

School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

Winchester House School

44 High Street
Brackley
Northamptonshire
NN13 7AZ

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	5
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	5
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	7
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	9
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.....	10
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	11
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	12
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	13
SAFEGUARDING	14
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	14
SCHOOL DETAILS	15
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	16
INSPECTION DETAILS	17

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors and leaders work in close partnership to enact effective measures that promote the wellbeing of pupils. Governors ensure that school and boarding leaders are well trained to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Governors and leaders routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the school's strategic vision. They make prompt adjustments, when needed, to support the school's continuous development.
2. The broad curriculum enables pupils to acquire a relevant set of skills and knowledge in preparation for the next stage of their education. Teachers' high expectations and subject expertise motivate pupils and extend their thinking. Pupils achieve well as a result.
3. An appropriate assessment framework allows leaders to monitor pupils' progress and attainment over time. Leaders use the information to plan for pupils' individual needs. However, leaders' use of assessment data to identify wider trends regarding how well pupils learn skills and knowledge as they move from one section of the school to another is not consistently in place. Leaders do not sufficiently evaluate assessment information and use this to adapt the way in which the curriculum is planned and taught in different year groups to maximise pupils' progress.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their different starting points. Leaders provide appropriate support to meet pupils' emotional and learning needs. Consequently, pupils who have SEND grow in confidence, skill and independence.
5. Leaders in the early years set high expectations for children's personal development and learning outcomes. They encourage children's independence and plan activities that reflect children's interests. Children make good progress, notably with their early reading and social skills.
6. Through a comprehensive curriculum for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, pupils learn strategies to form successful friendships and understand their emotions.
7. An extensive programme of physical education (PE) and sporting opportunities develops pupils' personal fitness and increases their physical skill levels. Teachers' subject specialisms and well-planned lessons ensure that pupils develop their technique, stamina and agility.
8. Pupils are courteous and well-behaved. The trusting relationships they have with leaders and staff reassure pupils that any concerns raised will be addressed. Pupils flourish in the school's nurturing environment.
9. Boarders' medical and dietary needs are met. Accommodation is suitable, and boarders personalise their living areas. Evening activities are carefully considered to provide boarders with opportunities for social interactions.
10. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing through a rigorous approach to health and safety. This includes comprehensive staff training and the monitoring of routine checks and fire safety practices to ensure that these take place as regularly and effectively as they should.
11. Pupils are well prepared for senior school. Leaders promote pupils' sense of responsibility through access to leadership roles, such as boarding and head prefects and eco-councillors. Pupils are sensitive to the needs of others and understand the impact they can make on the lives of others.

12. Leaders arrange a series of guest speakers to introduce pupils to different occupations. However, older pupils are not given sufficient information about potential careers or further education and training options for their future lives.
13. Safeguarding leaders and staff are well-trained. They understand the importance of reporting concerns promptly and remain alert to potential safeguarding issues. When situations arise, detailed record-keeping helps to inform leaders' decision-making with regard to protecting pupils from harm.
14. At the start of the inspection visit, not all arrangements for boarders to share their concerns reflected statutory guidance. This was quickly rectified during the visit.

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:

- enhance the strategic oversight of assessment information to ensure that evaluation is consistently effective in planning for and meeting pupils' learning needs as they progress through the different sections of the school
- increase opportunities for pupils in Years 7 and 8 to develop their awareness of potential career and further education and training options in readiness for their adult lives
- ensure that the arrangements for boarders to share concerns are in place and in line with all statutory requirements.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

15. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school to prioritise pupils' ongoing wellbeing. They visit the site regularly and engage actively with the views of staff, pupils and parents. Governors receive detailed reports from leaders, including on attendance and complaints as well as pupils' academic outcomes and sporting achievements. This ensures that governors keep themselves regularly updated on the day-to-day workings of the school.
16. Governors ensure that leaders, including boarding leaders, receive training and guidance to equip them with the skills and knowledge to carry out their roles effectively. The school's commitment to staff training, most recently focusing on neurodiversity and inclusivity in the classroom, enhances teachers' specialist knowledge so that pupils' learning and pastoral needs are met.
17. In the early years, leaders provide frequent opportunities for staff to pursue their training needs and develop their own practice. Leaders plan the curriculum and how it is taught to enable children's successful learning and personal development.
18. Boarding leaders manage policies and procedures appropriately. For example, they carry out fire drills regularly so that the welfare of boarders is safeguarded.
19. Governors and leaders check the school's development plans to ensure that the school's direction and ethos successfully reflect its aims. The school's aims are well understood by pupils. Leaders communicate 'The Winchester House Way' clearly through a programme of assemblies and PSHE lessons. Posters displayed throughout the school offer pupils guidance, reminders and strategies on how to achieve the aims.
20. Governors and leaders systematically review policies through various sub-committees. Governors scrutinise policy detail and offer leaders advice and appropriate challenge to reassure themselves that policies are suitable and reflect the latest statutory guidance.
21. The required information is provided to parents via the school's website, including its aims, key policies, a statement of boarding principles and contact details. Parents receive regular reports about their child's progress and achievement.
22. Leaders form beneficial relationships with a range of external agencies to support pupils' and boarders' wellbeing. Access to specialist advice helps to inform leaders' decision-making when situations arise.
23. Leaders apply clear procedures for carrying out risk assessments. They identify risks relating to the school site, including for the early years and boarding provision. A range of detailed risk assessments are in place, including for overseas residential trips, visiting speakers and site security.
24. Governors and leaders regularly review feedback from parent and pupil surveys and school statistics and make necessary adaptations to procedures and systems. For example, additional specialist classroom resources have recently been introduced to enhance the supportive classroom environments and better meet pupils' needs. This reflects the school's commitment to respond to identified areas for development in order to improve pupils' outcomes.

