

School inspection report

8 to 10 October 2024

Gad's Hill School

Gravesend Road

Higham

Rochester

Kent

ME3 7PA

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. Governors and school leaders carry out their responsibilities effectively. There are a number of recent appointments to the governing body and as a consequence sub committees have been established to help enable for a greater level of challenge and accountability. Recently, governors have undertaken more active involvement in the daily life of the school to help inform their oversight of the school. Governors and leaders maintain effective oversight of the school, including through making use of external advice to support their review of policies and procedures.
2. Leaders have developed a varied and engaging curriculum. It is planned to ensure appropriate breadth of content and enable pupils to access traditional examination subjects alongside other qualifications, such as those in mountain bike leadership and first aid. The early years curriculum provides opportunities for children to develop well across all areas of learning through a stimulating and varied learning environment alongside well-planned and resourced lessons. The school extra-curricular programme allows pupils at all levels the opportunity to partake in a broad variety of activities supporting their physical and emotional development.
3. Pupils learn and make typically good progress because, in the majority of cases, teachers carefully plan lessons to meet their needs. This is particularly the case in the early years and lower school. However, some teaching in the upper school does not consistently meet the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) or of those with high prior attainment as effectively as possible, limiting their progress.

Pupils are aware of the behaviour expectations of the school, and these are reinforced through the school 'greatest of expectations' policy. In the lower school pupils behave appropriately in lessons and during the school day. However, in the upper school, some low-level disruptive behaviour in lessons goes unchallenged.

4. In the lower school and early years, leaders make effective use of assessment data to support the progress of individual pupils. However, in the upper school, the use of assessment data to adapt provision to support pupils' progress is not as effective as elsewhere in the school.
5. School leaders have developed a comprehensive personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme which promotes mutual respect and cultural understanding. The programme supports pupils' understanding of what is right and wrong. Pupils respect each other and show respect for characteristics protected by law, such as race, religion and sex.
6. Through the 'religion and worldviews' (RAW) programme, pupils are able to develop an appreciation of diverse cultures and beliefs. The programme promotes the importance of social responsibility and respecting others.
7. Appropriate careers advice is provided. This allows for individual advice and a comprehensive pathway to be developed for each pupil in the upper school. This supports the pupils' preparation for the next stage of their education.
8. Leaders ensure that health and safety and fire equipment are checked, maintained and systematically reviewed. The school makes effective use of external health and safety expertise to review their systems and practices.

9. Safeguarding concerns are well managed across the school. Staff are regularly trained and understand their responsibilities in this area. Pupils are able to share any concerns that they might have. Leaders act swiftly and appropriately whenever any safeguarding issues arise.

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 the behaviour management policy is implemented consistently effectively, particularly with regard to low-level disruption
- strengthen the use of assessment data in the upper school to adapt provision to support pupils' progress
- ensure that teaching in the upper school consistently meets the needs of pupils who have SEND and those with high prior attainment as effectively as possible.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school, including through recently established sub-committees and increased involvement in the day-to-day life of the school. For example, governors have recently undertaken a full health and safety audit, commissioned by external experts and are working through the recommended next steps. In particular, governors oversee the implementation of revised procedures relating to the management of risk, training of staff and monitoring and recording practice. Governors' monitoring of the school ensures that leaders demonstrate the knowledge and skills required to ensure that the Standards are met.
11. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities and ensure that the school supports pupils' wellbeing effectively. They communicate the school's aims clearly, so that these are understood across the whole school community.
12. Leaders utilise risk assessments effectively to identify potential risks and record the actions being taken to mitigate them. Suitable risk assessments are carried out for educational trips and safer recruitment, and for the school premises, including daily risk assessments in the classrooms and early years setting.
13. Leaders evaluate the school's successes and areas for development and plan for school improvement accordingly. For example, leaders ensure that teaching staff, including those in the early years, are given useful time to enhance their practice through a continuous professional development (CPD) programme. This is supported by a programme of learning walks and the sharing of best practice in the school.
14. Information is provided to parents in a timely manner and the school operates an open-door policy allowing for existing and prospective parents the opportunity to discuss the information provided and made available. Leaders provide appropriate information to the local authority with regard to any pupils, including those with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, whom they fund.
15. An appropriate complaints policy and procedure are in place. Formal complaints are rare, however, when they do arise leaders handle them appropriately and in a timely manner. The school keeps appropriate records of any complaints that have been received.
16. Leaders at all levels ensure that the requirements under the Equality Act 2010 are met and implement an appropriate accessibility plan. Leaders ensure that the school does not discriminate against pupils and that the school is an inclusive environment.
17. Leaders work effectively with outside agencies when required. For example, leaders refer safeguarding issues to relevant external agencies should the need arise.

