

School inspection report

25 to 27 February 2025

ACS Cobham International School

Portsmouth Road

Cobham

KT11 1BL

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 governing body maintains effective oversight of all aspects of school life. Governors know the school well. They visit often to support leaders, and to check the implementation of policies and procedures. They ensure that leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills so that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Governors and leaders have a clear and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and relative weaknesses. Effective self-evaluation underpins decision making. Leaders manage complaints effectively. They regularly seek the views of parents and pupils to inform school improvement.
3. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the wellbeing of pupils are effective. Leaders have the necessary knowledge to fulfil their safeguarding roles and they do so effectively. Staff are well trained. They identify and report any concerns promptly. Leaders liaise appropriately with external agencies, when required. An accurate single central record of pre-employment checks is maintained. Pupils feel safe in school. They are confident to speak to an adult about any concerns.
4. Leaders provide an effective and engaging programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. Through it, pupils develop a good understanding of themselves and of the importance of respect for others. Knowledgeable staff provide older pupils with guidance about their choice of subjects and courses. Pupils receive appropriate careers advice and support to choose their next steps after school.
5. In the early years, skilful teaching matched to children's interests enables them to develop a range of core skills in numeracy, literacy and communication. Children grow in confidence and develop a love of learning as they experience a range of carefully planned indoor and outdoor activities.
6. The broad curriculum supports the school's aim to help pupils develop a global perspective by providing a range of internationally accredited courses. Pupils gain core knowledge and skills, whilst also being able to specialise and pursue their individual interests and aptitudes. Teaching is well planned and meets pupils' needs. Pupils are eager to learn, collaborate well and communicate effectively. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school.
7. Leaders have embedded effective systems to track pupils' academic progress through regular assessments. However, in some subjects, teachers often do not provide effective feedback on pupils' classwork and homework. As a result, pupils are sometimes not clear how to improve their work.
8. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified early. They are well supported by specialist staff and by subject teachers to enable them to access the curriculum effectively. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
9. Leaders promote the successful integration of pupils of different nationalities into the school's community. Pupils understand and respect each other's cultures. Pupils of all ages behave well. Serious misbehaviour and bullying are rare. When misbehaviour occurs, leaders act promptly and effectively to address issues and support pupils.
10. Leaders are well trained and boarding is well managed. They implement policies and procedures effectively. As a result, pupils feel safe and are well looked after. Boarders are confident to express

their views and leaders respond appropriately to any concerns raised. Boarding accommodation is maintained to a high standard and provides a clean, warm and comfortable environment for pupils.

11. Leaders provide a broad co-curricular programme. Pupils develop their aptitudes and interests in a wide range of sporting, creative and academic-based activities. Through well-organised community links, pupils learn to serve others in the locality and abroad.

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 teachers routinely provide clear and effective feedback to pupils about their classwork and homework, so that they know how to improve their work.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Governors know the school well. They visit the school often to support and challenge leaders. Governors and leaders actively promote the school's ethos, of encouraging pupils to aim high and to explore new ideas, by providing a challenging curriculum and celebrating pupils' achievements. Governors ensure that leaders have the necessary skills and training to promote pupils' wellbeing. Working closely together, governors and leaders ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
13. Governors and leaders work together, through focused sub-committees, to ensure that policies and procedures meet the requirements of legislation and statutory guidance. Leaders regularly monitor the work of staff to ensure that they understand policies and implement them effectively.
14. Leaders and governors have a detailed and accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas to be developed. They use a range of information to identify where improvement is needed. Leaders engage regularly with pupils, staff and parents through surveys. They visit lessons, scrutinise records and discuss the school with staff and pupils. Rigorous self-evaluation processes inform decision-making. Coherent and realistic development plans for the school prioritise the wellbeing of pupils and are implemented fully.
15. Pastoral and academic leaders have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They have appropriate skills and knowledge which they apply effectively. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils, including boarders, where appropriate. Academic leaders monitor and review the work of heads of department through data analysis and lesson observations to ensure that pupils make good progress. In the early years, leaders are knowledgeable and skilful. They are reflective and show initiative in developing and improving the provision.
16. Governors and leaders adopt a strategic approach to identifying and managing risks. Leaders are knowledgeable and well trained to identify potential risks to pupils, including risks that are harder to identify. A thorough risk assessment policy and suitable risk assessments are in place for the school site, and for activities in and out of school. Leaders limit potential risks to boarders by providing secure, well-maintained accommodation. Site security is overseen by a dedicated team of security staff.
17. The leadership of boarding is effective. Boarding staff have appropriate training, which is reviewed regularly and renewed when required. Policies and procedures are clearly understood by staff and pupils and are implemented effectively and consistently. Well-developed channels of communication between house and academic staff ensure that pupils' wellbeing is monitored and supported in a co-ordinated way. As a result, boarders' academic and pastoral needs are met effectively.
18. The school fulfils the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders make appropriate adjustments for those who have disabilities through a suitable accessibility plan. Pupils who have SEND receive individual support to enable them to access the curriculum effectively. Leaders provide the local authority with relevant information, including that related to funding, for all pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
19. All the required information, including that related to boarding, is made available to parents and prospective parents. Parents receive annual reports and other regular information about their child's progress and attainment.

