

School inspection report

19 to 21 September 2023

Thetford Grammar School

Bridge Street
Thetford
Norfolk
IP24 3AF

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. Leaders ensure that pupils receive teaching in a wide range of curriculum areas. Teachers plan lessons well, have secure specialist subject knowledge and provide regular feedback to pupils, which helps them learn. However, activities in lessons do not always challenge more able pupils.
2. Leaders have implemented the recommendation of the previous inspection to use data to evaluate pupil progress. This data shows that pupils make good progress overall, particularly those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those with lower prior attainment. Specialist staff provide effective, informed and individual support.
3. Pupils in the sixth form receive lessons well matched to their needs. However, preparatory school pupils are provided with too few opportunities for practical exploration through which they develop the ability to learn for themselves. Leaders recognise the need for improvement and have introduced an effective and rigorous evaluation of teaching but this is not yet fully implemented.
4. The school effectively promotes mutual trust and respect. Pupils report that there is very little discriminatory language or behaviour based on race or gender. Teachers clearly articulate the school's expectations for behaviour and pupils are, for the most part, well behaved. A few senior pupils fail to meet these expectations.
5. The personal, health and social education (PHSE) programme, which includes relationships and sex education (RSE) and careers guidance, prepares pupils well for their future lives. The physical and mental health of all pupils are given a high priority. Pupils from a range of nationalities integrate well with their peers.
6. The premises and the accommodation and facilities are maintained to an adequate standard. There is inappropriate storage of cleaning and other materials. The school has not conducted a suitable risk assessment to identify and manage site security issues. There is an inconsistent approach to risk management and, as a result, there are issues relating to site security. Standards are not met in some areas.
7. Staff show a secure understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and take appropriate action when necessary. As a result, the culture of safeguarding is effective and is one of vigilance, sharing and early reporting. Some minor errors in recording recruitment checks were addressed during the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards:

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met consistently
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Areas for action

- Leaders and managers must effectively manage risks relating to the school site.

Recommended next steps

- Leaders and managers should ensure that all areas of the site are well maintained, and there is appropriate storage of cleaning and other materials.
- Leaders and managers should continue to ensure the preparatory (prep) school curriculum encourages pupils to think and learn for themselves.
- All teachers should plan and teach lessons that provide suitable challenge for more able pupils.
- Leaders should accelerate recent initiatives to evaluate and improve teaching and learning.
- Leaders should ensure that recruitment checks are recorded accurately and promptly.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders and managers have an accurate understanding of the school's strengths and areas for development. The recommendation from the previous inspection to make consistent use of assessment data has been successfully addressed. This has identified inconsistencies with the progress of the more able pupils. As a result, leaders have introduced initiatives to establish a more strategic overview and monitoring of teaching and learning. These have not been fully implemented.
9. The school's aims, ethos and boarding principles are available in writing to parents and staff, known to pupils and can be seen operating in practice. The school provides an education tailored to the needs of most pupils, although some more able pupils are not provided with consistent challenge. Leaders ensure support for each child as an individual and deliver a high level of pastoral care.
10. Boarding staff have taken successful steps to ensure the full integration of each intake of overseas pupils into the school community. Leaders of boarding and other boarding staff have appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles effectively, some are undertaking further training to enhance their skills in the leadership and management of boarding.
11. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 and supports pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) by improving accessibility for all groups of pupils. Information is made available and provided as required. Leaders have created effective links with other agencies, including local safeguarding partners and medical professionals. The school liaises closely with statutory and non-statutory bodies over issues that concern pupils' wellbeing.
12. Proprietorial overview is undertaken through a director of education and an advisory board. The advisory board and the director of education monitor key areas, particularly safeguarding, academic performance and pastoral care. However, minor oversights in the school's central register of appointments were not identified.
13. Leaders commission audits when necessary to inform and evaluate new developments and engage external advice to inform their decision-making. For example, the effectiveness of the school's arrangements for pupils who have SEND have recently been evaluated by an independent professional body, which has helped to ensure effective provision in this area.
14. The assessment and management of risk in many identified areas of school life, for example science, sport or school trips, is effective. Leaders have identified the risk to pupils in crossing the road between the two sections of the main site and provide additional supervision for younger pupils. Leaders have raised this issue with local traffic authorities. However, leaders have not identified deficiencies in site security and therefore have not taken effective action to reduce these risks.
15. Leadership of the early years provision is effective. Teaching and learning are shaped around the needs of individual children, and children enjoy the free interchange between indoor and outdoor activities. This positive atmosphere helps them to make good progress in their learning. However, identified risks relating to security of the early years accommodation are not managed effectively.
16. Reports to parents are detailed and they receive regular and helpful information on their child's progress and achievement. Leaders respond quickly and appropriately to any concerns or complaints that they receive from parents. The school listens to the views of individual pupils.

