ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

# School inspection report

16 to 18 April 2024

# Hardwick House School

190 Forest Road

Loughborough

Leicestershire

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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 provide a rich curriculum programme both within and outside the classroom, with a strong focus on personal development and outdoor education. Pupils benefit from the varied opportunities on offer to develop their self-confidence and to acquire new skills and interests. Teachers provide interesting activities that pupils enjoy, that meet their needs and inspire them to learn. The support for pupils and the positive relationships between staff and pupils, ensure that pupils feel valued and safe. As a result, pupils achieve well and enjoy their learning.

2. Effective governance ensures that leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. They are confident and skilled in supporting leaders and holding them to account for the school's effectiveness. Governors ensure that leaders demonstrate the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles and responsibilities effectively.

3. Leaders gather a range of information about the school's performance, particularly about pupils' attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. However, data is not routinely analysed for all pupil groups across the school to enable leaders to identify any trends and pinpoint precisely which strategies will improve pupils' outcomes.

4. As they move through the school, pupils extend their knowledge and understanding of human, social and economic matters. They have many opportunities to put their economic knowledge into practice by participating in enterprise projects.

5. The premises and grounds are maintained to a suitable standard that meets health and safety requirements. The medical room provides appropriate accommodation for the care of pupils who feel unwell or are injured. Pupils appreciate the care and support they receive from staff.

6. Careful planning of breaktimes and lunchtimes ensures that pupils are supervised appropriately. Risks which may affect pupils' welfare, health and safety are identified and mitigated.

7. Pupils understand that participation in physical pursuits, including through recreational and outdoor activities, will help them to lead a healthy lifestyle and boost their confidence and fitness. As a result, pupils' physical and mental health are supported well.

8. There is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Staff are alert to changes in pupils' mood or demeanour and know when and how to refer their concerns. They make effective use of opportunities to teach pupils how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils appreciate the care and concern they receive from staff.

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# 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:

- develop the depth of analysis of attendance, behaviour and safeguarding data, with the aim of identifying trends, checking if different groups of pupils or year groups are disproportionately represented, in order to pinpoint precisely which actions will be the most successful in supporting pupils to improve their outcomes.

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## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors visit the school regularly to conduct monitoring activities. These visits help them check that leaders implement policies and practice effectively. Governors ask challenging questions of leaders and focus well on continual development and improvement. This has resulted in the timely and effective implementation of new initiatives such as in how behaviour is managed and in the quality of teaching. Governors check carefully that leaders are doing all they can to achieve the school's aims and ethos.

10. Drawing on the expertise within the schools in the trust, governors and leaders have begun to extend systems for evaluating the effectiveness of school's work. Leaders gather a range of data over time, particularly in the areas of attendance, behaviour and safeguarding. Leaders use this information effectively to form an accurate view of pupils' individual performance across these aspects. This, together with appropriate nurturing approaches enables staff to understand pupils' individual needs well. However, currently, performance in these areas is not routinely analysed by the different pupil groups across the school. This restricts leaders' ability to spot any emerging patterns or trends, to identify any groups of pupils who maybe disproportionately represented, and to target strategies to improve outcomes.

11. Subject leaders have an effective overview of their curriculum areas and outcomes for pupils. Leaders have developed a training and development programme which has been effective in improving teaching. This has been achieved through focused observations of lessons, coaching for individual teachers, and specific training to strengthen teaching strategies.

12. Subject leaders adapt the curriculum so that it enhances pupils' outcomes. Detailed curriculum plans are personalised to meet each pupils' needs. In addition to offering a suitable range of academic courses, leaders have enhanced and adapted the curriculum further by introducing new vocational qualifications to reflect the changing needs of the cohort and pupils' individual career aspirations. This has raised expectations and enhanced pupils' ambition.

13. The well-designed personal development, life skills and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes form the cornerstone of the school's curriculum. Staff help pupils learn strategies to manage their emotions and personal relationships so that they are ready to learn. Teachers provide positive role models to pupils and successfully promote the British values of liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. Staff help pupils to be respectful of different groups, both within and beyond the school community, and to not judge people by their equality characteristics such as faith, race and sexuality. As a result, pupils learn to be more tolerant and respectful of individual differences and understand that this helps to create a safe and secure community. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

14. Leaders engage with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils' additional needs are identified and understood thoroughly. With this information, leaders design appropriate plans so that pupils have access to all subjects across the school site. Pupils feel valued as a result of their placement in this setting.