20. An effective complaints procedure ensures that parents' concerns are addressed in a timely and appropriate manner. Detailed records of complaints are kept so that governors and leaders are alert to any trends or patterns.

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

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders provide a broad and balanced curriculum that reflects the school's aims. In the early years, the curriculum enables children to develop their skills in interesting and exciting ways, such as through role play or using digital technology. Pupils in the lower school develop a secure base of core skills, including in numeracy and literacy, whilst exploring creative, linguistic and scientific subjects. In the middle school, pupils study a breadth of subjects, often involving project work, based on a wide range of countries and cultures, and including a range of languages.
23. In the upper and high school, all pupils follow a high school diploma programme, gaining credits in a range of core subjects, such as mathematics, English, science and physical education. Pupils also engage in social service and select from a range of elective courses including languages and creative subjects. In addition, pupils in the high school choose a range of options from internationally accredited programmes, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme or the Advanced Placement curriculum. Pupils achieve well in public examinations relative to their starting points and in relation to international norms.
24. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons effectively and use a variety of techniques and resources to adapt teaching to the needs of pupils. Through skilful questioning, teachers promote thoughtful discussion in lessons. As a result, pupils have well-developed communication skills and express their ideas confidently and fluently.
25. Pupils typically behave well in lessons and enjoy their learning. Pupils make good progress in extending their knowledge and deepening their understanding. Pupils' skills are well developed across the curriculum, especially in art and music. Pupils are highly adept at using software packages to support and enhance their learning.
26. In the early years, teachers encourage children to speak confidently in different situations using a wide-ranging vocabulary. Children develop a love for learning and immerse themselves in carefully planned activities, such as telling their own stories using finger puppets. Children's technological skills are promoted through a dedicated space for the exploration of information technology. Teachers track children's progress carefully, ensuring that they acquire the necessary skills to transition to more formal learning, such as letters and the sounds they represent and reading.
27. Leaders have established an effective framework to evaluate the progress of individual pupils based on regular assessments. In some subjects, such as art and English, teachers routinely provide pupils with precise, clear and informative feedback about their classwork and homework. This helps pupils to improve their work and develop their understanding. However, this is not consistent throughout the school. In other subjects, teachers often do not provide pupils with the feedback that they need. Where this is the case, pupils are often unsure how to improve their work.
28. Pupils who have SEND receive tailored support to enable them to access the curriculum effectively. Specialist staff encourage pupils to develop effective study skills and learn how to manage their time productively. Teachers are aware of the needs of pupils who have SEND and adapt their teaching appropriately. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
29. Through specialist teaching and the support of classroom teachers, pupils who speak English as an additional language quickly develop the necessary language skills to study effectively. In lessons,

pupils who speak English as an additional language are given lists of subject-specific vocabulary to help them to learn effectively, where appropriate.

30. Leaders provide a wide range of co-curricular activities. Participation, irrespective of aptitude, is promoted, so that pupils develop their self-confidence by trying new sports or activities. Football, basketball and swimming are popular options in school and in competitive fixtures against other schools. Many pupils are involved in musical groups or drama productions. Leaders encourage pupils to suggest and lead clubs and activities, so that they further their interests and develop their skills.
31. Boarders enjoy a range of suitable activities, including optional trips to the theatre or cinema. At weekends, pupils spend time together in their houses relaxing, playing table tennis, pool or board games. The school's extensive sports facilities are also available to boarders at weekends.