17. In most areas, written policies are appropriately implemented, reflect the relevant legislation and guidance and are understood by staff and pupils. In the area of risk management leaders have not mitigated potential risks to pupils.

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

18. Standards are not met consistently with respect to the understanding and management of risk. As a result, standards relating to governance, leadership and management are not met, and in consequence, those relating to the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding and the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively so that pupils undertake a programme of lessons and activities that give them experience in a range of subject areas. Inclusive teaching promotes fundamental British values and respect for others. The curriculum is planned carefully to meet the needs of pupils. However, opportunities to challenge the more able pupils are sometimes missed. Pupils, including those with SEND, make good progress overall. Overall, the pupils achieve results at GCSE and A level either in line or just above predictions based upon their prior attainment.
20. Leaders ensure effective support for pupils with particular needs. For example, pupils for whom English is an additional language (EAL) make good progress because of the very effective support they receive from staff. Additional support is tailored to the needs of pupils to ensure that they can access the curriculum and make good progress in lessons. For example, reinforcing technical vocabulary or the sequential steps in mathematics problems secured pupils' understanding and confidence.
21. Specialist staff brief teachers on approaches that are effective for individual pupils. As a result, pupils with lower prior attainment make progress exceeding that predicted from their starting points. Teachers assess pupils' work and attainment regularly and thoroughly. Pupils in the prep school are well prepared for the skills they need to be successful in the senior school and pupils in the senior school are prepared well for their destinations beyond school.
22. Children in the early years make good progress in their speaking, listening, literacy and numerical skills because the planning, management and implementation of the early years programme is effective. Staff encourage children by modelling their language and develop their use of numbers through practice in a wide variety of contexts.
23. In many lessons, teachers use a variety of methods and activities to manage behaviour and cater for pupils' individual learning needs so that pupils are engaged and interested in their work. Teachers' secure subject knowledge ensures that pupils understand new concepts. Teachers provide pupils with regular and thorough feedback on their work and progress. However, in both senior and prep school lessons, activities do not always challenge and engage the more able pupils. Assessment results show that the progress of this group is not as strong as that of other groups.
24. Pupils in the sixth form are self-motivated, and lessons are well matched to their needs. For example, in mathematics and English lessons, pupils synthesise complex ideas and attempt increasingly difficult calculations.
25. There is a wide range of extra-curricular opportunities covering a diverse range of activities. These are age-appropriate, and enhance the development of pupils' emotional, social and creative skills. Many pupils achieve high standards in art, music and drama. Activities such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme develop pupils' leadership and life skills effectively. Boarders have access to a good range and choice of activities outside teaching time.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

26. Leaders ensure that pupils experience a varied range of physical activities. The extra-curricular programme includes physical, creative and contemplative elements, which support pupils' personal and physical development. School teams enjoy success in a range of sports and activities. Leaders encourage participation and pupils recognise that physical activity and reflection support their wellbeing. Leaders ensure that boarders have sufficient free time to pursue individual interests and social activities.
27. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes are age appropriate. In the prep school, leaders provide a balanced range of activities and well-resourced classrooms. Pupils develop secure self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence from the starting point of 'Marvellous Me', a focus on their own identity, strengths and background.
28. Teachers support pupils' understanding of PSHE through discussions on topics such as nutrition, oral health and hygiene. As a result, younger pupils understand how to stay healthy. The school provides pupils with a comfortable space should they become ill and need to rest or recover or if they have medical needs. Staff receive regular training in first aid and all staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid. Levels of supervision are appropriate for pupils' ages and needs, and the prep school includes tight protocols for crossing the road between the two sites. Suitable precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Fire evacuation drills take place termly, including in boarding time, and staff receive regular fire training.
29. In the senior school and the sixth form, teachers encourage pupils to explore and discuss their understanding of the topics. Leaders discuss the draft PSHE programme with pupils. Therefore, most pupils find the lessons interesting and relevant to their needs. This is demonstrated by their maturity and consideration for others.
30. Pupils start to develop a spiritual awareness through the religious studies curriculum, which emphasizes moral and philosophical debate as well as factual knowledge of world religions. Schemes of work for PSHE and other subjects promote mutual trust and respect, particularly for those of different gender, faith or national background. There is very little discriminatory language or behaviour based on race or gender, and pupils are tolerant of each other.
31. Teachers have high expectations of pupils' behaviour and attitudes. The anti-bullying strategies are effective in actively preventing and minimising bullying between pupils. Staff are well trained and deal quickly and effectively with any issues that occur. Consequently, pupils are co-operative and show empathy and sympathy towards each other. Fellow pupils enjoy helping those whose English is an additional language to improve their English skills.
32. Pupils are, for the most part, well behaved and critical of the attitudes of the few senior pupils who are not. Children in the early years are kind to each other, often sharing equipment and ideas. They accept responsibility for their own behaviour, guided by the clear expectations of the school. They admit any wrong-doing and are supportive of any sanctions taken.