15. The suitable three-stage complaints policy is available on the school's website and is implemented effectively. Leaders respond appropriately to any concerns raised and in a timely manner.

16. The informative website and electronic communications provide parents and prospective parents with the information about policies and procedures they require. Parents receive suitable reports and regular updates regarding their children's progress and attainment across all subjects. All pupils at the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Leaders furnish local authorities with the required information and a statement about how public funds are spent.

17. Leaders take effective steps to identify, manage and mitigate risk, especially regarding pupils' specific circumstances and vulnerabilities. Staff have a thorough understanding of risk management procedures, particularly those related to individual pupils and their behaviour, and implement these effectively. As a result, pupils can proceed with their learning and benefit from extending their experience in a safe environment.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Almost all pupils at the school have experienced periods of disruption to their education. Staff are skilled at identifying and meeting pupils' needs so that they settle quickly into the rhythm of school life. Pupils successfully learn how to manage the social and emotional difficulties they developed before they joined the school, growing in confidence and being reassured that they will receive the help they need.

20. The curriculum is designed to meet pupils' diverse needs and interests and prepare them for adulthood. The curriculum has a strong focus on outdoor, practical education and is effective in reducing pupils' anxieties and overcoming barriers to learning. For example, pupils learn how to care for the school's rabbits, guinea pigs, tortoise and therapy dog. They develop survival skills when gathering dry wood for a campfire to bake a fruit crumble. These activities help pupils to develop important life skills, such as teamwork and resilience, and to learn how to recover when things do not go according to plan.

21. The curriculum is suitably adapted to meet the needs of individual pupils and to enable them to be successful. The range of subjects offered has been developed and extended. For example, additional vocational subjects, such as childcare and health and beauty have been added to reflect the changing needs and interests of the pupils at the school.

22. Pupils enjoy a wide range of recreational and enrichment activities such as chess, cooking, climbing, cycling, singing and technology club. Staff encourage and enable pupils to choose and pursue additional activities as they acquire new interests and skills. Participation in these activities enables pupils to find new and interesting ways to spend their leisure time, while developing their confidence and self-esteem.

23. In Year 11, pupils complete a range of academic GCSE courses and equivalent vocational courses. In 2023, pupils achieved particularly well in English, mathematics, physics and Spanish in comparison to their starting points.

24. A suitable system is used to check pupils' progress. Leaders quickly establish pupils' starting points. This information, together with the results of standardised tests and detailed tracking of pupils' learning, enables staff to identify any gaps and target appropriate support. Leaders also use the information in pupils' education, health and care (EHC) plans to set appropriately demanding targets. They identify the small steps that pupils need to practise to embed their learning.

25. Curriculum leaders are knowledgeable and enthusiastic about their subjects. Positive relationships are successfully promoted between teachers and pupils. Lessons are planned and taught well, which help pupils to make good progress.

26. Teachers check that pupils remember what they have learned in previous lessons, going over work to help learning stick in pupils' memories. Teachers provide many opportunities for pupils to develop their speaking, listening and literacy skills across a range of subjects. Adults effectively demonstrate the language skills they want pupils to learn. For example, in English, teachers encourage pupils to use a range of interesting vocabulary when speaking, such as when talking about dystopian writing techniques. As a result, pupils develop their communication skills well.

27. Pupils' learning is enhanced through effective verbal and written feedback from teachers. Feedback is adapted to meet pupils' individual needs, such as colour-coded feedback comments in English and mathematics. Teachers have found this approach to be particularly helpful for some pupils who may find it easier to understand absolutes, as exemplified by colour, rather than interpreting the nuances of language.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. The extensive outdoor education and recreation curriculum forms a key part of pupils' lives in school. Pupils understand that participation in outdoor physical pursuits can improve their personal fitness, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. Pupils are actively encouraged to discover new sports and interests. This helps pupils gain self-confidence and self-esteem, and to develop useful techniques to manage and recover from disappointments.

30. Provision for pupils' wellbeing is effective. Leaders and staff provide a secure place for pupils, including ensuring that they receive specialist support when needed. For example, the school invests in counselling, clinical and educational psychology, together with animal, art, occupation, speech and language therapy provision, to support pupils' mental health. Leaders work closely with the eight local authorities that commission places at the school to make sure that pupils' needs are understood and met.

