

School inspection report

31 October to 2 November 2023

Apex Primary School

60-62 Argyle Road
Ilford
IG1 3BG

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. Trustees work with senior leaders to develop clear strategic planning. The school's Islamic ethos is at the heart of their vision. Trustees collaborate closely with the school's leadership to actively promote pupils' wellbeing in keeping with the school's motto *Helping Little Feet Climb Mountains*. Together they ensure that the school's aim of equipping pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to live as spiritual, confident, and healthy individuals is successfully achieved.
2. The trustees have a clear understanding of the management of risk. They understand their responsibility to ensure that they and school leaders have up to date knowledge and skills to lead and manage the school effectively. Leaders are knowledgeable about the requirements of the Standards and ensure that they are met. The effectiveness of the trustees' oversight of policy implementation is adequate overall, but lacks rigour in some areas, for example relating to recruitment checks. Some administrative oversights were rectified during the inspection.
3. Leaders maintain the documentation required by the Standards, but record keeping in some areas, for example of misbehaviour and pupils' concerns, is neither formalised nor systematic. This adversely affects the ease with which information, patterns and trends can be tracked.
4. The recently introduced cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning is in the preliminary stages of its implementation and at times results in repetition of topics covered in earlier year groups. Most pupils attain the expected standards for eleven-year-olds in national curriculum tests. Leaders monitor lesson planning and delivery, but this has yet to have the planned impact in all parts of the school.
5. Pupils are well cared for and feel happy. They are well behaved and show great respect and consideration for others. The school's policy for promoting good behaviour and preventing bullying is effectively underpinned by the school's evident positive culture. Leaders ensure that pupils can express any concerns and pupils are confident that they will be heard and supported.
6. Children in the early years enjoy the safe classroom environment and have a positive rapport with their teachers. Their social skills develop fast as they interact and play happily with their peers. The rate of their progress as independent learners is sometimes hindered through lack of appropriate challenge, open questions and opportunity for exploration. Most children achieve the expected levels of development by the end of the Reception year.

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

- Ensure that trustees maintain rigorous oversight of the implementation of school policies and procedures, including the effectiveness of the newly introduced curriculum as it embeds.
- Ensure that the newly introduced curriculum reflects the learning needs of pupils as they progress through the school and does not repeat prior learning.
- Ensure teachers receive training that enables them to plan lessons well, using effective teaching methods and activities.
- Ensure that children in the early years are presented with opportunities for exploration and enquiry.
- Ensure that all record keeping is consistent, formalised and systematic, enabling themes to be identified.
- Further develop the effectiveness of provision for pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. The trustees and school leaders have a clear vision for the development of the pupils' experience, wellbeing and education. The trustees play a supportive role in the management of the school. They set a clear strategic direction, ensuring that the school's aims and Islamic ethos are central to their plans. The trustees ensure that leaders maintain up to date skills to undertake their roles effectively.
8. Leaders have a good working knowledge of Standards and guidance. However, in some areas, the implementation of policies is less secure, and leaders' oversight has not identified errors. For example, the recording of recruitment checks needed amendment during the inspection. Although trustees understand their responsibility to oversee the implementation of policies, their oversight can sometimes lack rigour and detail. Record keeping, while in place for examples of pupil behaviour and early parental and pupil concerns, lacks the organisation structure that would enable trends to be effectively monitored.
9. Leaders recently redesigned the way in which the curriculum is delivered by introducing a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning. Their aim is to provide a meaningful and engaging experience for pupils that is relevant to the ethos of the school. Leaders have established a programme of staff training and monitoring of teaching and recognise that greater depth of training is required. Some teachers and curriculum leaders are not confident in planning and delivering lessons in this way. This results in inconsistency both in teaching strategies and meeting individual learning needs as, in some lessons, there is not an appropriate level of challenge.
10. Leaders are skilled and knowledgeable in promoting the wellbeing of pupils. Governors and leaders liaise frequently to be sure that all procedures to safeguard pupils are effective. Through regular leadership meetings and discussion with staff, leaders effectively identify risk of harm and act to minimise any identified.
11. Pupils are confident that they can express any concerns they may have. They feel safe in the knowledge that they will be listened to and support will be given. Leaders are aware that harmful behaviours towards pupils may occur and understand that negative experiences can be hidden by positive feedback from the majority. They carefully consider pupil communications, staff observations and responses to surveys to identify any issues in order to act upon them. Responses to such concerns, for example occasional teasing at play times, are swift.
12. Leaders ensure that all necessary information is provided to parents and official bodies as required by the Standards. An appropriate and effective procedure for parental complaints is in place. Records of formal complaints are held centrally, but the recording of informal complaints is not always systematic or easy to access to identify themes.
13. Children in the early years experience a suitable programme of age-appropriate activities that are often tailored to include their individual interests. Staff liaise regularly with parents about children's development. Written reports to parents are informative about the stage of a child's development.
14. Leaders in the early years ensure that children are kept safe and well cared for within a secure and happy environment. School leaders work together with early years staff to implement a shared vision for the setting. They hold regular supervision meetings to discuss their classroom practice so that continuous improvement may be fostered and any issues or concerns about children discussed.

