ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

6 to 8 January 2026

The Mead School

16 Frant Road

Tunbridge Wells

TN2 5SN

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 school provides a warm, caring and inclusive community of which pupils and staff are proud to belong. Leaders and staff prioritise knowing pupils as individuals and ensure that their wellbeing is paramount. Routines and consistent expectations support calm, purposeful learning across the school, including for the youngest children, who settle quickly and develop the independence to help them move confidently on to Year 1.

2. Leaders and governors articulate a clear vision centred on care, safety and high expectations. They fulfil their responsibilities through defined roles and sustained oversight of safeguarding, pastoral care, statutory requirements and risk management. Governors provide effective challenge and support, drawing on a range of evidence to ensure that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently and that pupils' wellbeing and progress remain central to decision-making.

3. Leaders provide a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum that prioritises vital foundational skills in English and mathematics while also supporting pupils' wider learning in areas such as creative, scientific and aesthetic development. Curriculum planning is structured and sequenced so that pupils build knowledge and skills cumulatively over time. Teaching is generally well planned. However, teachers do not provide some pupils with sufficient opportunities and time to engage meaningfully in activities or share their understanding. Where this happens, some pupils do not benefit as well as their peers from the learning opportunities in class.

4. Early years provision is well planned and implemented to ensure that children are provided with secure foundations across all areas of the early years foundation stage (EYFS). Over time, children learn effectively, including in their early reading, communication, language, number, social and emotional development. They are well prepared to transition into Year 1.

5. Leaders and staff promote pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing through consistent routines, appropriate levels of supervision and well-established pastoral arrangements. Leaders maintain effective oversight of health and safety, including supervision, risk assessments and medical arrangements, which support pupils' safety across the school day. Physical education (PE) is planned and taught regularly, enabling pupils to develop stamina, co-ordination and teamwork. Together, these arrangements support respectful behaviour, physical wellbeing and pupils' positive engagement in school life.

6. Pupils develop social and economic understanding through curriculum opportunities, roles of responsibility and community involvement. Teachers promote an understanding of democracy, respect and tolerance, supporting pupils to contribute positively to the school community. Opportunities to take responsibility further enable pupils to develop confidence, co-operation and an early understanding of their role in society.

7. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. Leaders maintain a vigilant safeguarding culture, staff understand their responsibilities and established systems support timely action, detailed record-keeping and engagement with external agencies when required.

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 use teaching strategies effectively, including allowing sufficient time for pupils to demonstrate understanding, so that all pupils engage, contribute and participate equitably in learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders and staff work together to prioritise and support pupils' progress and wellbeing. The school is a close and inclusive community in which pupils are known and cared for as individuals. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing through clear pastoral systems and consistent expectations. Adults know pupils well, respond thoughtfully to concerns and ensure pupils have trusted adults to approach for guidance. Leaders maintain defined responsibilities and oversight of safeguarding and pastoral care so that concerns are recorded, monitored and reviewed systematically, and action is taken when needed. They gather pupils' views through established arrangements and act on feedback, including by refining breaktime experiences and strengthening roles of responsibility, so that pupils contribute positively to school life.

9. Leaders use a range of information to evaluate their effectiveness. For example, using lesson visits, learning walks, scrutiny of pupils' work, assessment information and professional dialogue, leaders effectively identify and refine the quality of teaching. They identify and act to address any priorities for improvement and this continues to improve teaching and curriculum provision for pupils. Leaders' effectiveness in their self-evaluation is equally high quality in all other areas of their work, including their impact on behaviour, bullying, safeguarding, wellbeing and attendance.

10. Leaders promote inclusion and fulfil statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. An accessibility plan is in place and reviewed regularly. Leaders oversee provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Leaders co-ordinate support from external specialists, including local authority services, early years advisers and commissioned professionals such as speech and language therapists, and ensure that advice is acted upon so that pupils' needs are met within day-to-day classroom practice. Leaders ensure that staff, including non-teaching and peripatetic staff, receive regular training and guidance so they apply agreed approaches consistently when supporting pupils who have SEND.

11. Leaders fulfil the requirements to identify and manage risk. Leaders and staff have well-defined roles and responsibilities in managing risks and ongoing review ensures that they continually check on the effectiveness of their actions. Leaders maintain oversight of health and safety through systematic review of risk assessments, medical protocols, supervision arrangements and fire safety procedures. Leaders maintain detailed reporting to governors, and governors contribute to oversight through scrutiny, monitoring activity and audit processes.