31. The well-considered personal development programme, which includes relationships and sex education enables pupils to develop a mature awareness of issues related to adolescence. Staff's nurturing approach and guidance help pupils to regulate their feelings and to balance their emotions throughout the day. Pupils learn ways in which to navigate new social situations and keep safe in personal relationships. As a result, pupils acquire a variety of strategies that help them to develop self-knowledge and self-confidence.

32. Measures to reduce the risks from fire are managed well through staff training and regular fire drills. Appropriate protocols are in place to ensure that the activities which pose risks to pupils are mitigated. Systematic checks and records are maintained, which are supplemented with visits from external specialists in relation to asbestos, electrical testing, fire, and health and safety. The premises and buildings are maintained to a suitable standard. Suitable arrangements and accommodation for first aid are in place, with appropriately trained staff and resources.

33. The school provides opportunities for pupils to express their views and opinions. An anonymous system allows pupils to report any worries that they do not want to raise directly. This has been successful in addressing individual concerns.

34. Pupils develop an understanding of the spiritual and moral aspects of life, often experienced through art, yoga and outdoor activities. Pupils understand how the personal challenges they have encountered can have a profound influence on what they believe is important in life. As a result, they are respectful of each other's feelings and perceptions. If pupils become anxious, they can access safe spaces to take time out to reflect on their feelings and, when ready, return to their learning. This positive life skill strategy benefits their mental and emotional wellbeing.

35. The revised positive relationships policy promotes the use of restorative approaches that encourage pupils to reflect on their behaviour to resolve disagreements. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour effectively because they focus on reducing anxiety, for example, by deploying therapeutic resources such as plastic construction bricks and fidget toys. Pupils appreciate and understand the need for rules, and rewards and consequences, to protect individual interests and promote a peaceful society. As a result, behaviour is calm and civilised in lessons and around the school site.

36. Pupils show courtesy and respect towards each other and staff. Pupils are tolerant of, and celebrate, each other's differences. They learn how to appreciate and respond to people who may have a different point of view or experience to their own.

37. Staff across the school know pupils' individual needs well and are confident in spotting any changes in behaviour or demeanour and address any issues swiftly. Relationships are positive across the school and bullying is rare. Detailed records of behaviour and bullying incidents related to individual pupils are suitably maintained. Since the introduction of revised positive relationships procedures, the small number of behaviour incidents that require physical interventions has been reduced further.

38. Attendance and admissions registers are suitable and well maintained so that they meet requirements. Information regarding those pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times is reported to the local authority.

39. Staff carefully supervise pupils at break and lunchtimes. They are readily available to help and interact with pupils throughout the school day.

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

40. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

41. The curriculum has been carefully planned to develop pupils' understanding of human, social and economic matters through the life skills programme. Pupils learn how to manage money and they readily develop their financial literacy. For example, younger pupils learn about budgeting and making wise spending decisions when they are given £5 to purchase school resources from local charity shops. Older pupils learn about how banks and loans work, and the salaries that different types of work attract. Pupils participate in a range of enterprise projects, such as making and selling hair scrunchies or baking cakes and washing cars. These practical activities help to develop the skills to navigate real-life economic scenarios, such as calculating profit and loss margins. This also helps pupils prepare for adult life in British society.

42. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. The carefully planned careers programme is based upon nationally recognised benchmarks. This, together with bespoke careers fairs, visiting speakers and personalised advice enables pupils to have a clear idea of their next steps. Older pupils stated that their career choices currently include, accountancy, art design, childcare, pilot, retail sales, vet and zookeeper. In 2023, all Year 11 leavers proceeded to college or training.

43. Following their GCSEs, Year 11 pupils remain in school for the remainder of the summer term and participate in a range of activities, including off-site hedge-cutting and work in the park. These activities help pupils prepare for their next steps, helping them improve their social skills by giving them the self-confidence to work as part of a team.

44. Leaders have developed a strong partnership working with a local college. At 16 years, most pupils transfer to the college. However, they receive ongoing, personalised support from school staff to ensure their needs continue to be met.

45. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, together with strong pastoral systems, helps pupils to know right from wrong and prepares them for life in British society. Pupils gain an understanding of British values by studying democracy, laws and legislation. They apply this knowledge to global issues such as fair trade and carbon emissions and appreciate how people are affected by their environment.

46. Pupils display a strong sense of responsibility to their school community, by treating each other and the premises with respect. Staff act as role models in helping to promote the school's aims and values. Pupils accept responsibility and contribute to the life of the school, such as through working parties, the school council and deciding which charities to support. They also participate in wider community projects involving the local neighbourhood, such as through the cultivation of plants and flowers across Loughborough.

