leaders ensure that appropriate arrangements are in place relating to health and safety. They seek specialist advice, and act quickly to address any issues. The site is well maintained. There are high levels of supervision of pupils at all times. Appropriate arrangements for medical and first aid are in place, and there are sufficient staff trained in paediatric first aid.

36. Leaders and boarding staff ensure that the boarding community is an orderly, homely and happy environment. The quality of boarders' accommodation is of a high standard and is appropriate for their age. There are sufficient areas and activities for recreation and relaxation. Boarders are encouraged to personalise their allocated areas and they have sufficient space to store personal items securely. A suitable kitchen, stocked with healthy snacks, is accessible to pupils during the evening. Boarding staff supervise boarders appropriately and are always available to provide support to pupils, when required. Great care is taken by boarding leaders to ensure the wellbeing of pupils. This includes access to a medically trained matron.

37. Leaders maintain appropriate admission and attendance registers. Pupils' absences are effectively followed up. Leaders understand statutory guidance and work with external agencies appropriately. However, they had used the wrong absence codes for a very small number of pupils. These were not in line with the most up-to-date guidance. These errors in leaders' recording were rectified during the inspection.

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. Leaders have built a community that is harmonious, happy and socially inclusive. Pupils are consistently kind and welcoming. This starts in the early years, where the youngest children are taught important social skills, such as taking turns, listening and making appropriate choices. Staff help pupils to understand right from wrong by modelling appropriate responses and behaviours. Staff and pupils interact positively, such as when eating together at lunchtime. In boarding, pupils take on roles to support one another while interacting positively with the staff looking after them. Pupils' social skills are very well supported. They embody these values in how they treat one another and create the family atmosphere at the heart of the school's ethos.

40. Leaders enable pupils to learn about life in British society and important values through the PSHE curriculum and through lessons and assemblies. For example, the importance of democracy is reinforced by giving pupils the opportunity to vote on several issues, by taking on board pupils' views in developing school policies and through the celebration of the International Day of Democracy. Pupils are taught debating skills, how petitions work and the structure of the Houses of Parliament. Leaders have developed the curriculum to expose pupils to wider experiences beyond their own. For example, visits to cities and towns, both locally and abroad, educate pupils about national and global issues.

41. Pupils are taught about the importance of respect for and tolerance of all people. They learn about the role of protected characteristics and the prejudices faced by some people due to sexuality, race and religion. Pupils learn to value and celebrate diversity among people, through assemblies and the curriculum, covering vital topics such as LGBTQ+ awareness and Black History Month.

42. Leaders ensure that pupils learn the importance of contributing positively to the school, local community and wider society. Pupils undertake a range of responsibilities, often through application and election processes, such as prefects, school captains and school council representatives. Leaders encourage pupils to feel part of the local community through attendance at events such as the Woodhall Spa country show and harvest festival and through participation in local choirs. Pupils support a range of charitable causes. For example, pupils nominate charities and Year 8 pupils run fundraising days each year, helping them to value charitable endeavour.

43. Leaders ensure that pupils are aware of a range of careers. Pupils, including the youngest children in the early years, experience trips to see careers in the real world at locations including an RAF base, a pizza parlour, the local church and an egg factory. In years 7 and 8, leaders provide suitable careers advice and guidance by utilising the National Career Service (NCS) assessment tools and through activities such as enterprise days, visits from alumni and visits to a local working farm. Leaders have introduced an online learning platform to further improve the whole-school approach towards careers education. This helps pupils to identify their early future career aspirations.

44. Pupils are supported to develop an appropriate economic understanding. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 are taught about credit and debit payments. As they get older, pupils are taught about online payments and managing these safely. The curriculum is supplemented by practical opportunities. For instance, teachers arrange visits to local shops, allowing pupils of various ages to use money to make small purchases, teaching them financial literacy.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Safeguarding leaders have created a strong culture of safeguarding. An appropriate and detailed policy is in place that is in line with current statutory guidance. Safeguarding procedures are well established and reviewed constantly to ensure effectiveness. Governors are knowledgeable and have effective oversight of safeguarding arrangements.