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 have implemented a broad curriculum through which pupils develop a range of knowledge, skills and understanding. It is taught through a recently introduced thematic approach which encourages cross-curricular learning. Whilst this enables curriculum leaders to plan together, it sometimes results in the same lesson being taught to consecutive year groups without allowance for their individual aptitudes and needs.
17. Pupils speak confidently and listen respectfully to others in conversation and discussion. Pupils in the Reception year can recognise and pronounce the sounds that letters make and by the time they leave pupils have secure reading and comprehension skills. From the earliest years pupils learn to speak and read Arabic proficiently as part of their Islamic studies. Pupils develop mathematical skills steadily from a foundation of counting and ordering numbers to application of knowledge and investigation at an age-appropriate level at the top of the school.
18. Most children achieve the expected levels of development by the end of the Reception year. The youngest children experience a suitable range of play activities for their age. However, the development of their ability to think and learn for themselves is hindered by a lack of encouragement to do so. The majority of pupils in Year 6 attain the expected levels in reading, writing, spelling and grammar and mathematics in the national standardised attainment tests. By the time they leave they are well prepared for their move to secondary education.
19. As they move through the school pupils make steady progress across the curriculum. Occasionally in lessons the progress of pupils is also hindered by lack of appropriate challenge, resulting in some restless behaviour. Pupils follow instruction and direction well, but teaching does not always encourage creative effort or develop independent thinking. Consequently, pupils have limited opportunities to develop their own ideas or engage in discussion to express their thinking.
20. The most successful lessons engage pupils' interest and encourage curiosity, self-motivation and creativity. This occurs when a variety of tasks with appropriate levels of challenge is planned and there is an energetic pace to the lesson. Leaders monitor and support the quality of teaching, although the programme of lesson observations and the sharing of best practice is not embedded. They have correctly identified where training and support is needed to develop teaching strategies, and that the programme of professional development requires greater focus on teaching and planning skills.
21. Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) are effectively supported to complete tasks by their teachers and a learning support teacher assists in developing learning strategies. Recent initiatives have enabled further assessment by external specialists to be sought when required and leaders are ensuring that any recommendations made are followed. As a result, pupils are able to access the curriculum and make progress.
22. Pupils are assessed routinely through both teacher assessment and externally marked standardised tests. Records of achievements are kept centrally and are systematically analysed by senior leaders and teachers. When this information is used effectively to plan pupils' next steps in learning, they receive appropriate levels of challenge and understand what they need to do to improve. However, not all teaching uses the data effectively. As a result, the rates of pupils' progress are inconsistent.

23. Leaders' ability to provide recreational activity is limited by the space available, however they do provide as varied a recreational programme as space allows. They also ensure the use of off-site facilities to enable activities such as football, skating and sailing. Pupils understand that taking part in such activities enhances their wellbeing. They engage in a variety of trips that build experience and knowledge.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met

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

25. The trustees, leaders and managers ensure that the school's vision to equip pupils with the knowledge, skills and understanding to live as spiritual, confident, and healthy individuals is fulfilled. Pupils understand the school values that encourage them to be faithful, informed, tolerant, responsible and active (*FITRA*) individuals.
26. Pupils develop assured self-knowledge and self-confidence through the positive culture of the school, the effective social, moral, spiritual and cultural (SMSC) and personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programmes, and Islamic studies. Effective age-appropriate relationships education starts in the early years and an introduction to relationships and sex education (RSE) from Year 5. Pupils are clear about the need to respect others, whatever their differences.
27. Leaders ensure that the physical education (PE) curriculum effectively teaches pupils about physical health through participation in competitive sports and other activities such as archery and mindfulness. Pupils understand how exercise and relaxation have a positive impact on their mental health and emotional wellbeing. They understand the importance of balancing study with recreation.
28. The physical development of children in the early years is nurtured by opportunities to play outdoors and time for physical exercise between seated activities indoors. Parents and pupils believe that the school promotes good physical and mental health.
29. Leaders ensure that policies are effectively implemented to promote good behaviour and prevent bullying. In their positive demeanour around the school, pupils show clear understanding of right and wrong and accept responsibility for their own actions. Pupils are happy, well-mannered and respond positively to teachers' praise and rewards. Teachers know pupils well and suitable levels of supervision are in place. Staff are quick to intercept rare incidents of unkind language or behaviour. Clear sanctions are in place should any occur. Pupil leaders understand their responsibilities as role models.
30. Leaders maintain a central record of behaviour and bullying incidents. Some incidents are dealt with quickly but not formally recorded, therefore some patterns in behaviour may not always be recognised. Pupils almost always behave well in lessons. Occasionally, where individual needs are not catered for or activities do not engage pupils' interest, restless behaviour occurs. Pupils report that they are not aware of bullying in the school. They are confident that should any occur, an adult will listen and deal with it effectively.
31. Pupils understand that they are individuals and everyone is different. They show respect for each other, whatever their differences. Parents who responded to the pre-inspection survey agreed that pupils are respectful and any unkind behaviour is addressed promptly and proportionately by staff.
32. Children in the Nursery and Reception years enjoy a warm rapport with their teachers who sensitively guide them in their behaviour choices. They share well for their age, interact with their peers happily and show care towards one another as they develop early friendships.