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. Leaders have planned a broad curriculum which effectively promotes the learning of pupils, including in the core areas of English, mathematics and science. The curriculum covers a range of subjects which goes beyond the national curriculum (NC) and includes subjects such as mountain bike leadership and first aid qualifications. Pupils develop their intellectual aesthetic and technological skills through a range of subjects. The early years curriculum is also broad and balanced and the thorough planning of links between topics provides every opportunity for children to reach their learning goals. Leaders plan a continuous curriculum from early years to the upper school that methodically develops pupils' learning across different subjects.
20. Teaching enables pupils to learn new skills and concepts and is well matched to their learning needs. The continuous curriculum allows pupils the opportunity to explore concepts and develop their understanding of themes and ideas as they move through the school. For example, the curriculum and teaching are well planned to support children in the early years as they move through the school. Teachers are knowledgeable about their subjects and have high expectations of pupils' learning and achievement. Where teaching is most effective, lessons are planned to be well tailored to meet the needs of the cohort. In the most effective lessons teachers address any misconceptions through questioning and well used resources and encourage pupils to be enthusiastic about their learning. Teaching often includes detailed feedback and guidance for pupils about how to improve their work, often linked to clearly articulated success criteria. As a result of these measures, pupils typically make good progress.
21. Pupils who have SEND are identified by leaders and supported. Where teaching is matched to pupils' needs effectively, pupils progress well from their starting points. In the lower school including those in the early years, teaching meets the needs of the cohort and pupils make good progress. In the upper school, teaching for pupils who have SEND or high prior attainment is not always well matched to their needs. In these circumstances, pupils progress less well than they do typically across the school.
22. In the early years and in the lower school, children's literacy skills are developed through regular reading sessions. Teachers encourage participation in small group activities where children can sound out words and match different letters to sounds. Teachers support children's language development through using descriptive language and rich vocabulary. They plan effective activities that help children to develop their knowledge and understanding of numbers shape and space.
23. Leaders implement a suitable assessment framework to track the progress of individual pupils. This is most effective in the early years and in the lower school. However, in the upper school, less effective use is made of assessment data to adapt provision to support pupils' progress.
24. Parents are provided with opportunities to discuss their child's progress throughout the year. These include opportunities for parents to come into school to look at their child's work and discuss their reports.
25. The extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for pupils to develop existing and learn new skills. The wide range of activities boosts pupils' confidence and allows them to interact socially with others through clubs such as Combined Cadet Force (CCF), mountain bike leadership and wall

climbing. The wide range of sporting fixtures enables pupils to develop their resilience through experiencing both success and failure and helps develop their skills in the particular sports.

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 and teachers promote pupils' self-understanding and respect for themselves and for others through a well-planned PSHE programme and activities such as assemblies. Pupils learn about and discuss themes relating to equality, faith and relationships continually through the school.
28. Leaders model and communicate their valuing of individual pupils' identities and achievements. This contributes to a community that accepts and appreciates each other's diversity. In assemblies, pupils are given the opportunity to present their own ideas and thoughts on topics such as freedom of speech and voting rights. Leaders' and staff's demonstration of their acceptance and valuing of the individual contributes to the development of pupils' self-confidence and self-esteem. The PSHE programme, which includes relationships and sex education (RSE), is delivered effectively by specialist teachers and includes content which reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance. For example, pupils learn about diverse types and structures of healthy relationships. Staff enable pupils to discuss and reflect on the themes explored. The PSHE and RSE programme meets the needs of those in the lower school and the upper school.
29. For many pupils, Combined Cadet Force (CCF) activities play a large role in their school life, both during the week and on camps and weekends. The programme of activities helps to develop pupils' leadership skills, teamwork and problem-solving skills. These skills are further developed and supported through the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and mountain bike leadership courses on offer.
30. Pupils develop their spiritual understanding through the 'religion and worldviews' (RAW) programme which is taught across the school. The programme explores diverse religions and world cultures, allowing pupils the opportunity to develop both an understanding and appreciation of different beliefs. Assemblies and school events on topics such as 'culture day' also help pupils to develop their awareness of and respect for diversity.
31. Children in the early years experience an age-appropriate programme of activities which supports their personal, emotional and physical development. This includes opportunities for exploring, climbing and using gross motor skills while learning outside. Children are encouraged to share their emotions. Staff in early years support the children with sensitivity and compassion and help them share and manage their emotions.
32. Behaviour management is typically effective. Leaders communicate high expectations of behaviour, and the newly implemented behaviour policy is widely understood. However in some lessons in the upper school, staff do not challenge or respond to low-level disruptive behaviour as effectively as elsewhere in the school.
33. Leaders respond to the rare bullying issues which arise in school in an appropriate and timely manner. Leaders work closely with pupils and parents to resolve any concerns about possible bullying effectively. Pupils learn about types of bullying and how what may be meant as banter can be experienced as bullying.
34. Admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately and in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor any patterns and trends of attendance and follow up any non-attendance

swiftly. They inform the local education authority when children join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.

- 35. Leaders have ensured that pupils are closely supervised throughout the day, including by having sufficient staff deployed on duty during break times and in the early years.
- 36. The school premises and accommodation are suitable and well maintained. Health and safety checks are carried out in a systematic way. There are up to date fire risk assessments and fire equipment is checked appropriately.
- 37. There is suitable medical accommodation to care for pupils who are unwell during the school day and staff are appropriately trained to deliver first aid. This includes, in early years, staff who have paediatric first aid certificates. Procedures for the administration and storage of medicine are effective.