12. Leaders communicate effectively with parents and stakeholders. Statutory information is readily accessible, and leaders share required policies and information in a timely manner, including regular reporting to parents on their child's progress and learning. Leaders manage any concerns and complaints through an established complaints process, logging concerns, monitoring patterns and acting appropriately so that leaders' communication is effective and resolution is timely. Leaders review patterns arising from concerns and complaints to inform reflection and improvement.

13. Leaders fulfil statutory reporting responsibilities effectively. They ensure that the local authority is notified when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points and when pupils are removed from the admission register. Leaders maintain accurate records of admissions and leavers, including destinations, which supports effective oversight, continuity of education and safeguarding responsibilities.

14. Governors are knowledgeable and experienced and provide informed challenge and support. They receive regular reports on safeguarding, risk management, curriculum and assessment. They draw on a range of evidence to hold leaders to account and support sustained improvement, ensuring that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently.

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 provide a broad, balanced and inclusive curriculum that supports pupils' academic, creative and personal development. Curriculum planning is structured and sequenced so that it supports pupils to build knowledge and skills securely over time. Subject plans set out what pupils learn and how prior learning is revisited. Leaders ensure that curriculum plans reflect the school's aims and are refined through professional discussion so that learning builds securely from the early years to Year 6. The curriculum also includes planned provision for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE), including relationships and sex education (RSE), which is integrated through lessons, assemblies and wider curriculum opportunities.

17. Teaching is generally well planned. Teachers enhance learning through purposeful cross-curricular links. For example, teachers plan lessons that enable pupils to apply knowledge from humanities to support extended writing and to use scientific and geographical themes to explore sustainability and environmental responsibility. Opportunities for discussion and independent enquiry support pupils' reasoning, communication and critical thinking across subjects. Teachers address misconceptions promptly so that pupils' learning builds securely over time.

18. Over time, teaching typically supports most pupils to learn effectively across subjects, including in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. For example, in English, pupils justify interpretations during discussion and develop reading comprehension through purposeful textual analysis. In mathematics, pupils apply their mathematical understanding when constructing and interpreting tables and line graphs. In science, pupils make predictions, test ideas and record outcomes systematically. Pupils make good progress.

19. In a small number of lessons, however, adults do not check sufficiently on pupils' understanding before they move on in the learning. Where this happens, some pupils do not have time to process information, share their ideas or articulate their learning. As a result, some pupils are not confident in explaining their learning, do not participate equitably in lessons and do not benefit fully from learning opportunities in class.

20. Leaders review assessment information routinely. They identify and act quickly where pupils require additional support or are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways, including through additional intervention where needed. Over time, pupils learn well and apply their knowledge with increasing independence and complexity.

21. Leaders provide a curriculum for the youngest children in the early years that supports their learning and development effectively. For example, through practical activities such as role play involving coins, children learn about counting and number recognition and develop an early mathematical understanding. Staff use a range of stories, rhymes and songs, prompting children to predict events and explain ideas through the use of questioning, which develops their language and communication. A range of well-planned and considered assessment, ongoing observation and termly tracking enables staff to identify what children know and can do, and where they need more help. Children are well prepared to transition on to Year 1.

22. Leaders plan carefully and precisely for pupils who have SEND. They ensure that pupils' needs are identified effectively through appropriate screening, observation and assessment. Leaders provide teachers with clear guidance about how best to support pupils. Targeted approaches such as

intensive phonics, use of technology and one-to-one language support help pupils access the curriculum in ways that meet their needs. Pupils' individual needs and progress are reviewed regularly, and leaders use these reviews to check that strategies are working. Consequently, pupils learn well and access the curriculum successfully alongside their peers.

23. At the time of the inspection, there were no pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). However, leaders have thorough approaches to early identification to support any pupils who need it. Staff have an appropriate range of strategies and resources that they can use, when required.

24. Leaders enrich the curriculum through well-considered extra-curricular opportunities, trips and visits. For example, there is a range of opportunities in art, music and drama extra-curricular activities. Pupils collaborate and perform in a range of contexts, contributing positively to confidence, teamwork and enjoyment of creative learning. Pupils also participate successfully in external music and drama competitions, and these experiences further strengthen confidence, teamwork and pride in achievement.