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

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

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

33. Leaders promote a sense of trust between adults and pupils. Within each section of the school, pupils easily identify a range of adults who can offer them guidance and support. Pupils are confident to seek help and support when they need it. Provision for pupils' mental health is readily available through trained staff in school and from external professionals.
34. Pupils' physical health is promoted through the curriculum and by the extensive co-curricular sports programme. The physical education curriculum is delivered by skilled staff. The programme enables pupils to develop their skills effectively and to sample a wide range of sports. Pupils with a particular aptitude for sport receive specialist coaching. Others enjoy keeping fit through a variety of physical activities such as dance, swimming and gym sessions. Pupils understand the importance of maintaining their physical fitness alongside their academic studies.
35. In the early years, leaders have created an extensive outdoor space with a variety of climbing and other equipment that enables children to develop their physical skills and strength. Children demonstrate high levels of confidence and learn to make good choices as they navigate the learning environment, selecting resources independently and playing positively alongside or with others. Staff praise kind behaviour and give compliments appropriately to support children's growing sense of kindness and respect for others.
36. Leaders encourage pupils to be reflective about their behaviour and to show kindness and compassion in their dealings with others. Pupils understand leaders' expectations and typically behave well. Serious misbehaviour and bullying are rare. When misbehaviour does occur, leaders act promptly to support pupils and prevent a recurrence, often through a series of reflective meetings.
37. Leaders have created spaces throughout the school where pupils can relax and reflect. 'Wellbeing rooms' in the school and in the boarding houses, the prayer room and the library are well used by pupils to create quiet moments in their busy lives. Pupils' inspirational and challenging artwork, which is displayed around the school, encourages them to appreciate non-material aspects of life. Leaders support pupils' spiritual development through the study of world religions. As a result, pupils begin to develop an awareness of the spiritual aspects of human life.
38. The school provides an extensive programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This includes relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils learn about the differences between people such as race, religion, disability and sexual orientation. They learn not to judge others on the basis of these differences and to celebrate the diversity in society. PSHE lessons are interesting and engaging. Older pupils are encouraged to discuss and explore issues such as personal identity, different types of healthy relationships and the importance of consent. Teachers adapt the programme in response to questions raised by pupils in anonymous surveys, to ensure that it meets their needs.
39. In the lower school, the programme of relationships education enables pupils to understand the importance of good behaviour and of respecting others. In class morning meeting time, pupils discuss how they can support and help one another during the day ahead. In the early years, adults teach children the importance of taking turns and sharing resources as they play and learn.

40. Boarding accommodation is modern, clean and well maintained. Pupils enjoy extensive and well-resourced recreational and study areas within their houses. Well-equipped house kitchens allow boarders to cook their own food to complement the wide variety of healthy meals served in the school's dining room. Boarders are able to maintain regular contact with their parents. They feel safe and are well looked after.
41. The school's premises and grounds are maintained to a high standard. Health and safety arrangements are effective across the school campus. Arrangements to supervise pupils, including in boarding, are effective. Fire drills are held regularly in school and in the boarding houses. The school's medical centre provides suitable care for pupils who are ill or injured. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid in the early years.
42. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance carefully and maintain appropriate records. They analyse data to identify any ongoing concerns about pupils' attendance. They liaise appropriately with external agencies, when required, including for pupils who have an EHC plan. The school maintains an accurate admission register. It reports to the local authority the names of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.

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

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

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

44. The school provides a welcoming and inclusive community. Events such as the annual cultural fashion show and international fair, involving parents, pupils and staff, offer rich opportunities to learn about different cultural identities. Pupil-led groups, such as the Afro-Caribbean Society and the Middle Eastern Society, explore and celebrate the traditions of different nationalities and cultures. Everyone is welcome and pupils often join a cultural society that is different to their own background. As a result, pupils mix together well. Incidents of racism or cultural misunderstanding are rare and dealt with effectively by leaders.
45. The school develops pupils' understanding of British society and the rule of law effectively. Through their lessons in PSHE and subjects such as history and geography, pupils learn how democratic principles and governments operate. In PSHE lessons, pupils are taught how laws are made and enforced. Through discussions about current affairs in lessons, pupils develop a deeper awareness of ethical issues such as liberty and social justice.
46. In assemblies and through visiting speakers, leaders promote a culture where every pupil is valued. Pupil-led societies provide leadership opportunities and facilitate wider understanding amongst different groups in the school. Groups supporting pupils with protected characteristics, such as religious belief or sexual orientation, help to develop other pupils' awareness of diversity. Pupils are confident to be themselves and they respect one another's identity.
47. Pupils develop a good understanding of British society and the rule of law. Through PSHE, world history and science, pupils deepen their understanding of ethical issues, such as human rights and environmental change. In the lower school, teachers deliver the PSHE programme daily and encourage pupils to demonstrate good manners and respect throughout the day. Pupils practise democracy when electing house leaders. In the early years, children learn about the importance of following the rules in their classroom and when playing outside. Staff help children to learn to play constructively with others, sharing toys and voting to choose classroom activities.
48. Pupils develop a good understanding of financial and economic education at a level appropriate to their stage of development. For example, the youngest children are taught to use pretend money when buying and selling ice creams with their teachers and peers. In their PSHE lessons, older pupils learn how to open and manage a bank account and how to calculate interest rates on loans. As a result, younger pupils are confident when handling money and older pupils know how to manage their personal finances.
49. The school fosters a strong culture of service. Pupils of all ages are keen to raise money for charities and to collect items to support the local food bank. Pupils in Years 9 to 11 participate in compulsory service elements within their learning programmes. These programmes enable pupils to develop an awareness of both global and local issues, from climate change activism to the needs of local primary school children. Some older pupils raise money for, and volunteer in, a partner school in Namibia.
50. A well-planned and expanding careers programme enables pupils to consider a range of options for their futures. The programme is enhanced by visiting speakers who help pupils to understand the world of work and consider a variety of career options. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage in

