

School inspection report

21 to 23 January 2025

The Levels School

Etonhurst

7 Bath Road

Ashcott

Somerset

TA7 9QS

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 proprietor, governors and school leaders have a clear and shared vision for the school. Governors provide support and challenge to leaders to ensure that the Standards are met. Leaders actively promote the aims and ethos of the school so that these are known and understood by all members of the school community and implemented in practice.
2. Leaders effectively deploy skilled staff to support both the academic and therapeutic needs of pupils, all of whom have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), ensuring a well-regulated, focused and calm school day. They take pride in fostering pupils' personal development, helping each pupil to reach their potential regardless of past experiences or abilities. Leaders create a respectful environment where pupils can express their ideas and feelings confidently.
3. Leaders use detailed information-gathering, expert diagnosis and their understanding of each pupil's needs to provide a learning environment where pupils can flourish intellectually, socially and creatively. Pupils are well supported by staff and are confident that they can make progress personally and academically. Pupils attain well in relation to their starting points. Their skills and knowledge are less well developed in digital technology than in other subject areas.
4. Pupils manage themselves well in the learning environment, showing patience, attentiveness and independence. The classroom atmosphere is focused and productive. The school's flexibility in teaching and managing pupils ensures smooth transitions between lessons and personalised support for every child. Pupils make most progress in lessons and activities where they are engaged in practical or creative tasks. This is less evident when activities are less well matched to pupils' needs.
5. Pupils maintain positive relationships, showing maturity and respect towards peers and adults. Leaders promote high standards in attendance, health and safety, fire safety and first aid, through the effective implementation of robust policies and ongoing checks. Premises are well maintained, and any health or safety concerns are promptly addressed. Governors work closely with leaders to manage risks effectively so as to promote the physical, emotional and mental wellbeing of pupils.
6. Leaders provide a range of opportunities for pupils to engage in charitable, business and cultural activities within the local community. These experiences support pupils in making informed choices about their future studies, interests and careers. Teachers implement a curriculum that enables pupils to develop a clear understanding and appreciation of the diverse faiths and customs that make up British society. Pupils understand their responsibilities towards others and are well prepared to move on to the next stages in their lives.
7. Leaders, governors and staff are suitably trained in safeguarding. Leaders ensure staff are equipped to handle safeguarding concerns and understand the specific needs of the pupils that they work with. Safeguarding concerns are managed in accordance with current statutory guidance and with appropriate liaison with external agencies. Pupils are educated in online safety and are confident in approaching staff to share their concerns.

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:

- provide a wider range of opportunities within the curriculum for pupils to engage in practical and creative activities
- provide increased opportunities for pupils to develop their digital skills and knowledge.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders continually evaluate the school's success in achieving its aim of enabling pupils to achieve their potential regardless of their starting point, past trauma or prior attainment. Leaders implement the school's vision effectively through their understanding of pupils' needs and challenges. They take close account of pupils' needs in developing a curriculum and other activities that engender curiosity and enjoyment, helping pupils to develop character and forge healthy relationships.
9. Governors work with school leaders to monitor, evaluate and manage risks effectively. Leaders are aware of hazardous areas and activities, and the staff who are responsible for those areas and activities receive the necessary training and guidance. Leaders deliver risk assessment training to ensure that staff are competent in completing risk assessments. Leaders assess risks to pupils' emotional, mental and social wellbeing as well as the practical and physical aspects of the school's operations.
10. Governors exercise effective oversight to assure themselves that leaders demonstrate the relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders conduct an effective self-evaluation process which informs their vision for the school's future development and key targets for each year. This self-evaluation is informed by leaders' knowledge of the pupils in the school. Leaders are diligent in implementing policies and procedures which promote the wellbeing of the pupils and meet the requirements of current statutory guidance.
11. School leaders consistently implement a suitable complaints policy. When complaints are received, they are managed effectively through a three-stage process with clear timescales.
12. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. They promote a strong ethos of inclusion and acceptance throughout the school. Leaders adopt a restorative approach to all aspects of behaviour so that each pupil is supported in accordance with their own additional special educational needs and/or disabilities. A suitable accessibility plan is implemented effectively.
13. Leaders maintain an easily accessible website which provides relevant key information for parents of current and prospective pupils. Documentation relating to school policy and procedures is made available either on the website or from the school office. Parents receive an annual report of their child's progress and attainment.
14. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies to promote pupils' wellbeing. They provide relevant local authorities with information relating to the review and funding of education, health and care (EHC) plans.