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

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

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

39. Pupils benefit from a coherent approach to careers guidance that develops as pupils move through the school. This ranges from parents talking about their careers with early years children to older pupils undertaking work experience and an annual 'careers week'. In the lower school, pupils are supported to find the most appropriate pathway for secondary and senior education. In the upper school, pupils receive effective guidance on GCSE options and are well informed about sixth-form choices and how these relate to particular career paths. The school makes effective use of external careers expertise to inform its provision in this area.
40. Leaders provide a curriculum which enables pupils to learn about, understand and discuss life in British society and, through the RAW programme, life in the wider world. The RAW programme promotes values such as tolerance and equal treatment. Pupils are taught about democracy, government and how elections work. The election of pupils, by pupils, for heads of house, school councils and eco councils gives pupils a further insight into democratic processes.
41. The curriculum develops pupils' understanding of how to be environmentally responsible. Pupils are taught about the importance of recycling across the whole school and explore ways to conserve energy, such as turning off light switches and taking care over their individual carbon footprint.
42. The school enhances pupils' economic awareness effectively. Children in the early years develop their understanding of money through role-play buying and selling. Younger pupils learn about the importance of money and how to balance a budget, while older pupils are taught about opening bank accounts and are introduced to the notion of taxes.
43. The PSHE programme includes units on crime and punishment and the school's 'Great Expectations' behaviour code outlines how to behave within the school community and beyond. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of the importance of the rule of law.
44. Opportunities are provided by leaders for pupils to be able to develop their sense of responsibility in the school and wider community. This includes peer mentoring, representing others on the school council and fund-raising activities for local community projects. Pupils support a range of charities.
45. Children in the early years develop their social awareness through opportunities to engage in role play such as being a shop keeper and taking part in independent activities. Staff teach children the importance of sharing and model positive social behaviour to them. Pupils in the junior school are prepared effectively for the social and academic expectations of the upper school.
46. The curriculum engages pupils with issues relating to equality and diversity. Weekly assemblies and tutor time further raise pupils' awareness of these through exploration of themes such as Black History Month, and presentations on feminism and lesbian, gay and bisexual, transgender (LGBT) issues. These measures promote pupils' understanding of issues relating to equality and diversity and support pupils' preparation for life in British society.
47. The PSHE and RAW programmes effectively enable pupils to develop mutual trust, tolerance and respectfulness towards each other. Discussions with political themes are done impartially and with sensitivity to the beliefs and feelings of all.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are trained appropriately to carry out their duties. They meet regularly and ensure that any safeguarding concerns that arise are responded to appropriately, including through liaising with relevant external agencies for support and referring concerns to them when necessary. Leaders maintain appropriate and secure records of any safeguarding concerns, including any low-level concerns about staff, that arise.
50. Regular and timely safeguarding training takes place for all staff. Staff understand the school's expectations of their behaviour and their responsibilities under the staff code of conduct. They understand the procedures to follow should any safeguarding concern arise, including those relating to low-level concerns or allegations against staff.
51. Governors, including a designated safeguarding governor, maintain an effective and vigilant oversight of all safeguarding matters, including through regular meetings with leaders and scrutiny of records and scrutiny of reports received.
52. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe when online and are able to identify trusted adults in school who they can speak with if they have any concerns. Leaders maintain robust filtering and monitoring of internet usage and follow up any breaches swiftly and with sensitivity.
53. The school ensures that all required safer recruitment checks are carried out for those working across the school. A suitable single central record of appointments is kept and regularly monitored by leaders and members of the governing body.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

54. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Gad's Hill School
Department for Education number	886/6007
Registered charity number	803153
Address	Gad's Hill School Higham Rochester Kent ME3 7PA
Phone number	01474 822366
Email address	information@gadshillschool.org
Website	http://www.gadshill.org
Proprietor	Gads Hill School
Chair	Mr Dean Martin
Headteacher	Mr Paul Savage
Age range	3 to 16
Number of pupils	359
Date of previous inspection	22 to 24 September 2021

Information about the school

55. Gad's Hill School is an independent day school for male and female pupils situated in Higham, Rochester. It was founded in 1924 as a school for female pupils and became co-educational in 2001. The school is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity. The governing body is made up of directors of the company and trustees of the charity. Since the previous inspection the school has appointed a new chair of the governing body and a new safeguarding governor. The school comprises three sections: Kindergarten, for children and pupils aged 3 to 7 years, the junior school, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years, and the upper school, for pupils aged 11 to 16 years.
56. The early years comprises one Nursery, which caters for 26 children and one Reception class, which caters for 18 children.
57. The school has identified 141 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
58. English is an additional language for 17 pupils.
59. The school states its aims are to enable pupils to enjoy school, to achieve good academic qualifications and to develop personal attributes to guide them on their journey through life. Excellence, enthusiasm, friendship and success are core values. The school seeks to equip pupils to leave Gad's Hill as confident, mature, articulate, pleasant and self-reliant young people who are well-equipped for the outside world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

8 to 10 October 2024

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

61. 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 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.

62. 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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