

School inspection report

21 to 23 November 2023

Ruckleigh School

17 Lode Lane

Solihull

West Midlands

B91 2AB

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. School leaders and the proprietor carry out their responsibilities effectively. They promote the wellbeing of pupils and ensure the school meets the Standards and is successful in meeting its aims.
2. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their skills and understanding across the wide range of subjects. Leaders provide many opportunities for pupils to develop effective communication and numeracy skills. Teaching enables pupils to make good progress. Pupils are successful in entrance and scholarship examinations to selective senior schools. Pupils generally apply themselves well in lessons. The curriculum provides limited opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills in order to prepare them for their next stage of education.
3. Pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) receive the help they require to access the curriculum and make good and often rapid progress with their fluency in English.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported by the effective planning and staff who understand their needs. As a result, they make good progress from their starting points.
5. Children in the early years make good progress because leaders provide a warm and supportive environment and activities are well matched to children's interests and needs.
6. Leaders expect pupils to embrace the school ethos of mutual respect. Pupils respond well to this and develop positive relationships with their peers and show respect for diversity. The behaviour policy promotes high standards of behaviour. Bullying is rare and when it occurs it is addressed effectively by staff.
7. Leaders listen carefully to the views of pupils. One such request that leaders are considering is for the designation of a quiet area at break times for reflection or quiet activities.
8. Health and safety policies and procedures are thorough and are fully implemented and so promote the welfare of the pupils.
9. Leaders have devised and implemented a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum which prepares pupils effectively for life in modern British society. Pupils make a valuable contribution to the life of the school including by being prefects, monitors and members of the school and eco councils. Leaders have identified a need for pupils to engage more with their local community to support their understanding of wider society and provide an outlet for their desire to help others.
10. Leaders understand risk and manage it well. Complaints are handled appropriately, and parents receive a response within the stipulated time scales.
11. Safeguarding procedures are effective. Staff are appropriately trained, and any concerns are dealt with promptly. Pupils feel safe in school and know who to talk to if they have any 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:

- ensure that curriculum planning provides pupils with suitable opportunities to develop independent learning skills
- provide additional opportunities for pupils to contribute to the life of the local community.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. The proprietor and leaders promote pupils' wellbeing by ensuring that the Standards are met consistently. The proprietor and the advisory board are knowledgeable, understand their roles and promote the aims and ethos of the school. They monitor all aspects of the school with care and are kept informed of the school's performance.
13. Leaders are knowledgeable and have the requisite skills to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They understand regulatory requirements and ensure that policies and procedures are implemented effectively. Leaders are focused on the needs of the pupils and promoting their best interests. They actively listen to the views of pupils, who feel their opinions are valued.
14. Leaders carry out a regular and comprehensive evaluation of all aspects of the school. As a result, they know the school and evaluate its relative strengths and areas for development. Through a detailed school improvement plan, leaders have identified key areas for development, which they address effectively. For example, the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme has been reviewed and enhanced to ensure it is relevant to the emerging needs of the pupils. Pupils are respectful of each other and understand the diverse society in which they live. The school prepares pupils well for their later life and next stage of their education.
15. The effectiveness of teaching and learning is monitored closely by both middle and senior leaders through a system of lesson observations and scrutiny of pupils' work. They then offer support and guidance, if necessary, thus promoting pupils' good progress.
16. Children in the early years make good progress. Staff provide a supportive environment, and a well-planned set of activities which match children's needs and interest.
17. Leaders maintain a diligent overview of pupils' safety and welfare, identifying and managing risk appropriately. The risk management policy is implemented effectively, and suitable risk assessments are completed for the school site, trips and any potentially hazardous activities. Leaders are alert to possible unintended consequences. The oversight of safeguarding by both leaders and the proprietor is effective. Staff are trained at the appropriate level, and the school liaises with other agencies as necessary.
18. Parents are able to obtain all the required information. Leaders identify ways in which both the school site and curriculum can be made more accessible. They have recently increased both resources and staff to support the specific needs of pupils who have SEND. The academic performance of the school during the preceding year, including the results of entrance exams to senior schools, is made available to parents on the school website.
19. The school has a suitable complaints policy and procedures, and any concerns are handled effectively and in a timely manner. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.
20. The school does not discriminate through its curriculum or other provision. Suitable adjustments have been made to enable access to the site, and pupils with SEND are provided with any support they require.

