

School inspection report

03 October 2023 to 05 October 2023

Esland Bedford School

Unit 54
Wrest Park
Silsoe
MK45 4HS

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 proprietorial body has not ensured that leaders have the appropriate skills and knowledge to make sure that all Standards and statutory guidance are met. This includes when pupils are educated off-site and in care homes. Leaders do not take full account of the risks and possible impact of decisions that they make, including by considering the effectiveness and the impact of the communication between school staff and staff who provide off-site education for some pupils.
2. Although leaders have ensured that pupils develop speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills, they have not designed a curriculum which covers all of the required areas. They have not implemented suitable plans and a framework for assessment well enough. Pupils are not sufficiently motivated to apply their knowledge and skills effectively in lessons. They are not developing their physical and creative abilities well. Extra-curricular activities, trips and alternative provision are not planned well. They do not sufficiently take into account the age, interests and needs of pupils.
3. The premises and facilities are maintained to a suitable standard. However, pupils do not have regular opportunities to play outside with appropriate supervision and support which considers their individual needs. Therefore, leaders are not actively promoting the wellbeing of pupils.
4. Plans for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) have not been implemented effectively. Careers education is not planned and implemented appropriately for all pupils. Leaders have not sufficiently considered the choices offered to pupils, including those who are educated off-site. Some pupils are unaware of the appropriate pathways to follow, so they can gain suitable qualifications and experiences to enhance their lives going forward. This results in pupils not being effectively prepared for the responsibilities and experiences of life in British society.
5. Leaders have recently taken effective action to implement safeguarding requirements detailed in the school's safeguarding review. The proprietorial board and leaders are aware that they must sustain these improvements to consistently meet the standards and strengthen the school's culture of safeguarding.

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 not met consistently
- 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 not met consistently
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met

Areas for action

The proprietorial board must ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently
- actively promote the wellbeing of pupils

so that:

- Leaders implement appropriate monitoring and evaluation of systems to check that the Standards are consistently met, including when pupils are educated off-site.
- Leaders ensure that they assess and manage risk effectively when making decisions.
- Leaders plan and effectively implement the curriculum and extracurricular activities to take into account pupils' age, aptitude and needs including those with education, health and care plans (EHC), across all subjects.
- Leaders ensure that an appropriate framework for assessment is in place and implemented effectively.
- Leaders ensure that teaching is well-planned, takes into account pupils' prior achievement and enables all pupils to make progress according to their ability.
- Leaders ensure that policies and schemes of work for PSHE and RSE are implemented fully.
- Leaders ensure that all pupils have access to outdoor space and learning with appropriate supervision that meets their individual needs.
- Leaders implement careers education which enables pupils to make informed choices and to fulfil their potential.

Recommended next steps

- Leaders should embed the new systems and processes to ensure that safeguarding is consistently effective.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

6. The school has clear aims for its pupils which include enabling them to achieve academic and personal success, so that they become effective members of their communities. The number of changes in leadership, management and the proprietor have led to uncertainty, lack of direction and lack of focus on meeting the Standards consistently. The school has recently instigated an extensive self-evaluation process, to identify areas of weakness and necessary actions. However, the education of pupils who are off-site and in care homes has not been given careful attention so that all pupils access a curriculum that meets their needs.
7. Leaders have not ensured that the curriculum covers all of the required areas. Appropriate plans, schemes of work, assessment processes and activities are not in place. Some individual teachers enable pupils to achieve good outcomes in some aspects of their subjects. However, leaders have not ensured that overall, the quality of teaching enables pupils to make good progress.
8. With the support of local safeguarding partners, leaders are taking effective action to address safeguarding weaknesses detailed in the school's safeguarding review. Leaders suitably monitor safeguarding, particularly through regular checks by the safeguarding governor. Leaders have appropriately identified safeguarding risks in the school and in the care homes. They are now maintaining a more secure culture of safeguarding. Consequently, the school meets the Standards related to safeguarding.
9. Although there are suitable risk assessments in place for effective safeguarding and to maintain health and safety, leaders and governors have not considered risk sufficiently at a strategic level and the possible impact of the decisions they make. This applies particularly in relation to how the school and care homes communicate and work together to ensure that all of the Standards are met consistently.
10. Leaders have started to implement a training programme to meet improvements in safeguarding that were highlighted in a recent review. However, there are currently some aspects of the policy and procedures detailed in training that have not been implemented consistently well.
11. Other school policies have been updated when necessary. Leaders provide the necessary information to parents. They manage complaints appropriately.
12. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act.