33. Attendance and admission registers are effectively maintained. The school leaders understand the importance of monitoring pupil attendance and know the steps to take in the event of unexplained absence.
34. The school premises are maintained adequately. A safe environment for pupils that meets all applicable standards is provided. Precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Fire evacuation drills take place termly and staff receive regular fire training. All necessary records are kept, although the formality of record keeping is inconsistent. The trustees understand their responsibility to maintain oversight and ensure that protocols and procedures are implemented effectively, although these are not always systematic.
35. Suitable arrangements and accommodation are in place to care for pupils who become unwell or who have specific medical needs. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid and staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid. First aid is administered in a timely and competent manner.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

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

36. Leaders have recently introduced a cross-curricular approach to teaching and learning through which pupils can broaden their understanding of the world and society. This reflects the school vision for pupils to become global leaders in nurturing dynamic talents with Islamic ethics, contributing to a fair and prosperous society. The effectiveness of thematic learning is not yet fully embedded in the teaching across the school. This is evident when the planning of links between subjects is contrived, individual needs are not provided for and the range of activities is narrow.
37. Leaders ensure that all curriculum planning, including the comprehensive PSHE programme, effectively provides opportunities for pupils to gain a secure understanding of British values. This successfully supports the school's aim to prepare pupils to lead a life of faith and be positive contributors to society.
38. Pupils appreciate that laws play an important part in enabling people to live in a cohesive society. In their classes pupils agree team promises which effectively establish rules to discourage behaviour that could negatively impact others. Leaders ensure that their example and the curriculum place strong emphasis on responsibility and respect towards others. Pupils understand from an early age that living in a democracy means that they accept that others may think differently to them. Through elections for positions on the school council, making suggestions to those elected and completing school surveys, pupils realise that their own view may not always be accepted.
39. Trustees have an informed, transparent and compelling objective to develop young people who have Islamic beliefs and who also feel part of British society and contribute positively to it. Through the well-planned religious education curriculum, pupils gain a confident knowledge and understanding of other religions that are practised in Great Britain. They learn to empathise with those who live lives in different ways to their own.
40. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is values-based and promote an open-minded attitude to others through the school's Islamic culture and the effective PSHE programme. The concept of respect for all is strongly shared by pupils. Leaders and managers ensure opportunities for pupils to explore and discuss the values of individual liberty, tolerance, law, respect and democracy in curriculum planning across the school.
41. Children in the early years make fast progress in their social development, which is actively encouraged by the positive engagement with their teachers. Children are usually happy to take turns and share the colourful toys and activities provided. They show respect to their teachers and their peers within the caring setting.
42. Trustees and leaders are keen that pupils should offer support to others within the local and international community and pupils are very aware of their social responsibilities towards those who are in need. Pupils and their families willingly contribute to collections for local foodbanks. They raise money for international causes, such as for a charity to relieve suffering after an earthquake in North Africa, through special events.

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

43. Those with governance and leadership responsibilities ensure that effective arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Those with responsibility for leading safeguarding understand their responsibilities well. They are knowledgeable about the services of external agencies and how to refer a concern to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police. Trustees and leaders ensure that an appropriately trained person is available in the absence of the designated safeguarding leads. A clear written up to date safeguarding policy is available on the school website and implemented effectively.
44. All staff receive safeguarding training when they join the school and designated safeguarding leads are appropriately trained in line with local requirements. Staff are confident in their knowledge and understanding of child protection procedures, including those for online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. They understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern. Records show that safeguarding concerns are acted upon quickly.
45. Pupils who responded to ISI's pre-inspection survey agreed that they feel safe in school. If they have concerns, they are confident that they can talk to an adult or put a note in worry boxes available to them. They are confident that concerns will be heard and support given. Records are kept, but not always formally, which impairs the ease with which patterns and trends can be tracked.
46. Through computing and PSHE lessons, pupils gain secure understanding of online safety and how to keep themselves safe.
47. The trustees routinely review the site's security and identify and mitigate risks. There is a strong culture of political neutrality in the school. Leaders ensure that visiting speakers are properly vetted through discussion and online searches.
48. Safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff and trustees and a single central register is maintained. A lack of clarity in some areas was appropriately addressed during the inspection. The school is aware of the need to register the new chair of trustees with the Secretary of State, but oversight delayed the required application. This was rectified during the inspection.

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

All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Apex Primary School
Department for Education number	317/6077
Registered charity number	1116216
Address	60-62 Argyle Road Ilford Essex IG1 3BG
Website	apexprimary.co.uk
Proprietor	The Apex Trust
Chair	Syed Rahman
Headteacher	Ms Meherun Hamid
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	122
Date of previous inspection	16 January 2020

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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