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

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders have devised a curriculum which offers pupils opportunities to develop their knowledge and understanding across all the required areas of learning. Pupils have well-developed literacy skills, particularly in creative writing, where they use advanced vocabulary and linguistic structures. Pupils also make good progress in numeracy and use these skills effectively across a range of subjects, such as science and geography.
23. Leaders have devised a programme for children in the early years which offers a wide range of educational experiences. Children make good progress from their starting points, and almost all meet age-related expectations by the end of Reception. The outside learning environment is used effectively to add different stimuli and additional opportunities for learning. Staff know the children well and plan lessons based upon children's needs and prior attainments. Staff assess children's progress and accurately identify next steps which are communicated clearly to children during lessons and to parents in written reports.
24. Leaders provide pupils with many opportunities for artistic expression which encourage pupils to develop their creative skills. This is seen in the imaginative and high-quality artwork on display in the school. Discrete music and drama sessions provide all pupils with opportunities to learn instruments and take part in performances and drama productions. Around half of the senior pupils take national public speaking examinations, and their results show they progress well in these areas. Those taking music grade exams enjoy similar success.
25. Leaders monitor academic standards by observing lessons and scrutinising work. This supports the consistency of teaching and enables pupils to make good progress. Many pupils achieve success in entrance and scholarship exams to senior schools with selective entry requirements. In 2023 all pupils gained places at their choice of senior school with around a third of candidates earning scholarships.
26. Teaching is generally planned with care and adapted to meet the needs of pupils of all abilities. Lessons typically include well-structured tasks which build upon previous learning and reinforce prior knowledge and understanding.
27. Teachers know their subject well and use resources effectively. Consequently, pupils usually engage enthusiastically in their lessons, assimilate new ideas rapidly and consolidate their understanding and skills. Curriculum planning offers limited opportunities for pupils to work independently and develop skills such as research and planning in preparation for their next stage of education.
28. Pupils who have SEND benefit from the early identification of their needs and effective support strategies. Teachers understand their individual needs and tailor lessons to meet them. This enables pupils to make good progress in relation to their starting points and they often exceed ambitious targets set for them by the school.
29. Most pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) do not require support because they are already fluent in English. A small proportion receive the support they require to access the curriculum.
30. Leaders have devised and implemented an effective system of marking and feedback. Pupils find this system helpful as they understand how they can improve their work.

31. Leaders have devised a varied programme of extra-curricular activities which includes craft skills, choir, sports clubs, martial arts, chess and board games. These allow pupils to develop their creative, thinking and physical skills, so that they become well-rounded individuals with a broad skill base, in line with the school's aims. Pupils achieve success beyond the classroom, including in a range of team and individual sports, arts competitions and in the UK Primary Maths Challenge.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. Leaders place great emphasis on creating a welcoming and positive environment and strive to develop the principal of respect for others and to ensure that these are understood and embraced by all. The school's values are prominently displayed around the school and are known, understood and supported by pupils. This is reflected in their high standards of behaviour.
34. Leaders have produced a wide-ranging and effective PSHE programme which supports the school's aims. This programme ensures that pupils gain a broad understanding of the importance of physical and mental health, covering topics such as healthy eating and exercise and the value of friendships. Staff and pupil mental health champions further support pupils' wellbeing. Pupils are encouraged to discuss a range of moral issues such as how bullying behaviour can develop, so that they understand correct behaviours. This contributes to the harmonious school community.
35. Pupils are well supported by their teachers throughout the school, and this enables them to grow in self-knowledge and confidence. The programme of relationships education is effective in developing pupils' understanding of healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way. Pupils understand and respect diversity. They reflect upon their own beliefs and develop an appreciation of the faiths of others.
36. Children in the early years grow in confidence due to the supportive relationships they have with staff. They settle in well, feel secure within the setting and become more independent. They learn to organise their belongings and understand the importance of rules and routines. Children's physical development is enhanced through the opportunities for outdoor play and PE lessons.
37. Leaders ensure that PSHE and physical education teach pupils of all ages the importance of healthy eating and regular exercise. They provide opportunities for organised sport lessons and informal games which contribute to the pupils' healthy lifestyle and support their mental wellbeing. Leaders also promote healthy food options at meals.
38. The school places an emphasis upon mental wellbeing with a range of mindfulness sessions and opportunities for discussion. Five staff are currently trained as mental health first aiders and all pupils in Years 5 and 6 are trained mental health 'champions'. Individual support from the school counsellor is available for pupils with mental health needs if required.
39. Pupils' behaviour is of a consistently high standard. They are polite and considerate both in and out of the classroom, reflecting the high expectations of teachers. Leaders have developed a behaviour policy, based upon the values of kindness, care and courtesy. Incidents of poor behaviour are rare and are dealt with appropriately by the school. Bullying is rare and, when incidents do occur, the school addresses them effectively.
40. Leaders ensure that pupils of all ages are supervised appropriately. Some pupils feel that breaktimes are too dominated by ball games and they would like a quiet space where they can reflect or talk. Leaders acknowledge this need, and plan to address it.