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

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

13. Most teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they teach. They use a range of strategies and plan activities to successfully support the learning of individual pupils. The use of art and occupational therapy particularly contribute to meeting the needs of pupils. They have opportunities to express themselves creatively and physically.
14. However, curriculum plans and schemes of work do not sufficiently consider the ages, aptitudes and needs of pupils, including those with an EHC plan and those receiving education off-site. Pupils are not given experience of all the required areas of learning.
15. Some pupils receiving off site provision receive a curriculum which is restricted mainly to mathematics, English and some science. Consequently, some pupils do not have the opportunity to learn and make good progress according to their ability.
16. Overall pupils develop their speaking, listening, literacy and numeracy skills. Tutor times are used effectively to develop pupils' literacy skills particularly through extended and open discussions with staff and in pupil groups. However, in lessons, pupils are not consistently motivated and supported to apply their knowledge and skills well.
17. There are positive relationships between pupils and staff. Teachers know the pupils well and mostly use a variety of strategies to manage pupils' behaviour successfully.
18. Pupils talk positively about their school experiences, stating that staff support their academic progress and personal wellbeing. Pupils, who have not been able to attend mainstream school in the past, are often able to do so due to the support and care of staff.
19. Some effective marking and feedback to pupils is evident. It is however inconsistent because leaders have not provided a suitable framework of assessment. This means that teachers cannot effectively use assessment information to plan lessons, track pupils' progress and evaluate the impact of the support they provide.
20. Leaders have carried out a review of examination results, the curriculum, assessment and the quality of teaching. However, there is no systematic monitoring and quality assurance of the curriculum, teaching and pupil outcomes. This has adversely impacted pupils' progress and attainment including in examinations.
21. In 2023, leaders took a late decision to enter pupils for IGCSE examinations. Although new staff were appointed to teach English, mathematics and art, pupils found it difficult to cope with the demands of the course and/or adjust to the new teaching. Consequently, pupils' attainment in IGCSE was well below their expected outcomes.
22. Some pupils enjoy extra-curricular activities and aspects of their alternative provision, including a motor vehicles project and cookery classes. Younger pupils particularly enjoy a range of activities which include Lego, card games and chess. However, extra-curricular activities, trips and alternative provision are not well planned. Leaders do not sufficiently consider the age, interests and needs of individual pupils.

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

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

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

23. Leaders ensure that the behaviour and anti-bullying policies and procedures are effectively implemented. Incidents of unkindness or bullying are managed appropriately. Staff effectively use the school's positive and restorative approach to successfully enable pupils to reflect on their behaviour. Pupils are helped to consider how they can move forwards positively with any issues.
24. Pupils develop increasing responsibility for their own behaviour. They speak maturely about what is right and wrong and why it is important to make responsible choices. Pupils show an awareness of other cultures and of different groups. They show respect and kindness towards one another in the classroom and around the school. Through praise and the development of secure attachments, staff successfully encourage pupils to develop their self-esteem, self-confidence.
25. Leaders have suitable plans in place for the teaching of RSE that have regard to statutory guidance. They have consulted with parents and published the RSE scheme on the school's website. However, these plans have not been fully implemented. Pupils and staff say that although tutor times are supposed to be used for PHSE and RSE, this time is too short and focuses on the transition of pupils to and from school.
26. The building has recently been redecorated inside and all aspects of health and safety are managed carefully and thoroughly. Staff are trained appropriately in first aid and there is a suitably equipped first aid room. Medicines are locked away securely. Records of accidents are properly kept and the administration of medicines carried out appropriately.
27. There is a suitable fire risk assessment in place. This is carried out by a qualified external professional. The fire alarm and fire extinguisher checks have been carried out, as required. There are termly fire drills, which are recorded appropriately. All electrical appliances have been certified. The pupils have access to drinking water which has been suitably checked for safety by an external provider.
28. Admissions and attendance registers are appropriately kept. Pupil absence is now checked effectively. Appropriate strategies are put in place to meet the needs of pupils who feel unable to attend school because of their complex and additional needs.
29. Pupils enjoy indoor and outdoor physical education in a nearby sports hall and small outdoor area. Staff safely escort pupils to the sports hall. However, pupils do not have regular opportunities to play outside with appropriate supervision and support which considers their individual needs. This limits the chances for pupils to develop their spiritual and emotional development through nature and restricts opportunities for them to choose to self-regulate and regain control of their behaviour in an outdoor space.

