

School inspection report

14 to 16 May 2024

Holmewood House School

Langton Green

Tunbridge Wells

Kent

TN3 0EB

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 and governors have a clear vision for the school based on the school's positive values. The recently appointed leadership team have instigated comprehensive self-evaluation of all aspects of the school, including in the early years and for boarding. This has informed risk assessment and decision-making, enabling governors and leaders to monitor the work of the school effectively and identify accurately areas of most success, areas for improvement and training needs in order that the Standards are met consistently, and the wellbeing of pupils is actively promoted. Governors have supported the resourcing of the school's extensive curriculum and the development of the school's bespoke 'My heart, my mind, my world' programme which supports pupils' personal development, mental health and emotional wellbeing.
2. Parents are given regular opportunities to meet with staff to discuss their children's achievement and personal development. Parents in the early years are provided with clear and detailed information including the next steps for learning. However, reports from Year 1 upwards do not indicate clearly attainment and progress in all subjects, including those related to personal development.
3. The curriculum is extensive, creative and challenging, reflecting leaders' high expectations. It supports pupils in exploring, refining and testing their ideas. By the end of the Reception year, most children attain a good level of development. By the end of Year 8, the majority of pupils attain above average in standardised tests in science, mathematics and English compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The majority of leavers gain entry to their first choice of senior or secondary schools, with some gaining scholarships in a range of areas including academic, sport and the creative arts.
4. Clear criteria for assessment, marking and feedback have been implemented in the majority of subjects enabling pupils to know what they have achieved well across a wide breath of subjects and what they need to do to improve. Pupils make good progress from their starting points overall. Most pupils gain entry to their first-choice schools, including a range of scholarships. However, in a small number of lessons teaching does not take into account pupils' prior attainment as effectively as possible and does not engage or challenge pupils, which impacts their progress and attainment.
5. The pupils' personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) programme, known as 'My heart, my mind, my world', enables pupils to understand key issues that impact their emotional and physical wellbeing.
6. The school implements a clear and effective behaviour policy with a focus on pupils taking responsibility for their behaviour. The vast majority of pupils demonstrate kindness and consideration towards others. They are clear that bullying of any kind, including online, must not be tolerated.
7. Boarding staff support boarders effectively with their academic studies and in their personal development. Boarders develop independence and confidence through engaging in a wide range of activities and through socialising in their free time.
8. Pupils' economic education supports their understanding of key life skills such as money management. Pupils learn about economics from a global perspective, including the challenges of running a business, through visits and practical experiences.

9. Pupils receive suitable careers education from Year 6 which supports them in considering the wide range of opportunities that are available to them. They receive extensive support in preparing for external examinations and in preparing to move to their next school.
10. There is an effective culture of safeguarding throughout the school including supporting pupils' mental wellbeing. Staff are suitably trained. They are confident with regard to actions to be taken if a pupil makes a disclosure. Pupils learn how to keep safe including when online. Referrals are made appropriately to the local authority and suitable risk assessments for safeguarding are in place. Safer recruitment procedures are followed diligently. The required pre-employment checks are implemented and recorded accurately.

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:

- strengthens pupils' attainment and progress by ensuring consistency in the effectiveness of teaching and learning
- ensure that reports to parents indicate clearly attainment and progress in all subjects, including those related to personal development.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders and governors have a clear vision for the school. They communicate the school's aims clearly so that these are understood by parents and worked towards by staff.
12. The recently appointed leadership team collaborates effectively. Leaders undertake comprehensive and inciteful self-evaluation in order to assess accurately how well the school meets the Standards, including in the early years, for boarding and in relation to equalities legislation. This self-evaluation informs a cohesive and clear school improvement plan. Governors support the decisions made as a result of self-evaluation, such as the development of the learning hub and additional standardised testing.
13. Governors have recently supported extensive new initiatives in relation to the curriculum and pupils' personal development through the implementation of the school's bespoke 'My heart, my mind, my world' PSHE scheme from Nursery.
14. An efficient board and committee structure supports governors' monitoring of the implementation of the school's policies and procedures. Behaviour records are monitored regularly by senior leaders and shared appropriately with governors through detailed reports and discussions. The safeguarding governors meet regularly with the safeguarding team. They monitor all aspects of safeguarding diligently.
15. Leaders ensure that suitable risk assessments are in place in relation to health and safety and safeguarding. These identify potential hazards and risks clearly, including contextual safeguarding risks, and specify the actions to be taken in order to minimise and manage these. Regular review and updates are in place, including consideration of lessons learnt following any near-misses or incidents.
16. Through comprehensive and relevant training, the introduction of performance review and effective communication, leaders ensure that staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge required for their roles including meeting the needs of pupils with SEND. Team learning walks, discussions with pupils and evaluation of pupils' work and results inform leaders' identification of where practice works most effectively and areas for development.
17. Leaders ensure that information is provided as required, mainly through the school's well-organised website. Parents also receive regular, detailed newsletters and updates. Detailed reports of children's personal, social and emotional development, progress and attainment, including the next steps for learning, are shared regularly with parents who have children in the early years. Although the school provides termly reports from Year 1 and regular parents' meetings, the reports do not communicate as clearly as possible about pupils' progress and attainment across the curriculum, including subjects related to personal development. Leaders provide the required information about funded pupils to the local authority.
18. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented appropriately. Leaders respond promptly to concerns raised by parents and pupils. Parents may access freely form tutors and leaders if they have a query or concern. Where formal complaints are received, they are handled effectively through a three-stage process with clear timescales. The number of complaints received is published annually on the school's website. Records are kept appropriately including of any action taken and the outcomes of the complaint.