47. Tolerance and respect for individual differences are routinely promoted through the PSHE programme. Pupils listen to one another and are understanding of differences between people. Pupils develop an appreciation and understanding of the diversity of cultures, traditions and values other than their own by, for example, reading literature and through their art and cooking lessons. Trips and visits are carefully planned to support pupils' interests, such as a visit to a museum to learn more about the archaeology, geology, history and industries of the local area. They are also used as

a vehicle to widen pupils' knowledge and appreciation of neuro-diverse role models, such as visits to local artists and other working professionals.

48. The staff code of conduct ensures that if teachers plan activities where political issues are considered, they are required to present a balanced range of views.

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

49. All the relevant Standards are met.

# Safeguarding

50. Suitable safeguarding protocols and procedures have been established and are implemented with great care to help ensure pupils' safety. The well-qualified safeguarding team are knowledgeable about their roles. They work effectively with the eight commissioning local authorities, and other outside agencies. Leaders seek specialist advice from a range of professionals. Governors and safeguarding leaders understand their statutory duties to keep pupils safe and promote their wellbeing.

51. A suitable and comprehensive policy for child protection follows the latest guidance. Effective systems are in place for identifying and supporting the most vulnerable pupils in the school. Leaders are confident in taking the appropriate steps to ensure that pupils' needs are met when considering safeguarding concerns.

52. The well-designed RSE and PSHE curriculums, which include topics such as consent, drugs awareness and online safety, help pupils learn how to keep themselves safe. Pupils know who to turn to if they have a worry or concern. Worry boxes allow pupils to report any concern anonymously. These and other measures help pupils feel safe in the school.

53. Staff monitor pupils' internet usage effectively in school via a commercial filtering system that helps to keep pupils safe while using the internet. Pupils learn about the potential dangers when using online platforms and social media. They learn about ways to protect themselves, such as taking steps to protect their identity.

54. Governors regularly commission safeguarding reviews and auditing of the processes and procedures surrounding safer recruitment and the training of staff. Leaders check staff's understanding of safeguarding protocols through weekly update meetings and regular assessments.

55. Safeguarding concerns are recorded and managed on an effective electronic system. This enables safeguarding leaders to retrieve and use information quickly which helps to keep pupils safe. Staff understand and implement the agreed protocols regarding the use of mobile phones.

56. Suitable pre-employment checks are in place and are appropriately recorded in the single central record of appointments.

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

57. All the relevant Standards are met.

## School details

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|---|---|
| **School** | Hardwick House School |
| **Department for Education number** | 855/6033 |
| **Address** | Hardwick House School<br>190 Forest Road<br>Loughborough<br>Leicestershire<br>LE11 3HU |
| **Phone number** | 01509 218203 |
| **Email address** | info@hardwickhouseschool.co.uk |
| **Website** | www.hardwickhouseschool.com |
| **Proprietor** | Newcome Education (Cavendish Education Ltd) |
| **Chair** | Mr Aatif Hassan |
| **Headteacher** | Mrs Sarah Unwin |
| **Age range** | 7 to 19 |
| **Number of pupils** | 45 |
| **Date of previous inspection** | Not previously inspected by ISI |

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## Information about the school

58. Hardwick House School is a co-educational day school, situated in Loughborough, Leicestershire. It is a special school that caters for pupils with autism spectrum condition (ASC) and those who have communication and interaction needs. The school is overseen by Newcome Education (part of Cavendish Education Group), who form the governing body.

59. The school has identified all pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). All pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

60. Currently there are no pupils in the sixth form.

61. No pupils speak English as an additional language.

62. The school states its aims are to provide a welcoming, nurturing and homely environment, enabling the individual to overcome the barriers of their autism in a safe, happy and supportive community. It aims to promote a school-wide family ethos based on empathy, mutual respect, understanding and structure so that each pupil feels valued, supported and able to learn. The school also states its aims are to support pupils to give them the confidence to be themselves and celebrate the unique brilliance that autism brings, raise aspirations and prepare pupils for life beyond Hardwick House.

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# Inspection details

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|---|---|
| **Inspection dates** | 16 to 18 April 2024 |

63. A team of two inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons
- observation of registration time
- discussions with the executive principal and safeguarding governor
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils and examination of sample of pupils' work, some in conjunction with subject leaders
- visits to the facilities for outdoor education
- examination of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

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- 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.
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- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

**Independent Schools Inspectorate**

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