33. Boarders, almost all of whom are from overseas, feel well supported and their induction is effective in preparing them for life in the United Kingdom. Boarding accommodation is comfortable and well maintained. The standard of accommodation provided by host families is checked by the school to ensure it is appropriate. Boarders enjoy spending time with each other and boarding staff. They work together to prepare meals at the weekend, and this serves to further enhance the boarding community spirit.
34. Positive relationships between staff and boarders mean that boarders feel heard and that their views matter. Boarders can always contact a member of staff, including at night, and they are comfortable contacting the school's independent listener should they wish to do so. The privacy of boarders is respected. Boarders have quality nutritionally balanced meals, and a variety of snacks are readily available at other times. The boarding accommodation is secure.
35. The school premises and accommodation are maintained to an adequate standard. The proprietors are aware of some security risks but have not taken effective action to manage these risks. The storage of some cleaning and other materials is insecure.
36. Staff are alert to any attendance issues and follow up absence promptly. Attendance and admission registers are properly maintained.

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

37. Standards are not met with regard to the maintenance of premises.

Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.

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

38. Leaders cultivate pupils' international outlook and prepare them for success beyond the school, inspiring them to contribute positively as global citizens. Teachers regularly focus on these inclusive aims. For example, in sixth-form geography lessons teachers draw on pupils' diverse experiences, perceptions and contributions.
39. Pupils are well prepared for future life in both British society and the wider world. Having listened to pupils' requests for greater understanding of political systems around the world, leaders encourage discussion of international issues.
40. Senior school pupils receive helpful careers advice. For example, the science curriculum links topics studied to careers followed by former pupils or parents, who are invited to visit the school to speak to pupils. Data is used effectively to inform subject choice at GCSE and A level, or to recommend vocational courses elsewhere. There is a strong and unwavering focus on the needs of individual pupils.
41. In the sixth form, careers and university advice blends the need for personal guidance and personal research. The approach is effective, because almost all pupils follow their chosen courses when they leave school. The variety of subjects followed reflects the impartiality of the advice given. Pupils follow pathways based on their interests and strengths and are supported by the school to make appropriate choices. The sixth form PSHE scheme of work includes practical advice and guidance on how to handle money once they have moved on to higher education.
42. Pupils in the prep school develop strong leadership skills because of the opportunities they are given. Pupils in Year 6 help and encourage younger pupils during break and at lunchtime. Pupils in the senior school are equally supportive of each other. For example, new overseas boarders with developing English language skills are supported by other pupils with their schoolwork.
43. Leaders recognise that the school's central site provides rich opportunities for pupils to volunteer in the town and wider area, which they do with enthusiasm. Some of these are fundraising activities, whilst others provide more direct support for those in need. Pupils develop awareness and compassion for the causes they support.
44. School leaders promote an active approach to the school's clear moral code. Pupils have astute awareness of the contribution they can make both at school and in the wider community in which they live. They are sympathetic and empathetic to the challenges others might face. Pupils show respect for others.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