47. The safeguarding team ensures that staff are well trained. This includes a rigorous induction programme and provision of information on local and national issues, including the Prevent duty. Leaders seek a range of ways, such as QR codes in the staff room, to provide staff with key documents and information. Staff are vigilant about safeguarding issues and raise any concerns with designated safeguarding leaders. Staff report concerns promptly and with the required amount of detail. They report any concerns regarding the conduct of adults towards pupils, including low-level concerns.

48. Leaders ensure that effective policies and procedures are in place to look after the safeguarding and wellbeing of boarders. These are evaluated and reviewed regularly to ensure that they are appropriate. High levels of supervision by boarding staff ensure that pupils always have someone to speak to, if needed. Boarders are aware of the role of and contact details for the independent advocate.

49. Leaders work effectively and closely with external agencies such as the local authority, social services and other schools. They ensure that the necessary information needed to help protect children is shared efficiently. The safeguarding team builds positive relationships with parents, enabling them to have challenging but caring conversations, which ensures that pupils' emotional and physical wellbeing is well supported.

50. The process for recruiting adults who work with pupils is thorough and well documented. The school undertakes all appropriate pre-employment checks. Checks are accurately recorded on the school's single central record (SCR) and staff files are retained appropriately. The headteacher and governors undertake regular checks on all recruitment procedures and the recording of these. All staff involved in the recruitment process undergo appropriate safer recruitment training.

51. Leaders ensure the curriculum teaches pupils how to stay safe, including online. This ensures that pupils are confident in the online world and are able to keep themselves safe. A thorough internet filtering and monitoring system allows leaders to monitor online activity and react swiftly to any concerns. Leaders track trends and put in place suitable and timely interventions, where needed.

52. Leaders ensure that there are lots of ways in which pupils can report concerns to them. They are knowledgeable about contextual safeguarding issues and the additional vulnerabilities that pupils who have SEND may face. Leaders use this information to develop the PSHE programme to support the needs of pupils, where needed.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	St Hugh's School
Department for Education number	925/6022
Registered charity number	527611
Address	St Hugh's School Cromwell Avenue Woodhall Spa Lincolnshire LN10 6TQ
Phone number	01526 352169
Email address	office@st-hughs.lincs.sch.uk
Website	www.st-hughs.lincs.sch.uk
Proprietor	St Hugh's School (Woodhall Spa) Limited
Chair	Mr I Tyler
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Wyld
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	179
Number of boarding pupils	75
Date of previous inspection	18 to 19 January 2023

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Information about the school

54. St Hugh's School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school, located in Lincolnshire. The school is a registered charity and is run by a board of trustees, members of whom also take on roles on the board of governors. Since 2025, the school has worked in partnership with Repton School and other associated schools. A new chair of the proprietor body has joined the school since the previous inspection.

55. The school comprises four sections: an early years setting, for children aged 2 to 5 years; a pre-prep, for pupils aged 5 to 7 years; a middle school, for pupils aged 7 to 10 years; and a senior school, for pupils aged 10 to 13 years.

56. There is one boarding house, located on the same site as the main school building. This provides weekly and flexi-boarding for male and female pupils aged 7 to 13 years old. There are 75 pupils who board, the majority of whom are flexi-boarders.

57. There are 45 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.

58. The school has identified 38 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

59. The school has identified no pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

60. The school states its aims are to provide a caring, family atmosphere which allows each child to develop their independence and individuality, and to offer a broad, stimulating curriculum that helps each and every child to develop and to fulfil their potential, both within and beyond the classroom. At the same time, the school aims to provide a happy and stimulating environment in which every child feels safe, valued and cared for and to encourage the traditional values of courtesy, honesty and hard work, together with a sense of responsibility and consideration for others.

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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. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

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 chair of the proprietor body
- 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.

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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