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

19. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. Pupils experience a broad, balanced and enriched curriculum that deepens pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding, as well as encompassing the required areas of learning. A wide range of educational visits extend and deepen learning across the curriculum. Schemes of work have recently been reviewed comprehensively, enabling teachers to incorporate key knowledge and skills in their planning, as well as taking into account examination requirements and the needs and interests of pupils. For example, in geography, countries chosen for study are selected in discussion with international boarders. Subject leaders are highly knowledgeable, generating enthusiasm for learning in their subjects through a creative, challenging and practical approach enabling in-depth study. A wide range of educational visits extend and deepen learning across the curriculum.
21. There is a sustained focus on developing high mathematical and linguistic skills including in French, Latin or Spanish. As they move through the school, pupils read fluently, communicating with confidence and presenting their views in a reasoned and logical way. Effective grouping in English enables pupils to develop the creative aspects of language as well as accurate grammar, spelling and punctuation. Similarly, careful grouping in mathematics from Year 3 enables pupils to work at a pace that supports and extends their understanding of mathematics across all areas including geometry, algebra and problem-solving.
22. Pupils develop their aesthetic and creative skills to a high level across the curriculum and through music, drama, computing and art. Pupils enjoy taking part in a wide range of productions and in weekly informal concerts. All pupils have experience of learning to play an instrument, with many going on to achieve highly in music and drama examinations set by the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art (LAMDA) and the Associated Board of Royal Schools of Music (ABRSM).
23. The Nursery and Reception curriculum takes into account the developmental stages and interests of the children. Children engage in a wide range of open-ended indoor and outdoor activities that enable them to be active learners. Staff utilise the early years resources and environment effectively to enable children to be inquisitive and investigative and enjoy learning independently and with their peers. They are supported by key people who know the children well and the next steps needed to extend their learning.
24. Rigorous and detailed individual tracking of children in the early years and of pupils in the majority of subjects enables leaders to evaluate pupils' attainment and progress, and to identify where additional support is required and what impact it has. Additional standardised tests have recently been introduced which support further the evaluation of pupils' attainment and progress. In the majority of subjects, marking and feedback enable pupils to know what they have done well and what they need to do to improve their work further.
25. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make rapid progress from their starting points. This is because staff within the learning strategies department use their extensive understanding of specific learning needs and behaviour management to ensure that pupils are well supported. Accurate and detailed assessments, including those conducted by external agencies, are used to identify specific targets and ways of supporting learning. These are used effectively within the classroom, in groups and in one-to-one sessions.

26. The learning strategies department also comprehensively assesses and supports pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), including those who are international boarders. Specialist staff produce specific individual plans supported by resources including the use of electronic translators where required. These are used by teachers to ensure pupils who have EAL have access to the curriculum and make good progress.
27. The large majority of teaching is well planned and takes into account thorough and detailed assessment information. Teaching typically demonstrates high expectations of all pupils. However, in a small number of lessons teaching does not challenge pupils or take their prior attainment into account effectively, with the result that pupils do not engage as fully or make as much progress as is typical across the school.
28. Boarders feel well supported in their academic work. Key boarding staff supervise boarders prep diligently and are approachable when support is requested.
29. Pupils have access to a wide range of extra-curricular clubs and activities including choir, brass and swing bands, tennis, squash, gymnastics, athletics, fencing, Spanish, chess, debating, photography, art and coding. These are well attended and help pupils to develop creative and practical skills in the areas they have selected.