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

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

30. The school has reviewed its provision for PHSE. Staff effectively use the scheme as the basis for planning. However, PHSE has not been incorporated into the curriculum adequately. Consequently, leaders have not implemented the school's PSHE scheme in line with its aims and statutory requirements.
31. Pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 can study an established financial curriculum. Staff successfully link learning to practical opportunities to help pupils develop and apply financial knowledge. For example, in food technology, pupils successfully manage a budget when planning and preparing a banquet.
32. There are some examples where pupils have been supported in gaining relevant experiences and qualifications. For example, equine therapy and a childcare placement. However, the school has not sufficiently considered the range of choices offered to pupils, including those who are educated off-site. Pupils are not clear about appropriate pathways and how they gain suitable qualifications and experiences that will enhance their lives. Careers education is in the early stages of development. It is not planned and implemented appropriately.

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

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

Safeguarding

33. Since the appointment of the current headteacher, leaders have conducted an extensive review of safeguarding in line with the local safeguarding partnership framework. Several serious concerns were identified. With extensive support and guidance from local children's services and the local authority designated officer (LADO), leaders have suitably addressed the concerns raised in the audit. A review conducted by local children's services during the inspection highlighted the positive improvement. These include the appointment of a new safeguarding team, strengthened by an experienced designated safeguarding lead (DSL). The DSL team has the knowledge and skills to monitor safeguarding effectively, ensuring that the policy and procedures are implemented consistently. The DSL team effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities. A recent staff appointment with responsibility for liaison with the care homes, where some pupils live, has strengthened the monitoring of safeguarding for these pupils.
34. Leaders provide safeguarding training, and this is having a positive impact on the safeguarding culture of the school. Staff know the requirements of safeguarding policies and procedures. They understand the importance of raising all concerns and have a clear understanding of how to report concerns and to whom.
35. Pupils state that they feel safe in school. Staff teach them how to be safe, including when online. Pupils can name several staff to whom they can turn if they are worried or concerned, including their key person.
36. The new electronic system for recording safeguarding concerns is used consistently by all staff including those responsible for pupils off-site. Records are detailed, taking into consideration contextual information including pupils' special educational needs. Safeguarding concerns and the identification of any bullying, child-on-child abuse and abuse linked to different groups of pupils are recorded in detail and leaders take appropriate action. Records also suitably identify and address pupils' pastoral and mental health needs. Follow-up actions and patterns are monitored effectively by the DSL. During the daily review of pupils, staff thoroughly consider the welfare of each pupil, any potential risks and any further action required.
37. Safer recruitment procedures are followed carefully since the safeguarding review. Gaps have been rectified and checks are recorded appropriately on the single central record. There is a suitable system in place whereby the headteacher and managers regularly review recruitment procedures and records, taking prompt action if there are any shortcomings.
38. The governor responsible for safeguarding meets regularly with the DSL, to maintain effective oversight of safeguarding policies and their implementation. Local children's services have planned further visits to the school to support the school in ensuring that safeguarding requirements continue to be met and that the culture of safeguarding is embedded.