41. Leaders ensure that the school's admission and attendance registers are correctly maintained and stored. Staff follow up any unexpected absences and, when pupils leave or join the school, the local authority is notified. The destination of leavers is reported in accordance with local procedures.
42. Leaders ensure that the school premises are well maintained and provide a safe place for pupils. Health and safety policies and procedures are robust and followed effectively. Suitable precautions are taken to reduce the risk of fire, including regular fire-safety training for staff. Fire evacuation drills are well understood and practised.
43. There are suitable arrangements and accommodation for pupils to receive medical help. All permanent staff are suitably trained in first aid and an appropriate number of early years staff are qualified in paediatric first aid.

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

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

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

45. Pupils are prepared for life in modern British society in line with the aims of the school. Pupils have a wide range of leadership opportunities throughout their time at school with every pupil having a role including acting as classroom monitors. Older pupils are prefects, house captains, and librarians. Leaders have devised and implemented a curriculum which enables pupils throughout the school to learn about different cultures.
46. The religious education curriculum covers all of the major world religions, and aids pupils' knowledge and understanding of beliefs and cultures. Pupils show mutual respect and acceptance of others in their class and school regardless of cultural tradition or religious beliefs. They learn to respect, understand and value difference. Pupils are comfortable in each other's company as they learn and grow together.
47. From an early age, pupils learn about the rule of law. They understand the need for rules within school and within society in general. Pupils gain an understanding of democracy as they elect members for the school and eco councils, and know the important role played by major public institutions such as Parliament.
48. Leaders build up pupils' economic and financial awareness through a range of different activities. In mathematics they learn to calculate different amounts. In PSHE topics, they learn to understand how money is used within modern society and that budgeting can present both moral and financial choices.
49. In the early years, staff model respectful behaviour so that children learn the importance of listening to others, of sharing and taking turns. Children learn that rules exist to protect people and learn why it is important for people to undertake various roles in society, such as those working in the emergency and medical services.
50. Leaders organise visits from senior school staff who explain what to expect as part of a programme planned to support their transition. Pupils feel well prepared for life in senior school. This forms part of a programme which helps to inform them of possible career choices and the steps required to follow these up in later life. In addition, pupils are educated about issues such as the healthy use of social media.
51. Pupils make contributions to their school in a range of ways. They bring about change through their contributions to the school and eco councils and act as prefects and class monitors. Leaders actively listen to pupils' views. They have identified that, although they raise money for a number of charities, opportunities for pupils to contribute to the local community are limited. Leaders plan to find further age-appropriate ways in enable this to happen.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

53. Leaders have established a safeguarding culture that promotes the wellbeing of pupils. Staff are vigilant for any signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. The designated safeguarding leads (DSLs) work effectively with outside agencies and make referrals in a timely fashion. Detailed records of concerns are maintained on a secure system which also facilitates the sharing of information with relevant staff.
54. All staff and volunteers are suitably trained in safeguarding when they join the school. This training is updated regularly so that they are aware of the latest guidance.
55. The school's child protection policy is written with reference to the most recent statutory guidance and explains the school's procedures for protecting pupils from harm. Staff know the policy and follow it, showing a secure awareness of the recent changes relating to child-on-child abuse and the recording of low-level concerns.
56. All required recruitment checks are carried out diligently and are recorded in detail in the single central record of appointments.
57. The proprietor and advisory board regularly review the school's safeguarding procedures to check they are effective. This includes a termly check of staff recruitment records and an annual review of safeguarding policies and practice.
58. Leaders ensure pupils know how to keep safe online and provide appropriate filtering and monitoring systems. Pupils feel safe at school and know who to approach if they are worried about anything.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Ruckleigh School
Department for Education number	334/6007
Address	17 Lode Lane Solihull West Midlands B91 2AB
Phone number	0121 705 2773
Email address	office@ruckleigh.co.uk
Website	ruckleigh.co.uk
Proprietor	Mrs Charlotte Laurens
Headteacher	Mr Dominic Smith
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	217
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 May 2019

Information about the school

60. Ruckleigh School is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged from 3 to 11 years. It is based in the town centre of Solihull. The school was founded in 1909 and has been owned by the same family since 1948. The school is a limited company, and the directors are responsible for the governance of the school. Since the previous inspection, an advisory board has been appointed to assist with the oversight of school operations.
61. The early years foundation stage caters for 34 children aged three to five. It comprises one Nursery and one Reception class.
62. The school has identified 58 pupils as having SEND, 26 of whom receive additional support. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for 106 pupils, of whom 4 receive additional support.
64. The school states its aims are to educate the whole child in a stimulating environment where kindness, care and sensitivity towards the needs of others is practised by all. It aims to develop each child to reach their full potential academically, physically, creatively, socially and morally and to guide pupils into habits of self-reliance, courtesy, clear thinking and with a willingness at all times to 'have a go'.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 November 2023

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

66. 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 proprietor
- discussions with the head, 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.

67. 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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