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

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

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

31. The school's bespoke 'My heart, my mind, my world' PSHE programme is planned comprehensively. It guides pupils in understanding how they learn, developing effective study skills and in taking responsibility for their physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing through study of themes such as active listening, mutual respect, identifying personal qualities, sleep, dental health, nutrition, managing stress and setting goals.
32. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is planned appropriately enabling pupils to develop an understanding of healthy, positive relationships. This includes the understanding of personal boundaries and what is meant by consent. The RSE curriculum is supported effectively by the school nurse, particularly in enabling pupils to understand the emotional and physical changes they experience during puberty.
33. Throughout the school there is a focus on encouraging pupils and recognising their strengths. This raises their self-confidence and willingness to participate in lessons, activities and performances. The wellbeing room provides an additional safe space where pupils can share any worries or concerns and receive support from staff who are trained to give suitable responses. A large number of staff are trained as mental health first aiders, which enables them to listen and respond to pupils more effectively.
34. Children in the early years learn to understand their emotions, take turns, co-operate and to self-regulate through a wide range of strategies, such as the use of 'kind hands, feet and words', using an 'emotional washing line' to name feelings and teaching about facial expressions. Play therapy is used effectively to support children with managing their behaviour and emotions. Children develop secure attachments with the key people. Transitions from home to school and to the next class are planned carefully, enabling children to become familiar with their new environment and to feel secure.
35. The school's behaviour policy sets out clearly the school's expectations and ethos of promoting kindness, respect and responsibility for one's actions. Pupils' behaviour is monitored comprehensively by school leaders including detailed discussions during weekly year group pastoral meetings. Support and appropriate sanctions are tailored to the needs of the pupils and implemented effectively with the guidance of tutors.
36. The curriculum supports pupils' spiritual development by engaging pupils with influential works of art and music. Pupils gain a developed understanding of faith and ethics through the study of theology, philosophy and religion. Assemblies provide time for reflection on a range of spiritual and moral themes such as the impact of one's decisions on others. The curriculum also supports pupils' spiritual development by engaging pupils with influential works of art and music.
37. Pupils participate in an extensive range of physical activities through their physical education (PE) lessons and through competitive sports and extra-curricular activities. This supports their emotional wellbeing as well as enabling them to achieve the balance, gross and fine motor skills that enable them to achieve well in a wide range of sports.

38. Supervision is made effective through suitable organisation of staff and the maintenance of required ratios in the early years. The attendance registers and admissions register are maintained accurately. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
39. The school premises are maintained well. Regular checks and maintenance are carried out across the premises, including of fire safety equipment, lighting, asbestos, the electrical system and school vehicles. Detailed records are maintained, and suitable action is taken to address any issues following regular lockdown and fire evacuation drills. Comprehensive training is in place with regard to health and safety and fire safety. Appropriate systems are in place for the control of traffic and people on the site.
40. The medical centre is suitable and well managed by medically trained staff. A large number of staff are qualified first aiders and all staff in the early years are paediatric first aid trained. Effective systems are in place for the storage and administration of medicines. Medical centre and boarding staff communicate regularly and clearly so that boarders receive appropriate and timely medical care when required.
41. Boarders develop independence, confidence and a wide range of friendships through boarding activities and the provision of a suitable balance of free time, study time and activities. Sufficient staff are on hand to supervise boarders effectively during boarding time.
42. Sleeping accommodation is of a high standard. Boarding areas are well maintained and clean. Laundry is well managed. Colourful and individual personalisation creates a comfortable environment. Boarders have individual and appropriate lockable spaces for their property.

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

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

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

44. The school's 'My heart, my mind, my world' programme and wider curriculum support pupils' understanding of society, becoming responsible citizens and the importance of respecting people's protected characteristics, such as those of disability, religion and sexual orientation. The curriculum promotes the British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs and for those without faith. These considerations are explored through themes including politics, eco-tourism, debating and money-management. Thought-provoking assemblies such as those linked to World Mental Health Day, 'world kindness' day and 'empathy day' also support pupils' understanding of society and the wider world. Visitors, such as speakers discussing International Holocaust Remembrance Day and young people doing paralympic training, develop pupils' awareness of the issues related to these.
45. Challenging questioning, such as in theology, philosophy and ethics lessons, enables pupils to consider moral issues and the ethical stances of various responses to these, including their own. For example, pupils' reflection on the validity of the theoretical statement, 'society will never achieve justice', led to their thoughtful consideration of what is meant by both society and justice. In addition, leaders and staff consistently promote the value of kindness to others. As a result, pupils demonstrate a well-developed sense of right and wrong and an appreciation of the school's focus on taking responsibility for one's own behaviour. Form times and individual tutorials provide time to talk through social situations and how to respond to range of issues including managing conflict and making friends.
46. Boarders support the development of mutual respect and understanding, particularly by sharing information about their countries of origin, including religions, customs, festivals, traditions, physical and economic geography.
47. Children in the early years learn about themselves, their families and the wider world. They understand rules and the importance of taking responsibility for their own behaviour through a positive approach by staff. Politeness, sharing and kindness are re-enforced with explanation, support and guidance which supports children in making the right choices.
48. Pupils are introduced to the concept of leadership and taking responsibility for their actions from an early age. There is a wide range of opportunities for pupils to develop their leadership skills. These include head male and female pupils, house captains and eco-councillors. Pupils experience democracy in action by voting for their representatives. They also initiate their own leadership opportunities by approaching staff to introduce new pupil-led activities, such as coding club, handball club and assemblies. Pupils also lead on supporting a wide range of local, national and international charities including a local foodbank, the Royal British Legion poppy appeal and a charity located in Zambia. Older pupils have organised a sponsored sleep out at school which enabled them to empathise with those who are homeless.
49. The enrichment curriculum is designed to challenge, including solving real life problems. It includes economic education and suitable careers modules in Years 6, 7 and 8. Pupils learn about managing money, the cost of loans and the impact of supply and demand. The Year 8 leavers programme includes real-world experiences such as visiting a robotic strawberry farm. Visiting speakers raise awareness of the wide range of possible careers.