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

25. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

26. Leaders embed clear expectations for behaviour and relationships through consistent routines and agreed approaches across the school day. Staff model respectful interactions and apply expectations consistently, enabling pupils to settle quickly into purposeful learning. Staff use sanctions in line with policy and leaders review behaviour information so that patterns are identified and addressed.

27. Staff promote emotional wellbeing through warm interactions, consistent pastoral support and planned opportunities for pupils to share concerns. They know pupils well and respond thoughtfully to emerging needs. Pastoral information is reviewed routinely so that emerging issues are identified and acted upon.

28. Personal, social, health and economic education and RSE lessons are planned and implemented consistently across the school. Leaders ensure that provision is age-appropriate, suitably resourced and aligns with the school's aims. Pupils develop an appropriate understanding of relationships, emotional wellbeing, personal safety and respect for others. In lessons, pupils articulate opinions confidently and listen respectfully to differing viewpoints. For example, pupils discuss body image and hypothesise thoughtfully about the feelings of others and how their actions can affect this. Leaders ensure that parents are informed about lesson content and are given opportunities to discuss provision.

29. Leaders ensure consistent supervision across the day. Staff maintain a visible presence at arrival, breaktimes, lunchtime and dismissal and reinforce expectations calmly. Staff support pupils during unstructured times while maintaining pupils' independence, enabling pupils to engage positively with peers and routines. Roles of responsibility, including playground buddy roles and council involvement, contribute to positive play and pupils' contribution to school life.

30. Leaders and staff promote physical wellbeing through a planned PE programme and regular opportunities for exercise. The teaching of PE and games develops pupils' stamina, co-ordination, teamwork and specific techniques. Staff provide feedback and adapt activities where required so that pupils are able to participate confidently and develop physical competence over time.

31. Leaders take a proactive approach to preventing bullying. Leaders record behaviour and bullying concerns, review patterns routinely and take appropriate action to address concerns and strengthen preventative teaching. Bullying is addressed promptly when it occurs. Staff apply sanctions in line with policy and use restorative approaches so that pupils resolve difficulties and maintain positive relationships.

32. Leaders manage their health and safety responsibilities appropriately. They conduct regular reviews of health and safety arrangements, including fire safety procedures, medical protocols and supervision. They act promptly to address any issues that are identified. The site is maintained appropriately.

33. Leaders manage admission and attendance registers carefully. Leaders monitor attendance patterns routinely, follow up absence promptly and review trends through planned meetings. They work closely with parents and external agencies to support pupils to ensure that attendance does not

become a barrier to learning. This supports pupils' continuity of learning and leaders' oversight of wellbeing and safeguarding.

34. In the early years, staff establish a calm and nurturing environment through consistent routines and secure relationships. Children develop emotional understanding through shared language about feelings and clear boundaries. Staff provide regular opportunities for fine and gross motor development through indoor and outdoor activities. These approaches support children's early physical development, self-regulation, co-operative play and readiness for future learning.

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

35. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

36. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to school life and develop responsibility. Pupils take on roles, including council involvement, playground buddy roles, house responsibilities and sports leadership. Pupils contribute views through council discussions and campaigns, enabling them to understand how ideas are proposed, discussed and acted upon within a shared decision-making structure.

37. Leaders promote pupils' understanding of British values through assemblies and the curriculum. Pupils learn about democracy, shared decision-making and representation through planned learning and discussion. Pupils explain how voting and discussion help groups reach decisions and they link school rules to wider expectations about keeping people safe and treated fairly. These opportunities help pupils understand how rules and responsibilities support life in British society.

38. Leaders help pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of the law and public services in England. Staff help pupils develop an age-appropriate understanding of right and wrong from the early years and to take responsibility for their actions. Pupils learn how the law protects people and why fairness matters when rules are applied. In history, pupils learn about civil rights and equality and, in religious education, they discuss different faiths, opinions and tolerance. This helps pupils understand justice, respect for others and the role of services and institutions in society.

39. Leaders promote pupils' social development through consistent expectations of respect, inclusion and positive relationships. They promote respect for difference through assemblies and planned curriculum opportunities. Pupils learn about a range of cultures, religions and beliefs through religious education and PSHE, supported by events such as Black History Month, Diwali and Chinese New Year. Leaders also teach pupils about protected characteristics, such as disability, race, religion or belief and sex, in age-appropriate ways. Pupils speak confidently about fairness and inclusion and show respectful attitudes in their daily interactions.

40. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community. Pupils plan and organise charitable events in their houses to raise money for chosen causes and pupils perform in the local community, for example, in the choir carol singing. Leaders invite charities into school, so pupils learn about their work and understand how charitable action helps others. This develops pupils' sense of social responsibility and pride in representing the school beyond its immediate community.

41. Leaders develop pupils' economic understanding effectively. In the early years, children explore money and exchange through role play, including shops and simple transactions. Older pupils learn through enterprise activities, including a French café and daily budgeting on a residential visit to France. In Year 6, pupils take part in a chocolate enterprise project that includes financial literacy, marketing and public speaking. These experiences help pupils apply learning to real-life situations and develop an early understanding of financial responsibility.

42. Leaders manage transition points carefully, so pupils are prepared for the next stage of education. Leaders support Year 6 pupils for the move to senior schools. Teachers from secondary schools visit to meet pupils. Planned activities in the summer term for all pupils build confidence, resilience and

independence. Pupils speak positively about feeling prepared for change and confident about their next steps.

43. In the early years, staff promote children's social development through daily routines and carefully planned activities. Children learn to take turns, share resources and co-operate during play. Staff use stories and discussion to help children understand kindness, fairness and respect, and children show this understanding when they tidy resources and consider others' safety. These experiences help children develop confidence, empathy and positive habits for future learning.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding arrangements are in line with statutory guidance and outlined appropriately in the school's policy. Those with designated leadership responsibilities are well trained and ensure that systems to safeguard pupils are embedded and used effectively across the school. Leaders have a thorough understanding of statutory guidance and local referral systems. Leaders seek advice or escalate concerns to external agencies when required. They take timely and proportionate action in response to safeguarding concerns.

46. Governors maintain appropriate oversight of leaders' work to safeguard pupils. They receive reports, meet regularly with leaders, staff and pupils and review a range of information related to the school's daily work. Governors provide effective scrutiny of leaders' work, including information related to recruitment.

47. Staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Leaders ensure that staff report concerns about pupils and adults, including low-level concerns, and staff follow reporting expectations consistently. Safeguarding training is regular and well monitored for all staff, including non-teaching and peripatetic staff. Leaders reinforce training through regular updates and checks so that staff understanding remains current and consistent.

48. Safeguarding leaders and staff use established systems to record, monitor and review concerns consistently. They review records systematically and maintain detailed chronologies. Leaders review records routinely to ensure that they can identify any wider concerns, emerging patterns or additional needs that need addressing.

49. Leaders undertake appropriate pre-employment statutory checks on adults who work with pupils. Leaders ensure that recruitment procedures support safeguarding and that records, including the single central register of pre-employment checks, are accurate and maintained appropriately.

50. Leaders ensure that they are taught how to stay safe through the curriculum and assemblies. Pupils are knowledgeable about how to keep themselves safe, including online. Leaders maintain oversight of filtering and monitoring arrangements. Leaders maintain daily oversight of these systems and follow up any alerts or concerns promptly. Pupils know which adults to approach for help and are confident that staff listen and respond appropriately.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	The Mead School
Department for Education number	886/6033
Address	The Mead School 16 Frant Road Tunbridge Wells Kent TN2 5SN
Phone number	01892 525837
Email address	office@themeadschool.co.uk
Website	www.themeadschool.co.uk
Proprietor	The Mead School Ltd
Chair	Mr Sam Antrobus
Headteacher	Mrs Catherine Openshaw
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	202
Date of previous inspection	28 February to 2 March 2023

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Information about the school

52. The Mead School is an independent co-educational day school located in Tunbridge Wells. It is owned by Mead School Ltd. The proprietor body is supported by an advisory board of governors. Since 2016, the school has been part of the Wishford Schools group. The school comprises three sections: Pre-Reception for children aged three to four years old; Reception and Years 1 and 2, for pupils aged four to seven years old; and Years 3 to 6, for pupils aged seven to eleven years old.

53. There are 30 children in the early years, comprising two Reception classes and one Pre-Reception class.

54. The school has identified 14 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

55. The school has no pupils who speak English as an additional language.

56. The school states its aims are to be a community that empowers individuals to flourish and enable every child to be successful. It seeks to deliver an inspirational education which fosters curiosity and ambition. The school intends to develop every child's independence and wellbeing and promote the school rule: 'Be kind, listen and do your best'.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	6 to 8 January 2026

57. A team of three inspectors and a shadow inspector visited the school for two and a half days.

58. 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.

59. 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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