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
34 (1) (a)	Leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34 (1) (b)	Leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34 (1) (c)	Leadership and management actively promote the wellbeing of pupils
16 (a) and 16 (b)	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 appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

The relevant Standards are not met consistently

Paragraph number	Standard
1	The standards about the quality of education provided at the school are those contained in this Part.
2(1)	The standard in this paragraph is met if—
2(1) (a) and (b) (i)	The proprietor ensures that a written policy on the curriculum, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work is drawn up and implemented effectively taking into account the ages, aptitudes and needs of all pupils, including those pupils with an EHC plan;
2(2) (a)	that full-time supervised education for pupils of compulsory school age gives pupils experience in linguistic, mathematical, scientific, technological, human and social, physical and aesthetic and creative education;
2(2) (h)	that all pupils have the opportunity to learn and make progress.
3	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that the teaching at the school—
3(a)	Teaching enables pupils to acquire new knowledge and make good progress according to their ability so that they increase their understanding and develop their skills in the subjects taught.
3(b)	Teaching fosters in pupils' self-motivation, the application of intellectual, physical and creative effort, interest in their work and the ability to think and learn for themselves.
3(c)	Teaching involves well-planned lessons and effective teaching methods, activities and management of class time.
3(d)	Teaching shows a good understanding of the aptitudes, needs and prior

	attainments of the pupils, and ensures that these are taken into account in the planning of lessons.
3(g)	Teaching demonstrates that a framework is in place to assess pupils' work regularly and thoroughly and use information from that assessment to plan teaching so that pupils can progress.
4	The proprietor ensures that a framework for pupil performance to be evaluated, by reference to the school's own aims as provided to parents or national norms, or to both, is in place

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

The relevant Standards are not met consistently

Paragraph number	Standard
2A(1) (a)	The proprietor ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with primary education at the school is provided with relationships education.
2A(1) (b)	The proprietor ensures that every registered pupil who is provided with secondary education at the school is provided with relationships and sex education; except where a pupil's parent requests that the pupil is wholly or partly excused from sex education provided as part of relationships and sex education, the pupil is so excused until the request is withdrawn, unless or to the extent that the headteacher considers that the pupil should not be so excused
29(1) (b)	The proprietor ensures that suitable outdoor space is provided in order to enable pupils to play outside.

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

The relevant Standards are not met consistently

Paragraph number	Standard
2(2) (d) (i)	The proprietor ensures that personal, social, health and economic education reflects the school's aims and ethos and is implemented effectively.
2(2) (e)(i), (ii) and (iii)	The proprietor ensures for pupils receiving secondary education, access to accurate, up-to-date careers guidance that is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> presented in an impartial manner; enables pupils to make informed choices about a broad range of career options; helps to encourage pupils to fulfil their potential.

Safeguarding

The relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Esland Bedford
Department for Education number	822/6013
Address	Unit 54 Wrest Park Silsoe Bedfordshire MK45 4HS
Website	eslandcare.co.uk
Proprietor	Esland North Ltd.
Chair	Mrs Jill Palmer
Headteacher	Mr Rhett Cameron
Age range	8 to 18
Number of pupils	25
Date of previous inspection	26 to 28 February 2019

Information about the school

39. Esland Bedford School is an independent, co-educational special day school that was founded in 2006. It is owned and managed by Esland Care and is overseen by a proprietorial governing board. The school occupies a single building on a small commercial estate. It is structured flexibly around pupils' age, ability and interests. Since the previous inspection in 2019 (when it was named Oracle School) the school has changed proprietors and a new headteacher has been appointed.
40. All pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. Twenty-four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Nine pupils are registered at the school and receive education off site in liaison with staff managing Esland Care homes.
41. No pupil has English as an additional language.
42. The school states that its aims are for pupils to:
- leave Esland Bedford School with a range of academic qualifications and social skills that will stay with them throughout their adult life
 - progress in these areas to form the foundation of future success in their employment, their independence enabling them to become effective members of their local communities
 - follow a curriculum which contributes to a well-balanced education, developing the abilities and life skills of individual pupils so that they will hold a valuable, positive and active place in society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 3 to 5 October 2023

43. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
44. Details of inspection activities undertaken:
- discussions with senior leaders and a range of staff
 - discussion with a group of governors, including the chair and safeguarding governor
 - lesson observations, including joint lesson walks with staff leaders
 - discussions with pupils including with samples of their work
 - observation of breaktimes and a sample of extra-curricular activities
 - observation of assemblies
 - observation of pupil registration
 - examination of curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.
45. 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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