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. Governors and senior leaders have developed an appropriate curriculum which considers the needs of pupils and their future pathways. Leaders monitor teaching and learning through informal and formal learning walks so as to identify the means to improve teaching practice in the school.
17. Senior leaders have created an educational programme that offers a wide breadth of opportunity, delivered by specialist teachers and therapists. The curriculum allows pupils to revisit topics, retrieve previous learning and reinforce their knowledge. Lessons are tailored to meet each pupil's individual needs, as identified through their targets and baseline assessments. Thoughtful planning of the timetable, movement of pupils and individual support enables pupils to engage in their learning in a well-regulated, calm and focused manner.
18. The curriculum provides pupils with opportunities to work towards qualifications and certifications that align with their progress and accomplishments. Pupils achieve entry-level, functional skills or GCSE awards. Leaders implement a suitable curriculum for a small number of pupils in Year 12. This bespoke programme prepares these pupils well for the next stage of their education.
19. Teachers manage behaviour in lessons well. They assist pupils with self-regulation, which allows them to manage themselves in a learning environment, showing patience towards themselves and their peers during lessons. Pupils listen attentively and are confident in their ability to tackle the work they are set. Teachers encourage pupils to settle down to work quickly. Pupils are helped to develop organisational skills and to be mentally prepared for learning. This enables them to work both independently and collaboratively, applying their previous learning and skills to new topics.
20. Teachers tailor lessons to pupils' interests and ability to engage, and this benefits their learning and progress. They have secure subject knowledge and make effective use of a range of resources. In lessons, staff balance challenge with suitable support so that pupils develop confidence in their learning. Teachers use a range of techniques and activities to engage pupils, and lessons are planned to maximise challenge at each pupil's level. Teachers provide appropriate tasks to support pupils' current attainment levels and enable them to make progress. As a result, pupils enjoy their learning and make progress in their subjects.
21. Leaders review and evaluate pupils' attainment and progress regularly. They use their understanding of pupils' achievements to ensure that pupils' work and learning are acknowledged and celebrated, learning gaps are identified, and specific targets for further progress are given.
22. Pupils make good progress in mathematics, English and science. They discuss and debate historical questions with confidence and acquire an understanding of how human activity has an impact on the environment. Pupils develop an understanding of computing, although their skills and knowledge when using digital technology are less well developed than in other subjects.
23. Leaders ensure that assessment is continuous and discreet. Teachers use assessment to inform lesson planning so that work can be planned, challenge put in place and topics revisited as required. Feedback is provided verbally in lessons and in written form in pupils' books.
24. Pupils produce varied and engaging work in art lessons and create their own compositions in music. Pupils are particularly engaged and make most progress in lessons and activities that involve

practical or creative elements. They are less focused on their learning, and consequently make less progress, in lessons where activities are less well matched to their needs.

25. Leaders provide a diverse choice of enrichment activities for pupils to pursue beyond the classroom. These include activities that enable pupils to develop their skills in sport, music, creative arts and life skills such as cooking, and games, including digital gaming. Pupils benefit from the opportunities for socialising and skills development. Pupils gain a sense of confidence and achievement through their accomplishments in the co-curricular field.

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

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

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

27. Leaders implement a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum which promotes pupils' understanding of their own wellbeing. This is complemented by interactions with staff throughout the school day, assemblies and activities. These enable pupils to understand the importance of mutual respect and tolerance towards all groups of people. As a result, pupils develop an understanding of their own needs and those of others within their school and the wider world. Pupils are accepting of those around them.
28. Teachers implement the well-planned relationships and sex education (RSE) programme effectively. The lessons are relevant and interesting. Pupils have a sound understanding of one another and how they interact together, helping them to handle relationships and encounters effectively.
29. Leaders take positive and effective action to prevent bullying from occurring by adhering to policies governing behaviour. Leaders communicate their expectations of conduct clearly. Effective teaching enables pupils to develop a comprehensive understanding of different types of bullying, including such behaviour that can occur verbally and online.
30. Leaders have drawn up a comprehensive and clear behaviour policy which is well understood by staff and pupils. Governors and school leaders advocate for a restorative approach to behaviour throughout the school, with a clear focus on promoting pupils' emotional wellbeing. Pupils' behaviour in school is generally good. They have a mature understanding of what causes their peers to misbehave and are confident that any behavioural issues are managed well.
31. The supportive approach of staff helps pupils to feel recognised and valued as individuals and to develop their confidence and self-knowledge. Pupils benefit from this understanding of their own needs. They can self-regulate and know how to manage tricky situations when they may feel overwhelmed. Leaders provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to take on roles of responsibility in school and to contribute to the lives of others within the school community. This enables pupils to develop self-knowledge and interpersonal skills and to grow in confidence and self-awareness.
32. Leaders maintain an up-to-date admission register containing the correct information for each pupil. A suitable attendance policy is implemented. Leaders take appropriate action in response to any concerns about pupils' attendance. They report pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points, as well as any attendance concerns, to the relevant local authorities, as required by statutory guidance.
33. Leaders implement effective arrangements for the management of health and safety and for the prevention of fire. Robust processes are in place for the delivery and management of first aid. Staff are trained in fire safety and there are a high number of fire marshals. Leaders ensure that the premises are suitably maintained, and regular checks are undertaken as required.
34. Pupils participate in a broad range of physical activities as part of the physical education (PE) curriculum, including games and sports, which develop their physical skills as well as their teamwork and resilience. The aim of PE and games is to raise self-esteem and confidence through a bespoke, fun and challenging curriculum where pupils gain a sense of achievement and pride by going beyond what they thought they were capable of doing. Pupils are taught racquet skills, gymnastics, cross-

country, weight training and basketball. They gain an understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle through their PSHE lessons and assemblies. They have a clear knowledge of why they need to get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and take regular exercise.