50. Pupils appreciate the effective support and guidance that they receive with regard to preparing for entrance examinations through teaching, the tutor system and the school's 'My heart, my mind, my world' curriculum. Leaders' close liaison with senior schools supports a smooth transition process for leavers. Parents and pupils discuss options available with staff and are supported in choosing their children's next schools, including through visits. As a result of these measures, pupils are well prepared for their next stage of their education.

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

51. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

52. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures reflect current statutory guidance effectively. The safeguarding governors monitor all aspects of safeguarding, including recruitment, the single central record of appointments (SCR) and staff files. An annual review of safeguarding, in line with the local authority (LA) partnership framework, is conducted and considered carefully by all governors and leaders. There is a secure culture of safeguarding throughout the school.
53. Staff are confident with regard to actions to be taken if a pupil makes a disclosure. Regular training for all staff and checking of their understanding conducted by the safeguarding team, ensure that staff are well informed, have a clear awareness that 'it could happen here', and record and report any concerns diligently and promptly. Staff also know that they can independently make referrals to external agencies.
54. The safeguarding team respond swiftly and appropriately whenever safeguarding concerns are raised. They maintain appropriate liaison with external safeguarding partners, such as the local authority designated officer (LADO) and children's services, and refer concerns to them without delay, when necessary. Safeguarding records are detailed, thorough, secure, up to date and monitored consistently by the safeguarding team.
55. An appropriate filtering system is in place to prevent pupils and adults accessing inappropriate information when using the internet. The safeguarding team continually monitors internet use and takes appropriate action where required, including discussion with staff, pupils and parents. Boarders are given appropriate access to their phones to contact parents at agreed times. During the inspection, systems were sharpened to make clear to boarders that the school's Wi-Fi must be used at all times when using mobile phones in order to ensure that the filtering and monitoring by the school can be applied at all times.
56. Leaders and staff inform pupils of the importance of sharing any concerns that they might have. Pupils throughout school have 'safety circles' where they have identified adults to whom they can turn if they have any worries. Safeguarding posters with updated team members are also located in each classroom. Boarders understand the role of the independent person and know where to locate contact details for services including Childline and the Children's Commissioner.
57. Safer recruitment procedures are securely in place. The school carries out all required pre-employment checks. The SCR and staff files are well organised and record the safer recruitment checks accurately.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Holmewood House School
Department for Education number	886/6012
Registered charity number	279267
Address	Holmewood House School Langton Green, Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 0EB
Phone number	01892 860000
Email address	admin@holmewoodhouse.co.uk
Website	www.holmewoodhouse.co.uk
Proprietor	Holmewood House School
Chair	Mr Jeremy Thomson
Headteacher	Mrs Ruth O'Sullivan
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	475
Number of boarding pupils	25
Date of previous inspection	12 to 13 February 2020

Information about the school

59. Holmewood House School is a co-educational independent day and boarding school for boys and girls aged between 2 and 13 years. The school is overseen by a board of governors. The school comprises the Nursery for children aged 2 to 4 years, the pre-preparatory department for pupils aged 4 to 7 years and the preparatory department for Years 3 to 8.
60. Full, weekly and flexi-boarding options are offered to pupils of 8 years and above.
61. The early years provision consists of two Nursery classes catering between them for 45 children, and two Reception classes catering between them for 28 children.
62. The school has identified 81 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for 82 pupils.
64. The school states its aims are for pupils to become their best selves in the fullest sense, upholding the school's core values of self-belief, aspiration and kindness with a generosity of spirit. It seeks to encourage pupils to become independent, creative and critical learners who aim for standards of excellence in all that they do. The school intends to promote respect for all and strives to develop pupils' emotional and social wellbeing, self-esteem, resilience, confidence, and an appreciation of global opportunities in an ever-changing world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 May 2024

65. A team of five 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 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by staff
- 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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