45. Safeguarding procedures regarding children at risk and those in particular need are implemented effectively. Staff show a secure understanding of their responsibilities, including regarding child-on-child abuse and are alert to any issues. Staff show appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing policy and safeguarding procedures and are confident to use them. They understand that they can make a direct referral to children's services if necessary. They take appropriate action when necessary.
46. Safeguarding records are detailed and well maintained. Training of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), safeguarding team and other staff is up to date and in line with local requirements. Pupils receive guidance on staying safe and understand what they have been taught, including in relation to e-safety. New arrangements for the monitoring and filtering of online technology are effective. The physical and mental health of all pupils involved in any incident are given a high priority.
47. There are suitable arrangements for managing any allegations about staff or any potential misconduct. They include seeking immediate advice from the local authority designated safeguarding officer (LADO). The school engages with the relevant local safeguarding partners. Procedures are followed effectively, and the school follows up actions promptly. The school understands its role in reporting any person to relevant regulatory bodies. The needs of boarders and those hosted by families are prioritised.
48. The school follows safer recruitment processes to ensure that adults who work or volunteer at the school have been checked before they begin at the school. However, some minor misinterpretations of the requirements were addressed during the inspection so that the central register of appointments is now accurate. Those with proprietorial responsibilities conduct an annual review of safeguarding but failed to notice the errors.

The extent to which the school meets standards relating to safeguarding:

All the relevant Standards are met

Schedule of unmet standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The relevant Standards are not met

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34 (1)(a), (b) and (c)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school— (a) demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently. (b) fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and actively promote the wellbeing of pupils. (c) actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 8(b)	The standard in this sub-paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures the school meets the requirements of the National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools.
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16(a) and (b)	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that (a) the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and (b) appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified
EYFS 3.65	The requirement in this paragraph is that providers must ensure that they take all reasonable steps to ensure staff and children in their care are not exposed to risks and must be able to demonstrate how they are managing risk.
NMS 2.1, 2.2, 2.4 and 2.5	This standard is met if the school’s leadership and management and governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and take appropriate action where necessary • demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required • fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met • actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

The relevant Standards are met

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

The relevant Standards are not met consistently

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 5, paragraph 25	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the school premises and the accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured.
EYFS 3.55	The requirement in this paragraph is that providers must ensure that their premises, including overall floor space and outdoor spaces, are fit for purpose and suitable for the age of children cared for and the activities provided on the premises.
NMS 9.2	The school should meet the standard that premises, accommodation and facilities provided therein are maintained to a standard such that, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of pupils are ensured, and that they provide a safe environment in which they can live and learn.
NMS 9.3	The school ensures that the welfare of boarders at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

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

The relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

The relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Thetford Grammar School
Department for Education number	926/6128
Address	Bridge Street Thetford Norfolk IP24 3AF
Website	www.thetfordgrammar.co.uk
Proprietor	Thetford Grammar School Ltd
Chair	Mr Jay Liu
Headteacher	Mrs Amanda Faye
Age range	3 to 19
Number of pupils	203
Number of boarding pupils	14
Date of previous inspection	12 December 2019

Information about the school

49. Thetford Grammar School is a co-educational day and boarding school situated in the centre of Thetford in Norfolk. It occupies two sites, separated by a road, with nearby playing fields. It consists of a prep school and a senior school, which includes a sixth form for about 40 pupils. There is a separate boarding house. The current headteacher took up her role in September 2023. The school is owned by China Financial Services, of which Thetford Grammar School Ltd is a subsidiary.
50. There is one boarding house for senior school pupils situated elsewhere in the town, accommodating both male and female pupils, almost all from overseas. Some other senior pupils are accommodated with host families.
51. The early years setting, which includes a nursery, is part of the prep school.
52. The school has identified 51 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
53. English is an additional language for 19 pupils.
54. The school states that its aims are to provide a unique personalise education for all pupils; to celebrate and support each child as an individual and challenging them to achieve and grow. It seeks to provide a stimulating curriculum and excellent levels of pastoral care that enable the highest possible academic achievement and personal development of each pupil; and to cultivate in pupils an international outlook that prepares them for success beyond the school and inspires them to contribute positively as global citizens.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 19 to 21 September 2023

55. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
56. The inspectors:
- held discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, other members of staff and the director of the proprietorial body
 - visited different areas of the school, observed lessons and assemblies, and talked with groups of pupils
 - scrutinised pupils' written and creative work and a range of documentation, records and policies.
57. 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 2023

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