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 draw up a curriculum that enables pupils to understand the range of social groups within British society and emphasises the significance of equality and fairness. Leaders promote mutual respect as well as an appreciation for people's identities and perspectives. Pupils develop an understanding of a range of religions during ethics and philosophy lessons. They learn about the importance of values such as courage, compassion and caring for each other during weekly assemblies.
37. Pupils receive effective economic education through activities such as organising a school concert where they calculate how much the entry tickets need to be to cover the cost of advertising and other associated costs. In Years 5 and 6, pupils are taught about money decisions as part of the PSHE curriculum.
38. Teachers provide pupils with opportunities to develop their understanding of British values through discussions and debates in ethics and philosophy lessons. They learn about what it means to be part of a democratic society, including through participation in mock elections.
39. Pupils have an understanding and appreciation of the diverse religions that make up their society. Staff convey the importance of making a positive contribution to school and home life. They respond positively when asked to consider the ways in which the lives of others can be improved.
40. Leaders provide a wide range of co-curricular opportunities which enable pupils to engage with and experience the community beyond the school in preparation for their future lives. These include volunteering through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE) and involvement in local performing arts events. Pupils take part in initiatives run by local businesses and community groups. This allows them to develop interpersonal and employability skills and contribute positively to the lives of others.
41. Pupils receive relevant and impartial careers guidance through a structured programme of lessons and visits to and from external agencies. Individual support and targeted advice for pupils meet their specific needs and help prepare them for their next steps in education or employment.
42. Staff identify opportunities throughout the curriculum to teach pupils to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and respect their own and diverse cultures. Pupils show care and respect towards others as they move around the school. They understand the importance of accepting others and promote inclusivity within the school through posters which they design themselves. Pupils also ran a mock election in school.
43. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to make contributions to the school community through the school council system, where a representative of each tutor group can formally propose ideas for change. Pupils support those who are new to the school as mentors, fulfilling their roles diligently.
44. Leaders encourage pupils to pursue a broad range of interests in and beyond the curriculum which enables them to prepare for life beyond school. The range of activities and trips allows all pupils to acquire a broader social and cultural understanding of the world around them, as well as a greater respect of and tolerance for others. Activities such as career-focused assemblies and a careers week

support pupils in making future choices to fulfil their own potential in terms of courses of study, interests and future paths.

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

45. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

46. Leaders put in place effective procedures and systems for staff and pupils to raise concerns. Staff respond promptly to these in line with school policies and procedures. Safeguarding records contain appropriate records of concerns and the actions taken in response to these. Records are stored confidentially and shared with external agencies only when appropriate to do so.
47. Leaders have a clear understanding of the specific risks associated with the school's individual context when managing concerns about the behaviour of adults in the school. Staff understand leaders' expectations, including the need to self-refer when required. Leaders record and act upon concerns appropriately, making timely referrals to external agencies when needed.
48. Pupils feel safe in school and can identify a trusted adult that they can speak to if they have a concern or worry. Pupils are taught about online safety and understand how to protect themselves and report any related issues or concerns to a trusted adult. Leaders maintain suitable filtering and monitoring systems to protect pupils from harmful content when they are online.
49. Staff and those with leadership responsibilities receive suitable safeguarding training. They understand how to report, record and address any safeguarding concerns that might arise. School leaders keep in regular contact with external agencies and make timely referrals as required.
50. Leaders undertake the required checks on adults before they begin work at the school in a timely manner. A suitable record of pre-appointment checks is maintained. Governors maintain effective oversight of the single central record (SCR) and conduct regular and effective quality assurance checks.
51. Governors maintain suitable oversight of the school's safeguarding policies and procedures. They check regularly that these are implemented effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	The Levels School
Department for Education number	933/6014
Address	The Levels School Etonhurst 7 Bath Road Ashcott Somerset TA7 9QS
Phone number	01458211014
Email address	office@thelevelsschool.co.uk
Website	www.thelevelsschool.co.uk
Proprietor	The Levels School Ltd
Chair	Geraldine O’Sullivan
Headteacher	Caroline Cook
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	79
Date of previous inspection	10 June 2024

Information about the school

53. The Levels School is a co-educational day school located in Ashcott, Somerset. Opened in January 2021, the management of the school is overseen by the governing body.
54. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Seventy-six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Many have diagnosed co-occurring conditions or diagnoses, including specific learning difficulties and autistic spectrum condition.
55. The school has not identified English as an additional language (EAL) for any of its pupils.
56. The school states its aims are to provide a nurturing environment in which pupils with specific learning difficulties and co-occurring diagnoses can develop their self-esteem. It seeks to inspire pupils to be independent young adults who value the rights, responsibilities and rules that exist to promote and support their future welfare.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 January 2025

57. A team of two inspectors 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**.

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