their education as they move up through the school. Staff help them to choose courses and subjects that suit their individual learning needs and support their career aspirations. Pupils in their final year are well supported by knowledgeable staff, who help them to decide the next steps after school. Many pupils successfully apply to universities in the United Kingdom and abroad.

51. Leaders and governors listen to and act upon pupils' views. Through surveys and student councils, leaders consistently look to improve the experience of pupils. For example, pupils have recently renegotiated the rewards for achieving high grades for classroom behaviour. Boarders are confident to express their views and contribute ideas to enhance facilities or change routines.

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

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

Safeguarding

53. The school's safeguarding arrangements are effective. The safeguarding policy reflects current statutory guidance. Leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills and ensure that the safeguarding arrangements are implemented effectively. Safeguarding training for leaders and governors is appropriate and up to date.
54. Governors oversee safeguarding arrangements effectively. They receive biannual reports, visit termly to check records and meet with pupils and staff to ensure that the policy and procedures are implemented appropriately.
55. Leaders have embedded a clear and sensitive safeguarding culture throughout the school. Staff at all levels have appropriate training to recognise and report any safeguarding concerns. This includes their responsibilities with regard to the 'Prevent' duty, where staff are well trained and alert to any contextual risks, such as political extremism. New staff receive detailed training on safeguarding as part of their induction.
56. Safeguarding concerns are monitored by leaders, who liaise effectively with external agencies when required. Referrals to safeguarding partners are made in a timely manner. Effective procedures are in place to report and monitor any low-level concerns or allegations about staff. Detailed records are kept about safeguarding concerns.
57. Pupils feel safe in school and in boarding. They are confident to speak to an adult about any concerns. Leaders respond promptly, sensitively and effectively to any concerns raised.
58. Pupils learn how to stay safe through their lessons in PSHE. For example, they are taught about the dangers that strangers can pose and the importance of online safety. Effective filtering and monitoring software protects pupils when online and identifies any risks to them. Leaders act quickly to follow up on any concerns. An external provider tests the reliability of the software on a regular basis.
59. All required pre-employment checks are completed before staff or volunteers start work in the school. The school maintains an accurate single central record of pre-employment checks, which is reviewed each term by leaders and governors.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	ACS Cobham International School
Department for Education number	936/6529
Registered charity number	1179820
Address	ACS Cobham International School Portsmouth Road Cobham Surrey KT11 1BL
Phone number	01932 867251
Email address	cobhamswitch@acs-schools.com
Website	www.acs-schools.com/cobham
Proprietor	ACS International Schools Limited
Chair	Mr Robert MacNaughton
Headteacher	Mr Robert Crowther
Age range	2 to 18
Number of pupils	1269
Number of boarding pupils	197
Date of previous inspection	18 April 2023

Information about the school

61. ACS Cobham International School is a co-educational day and boarding school located on the outskirts of Cobham, Surrey. The school consists of four departments: the lower school including the early years, for children aged 2 to 11, the middle school for pupils aged 11 to 14, the upper school for pupils aged 15 to 16 and the high school for pupils aged 17 to 18. All departments are on the same site. It is a member of a wider group of schools, owned by a limited company, whose directors act as governors of the school.
62. The school has two co-educational boarding houses with separate wings for male and female pupils. One house is for pupils aged 13 to 16, the other is for pupils aged 16 to 18.
63. The early years has 45 children in two Nursery and two Reception classes. It is located within the lower school.
64. The school has identified 211 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Eight pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
65. The school has identified 66 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
66. The school states its aims are to encourage pupils to aim high, to explore new ideas, to act with kindness and compassion, to make a unique contribution to the world and to adopt a global perspective.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 February 2025

67. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

68. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the 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.

69. 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