25. The school has a suitable complaints process. Any concerns are followed up in line with the timeframes of the complaints policy. Leaders maintain detailed records and are quick to respond when concerns are raised. In this way, matters are resolved promptly.
26. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Pupils are not discriminated against by the school. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan. Leaders carry out adaptations to meet pupils' needs. Adaptations to the site include accessible toilet facilities and ramps for entry to the school buildings as well as specialist classroom resources. This ensures that all users have access to the school's curriculum and to the buildings and surroundings.
27. The school reports to the local authority regarding funding for pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan, as required.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

29. Leaders have designed a comprehensive curriculum that offers opportunities for pupils to develop a range of mathematical, linguistic, scientific, creative and technological skills. A creative curriculum for pupils up to Year 4 inspires pupils' interest and engagement through topic-based learning. Pupils from Year 5 upwards learn reasoning skills in preparation for senior-school entrance. Pupils build a relevant toolkit of knowledge and understanding to be fully prepared for the next stage of their education.
30. Teachers plan lessons based on pupils' prior attainment and individual learning needs. Teachers' subject-specialist knowledge, high expectations and use of open-ended questioning enable pupils to increase their knowledge and deepen their understanding. Pupils are conscientious and independent learners. Teachers encourage pupils to evaluate their work from an early age so that pupils understand ways to improve their skills. Pupils make good progress, particularly with early reading skills by the end of Year 2. By the end of Year 8, pupils attain especially well in English, mathematics, science, history and languages.
31. Following a review of the school's assessment system, leaders have put a range of measures in place to monitor pupils' achievements more closely over time. Generally, teachers use assessment data effectively to identify what individual pupils do and do not know. They adapt their teaching accordingly to take account of pupils' individual next steps. However, leaders' strategic oversight of assessment information to identify wider trends, such as considering variation in pupils' knowledge and skills across year groups, is less developed. This limits how effectively leaders evaluate assessment data to improve curriculum content and teaching approaches that enable pupils' ongoing progress as they move through the school.
32. Pupils who have SEND learn successfully and achieve well. Leaders identify pupils' learning needs early so that appropriate support can be arranged. Resources, including visual aids, social groups and specialist learning resources, are carefully matched to pupils' individual needs. This helps pupils to develop confidence in their basic skills. Pupils who have EHC plans are given clear and specific targets that are monitored closely to support their ongoing development.
33. Leaders organise suitable support to meet the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), should this be required. They assess pupils' language fluency on entry to the school. Teachers provide individual support for pupils' English acquisition, initially through stories, conversations and modelling subject-specific vocabulary. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress over time.
34. Teaching staff in the early years introduce children to new vocabulary and check children's understanding through questioning so that children quickly become confident communicators. Staff use repetition, actions and visual prompts, for example when introducing three-dimensional shape names in Reception. This builds children's familiarity with new terminology so that they are able to apply this accurately and independently. Staff are ambitious for children's outcomes, particularly in terms of developing children's independence and skills of enquiry. For instance, in Nursery, children use comparative language to problem-solve the sizes and sequences of circles. Children achieve well as a result.

35. Leaders and teachers regularly share information with parents during meetings and through written reports. This keeps parents updated about their child's progress both academically and in terms of their child's personal and social development.
36. An extensive programme of extra-curricular activities, including skiing, polo, debating and orchestra, complements pupils' class-based learning and offers opportunities for them to acquire new skills and interests. For instance, children in Reception persevere when they practise balancing a ball on a tennis racket and pupils who attend the karate club perform wrist releases following clear explanations of this technique.
37. Boarders respond positively to the varied programme of evening activities as well as the opportunity to relax with friends. Free time in the sports hall, film nights, trips to a climbing centre and baking activities provide boarders with ways in which to develop their social, creative and physical skills.

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

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

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

39. The well-structured PSHE curriculum, including relationships and sex education (RSE), is planned and taught appropriately for pupils' different ages and needs. Topics including healthy relationships, puberty and conflict resolution are delivered sensitively so that pupils learn to manage their emotions and grow in self-understanding. Older pupils learn about the dangers of knife crime and alcohol dependency to enable them to make informed decisions for their future lives.
40. Leaders prioritise pupils' emotional and spiritual wellbeing through personal reflection during chapel and meditation sessions in PSHE. Pupils value quiet time in the nurturing surroundings of the 'secret garden'.
41. Pupils enhance their physical fitness through the extensive sporting opportunities and facilities. Teachers demonstrate high expectations and expert subject knowledge. For example, well-modelled running technique enables pupils in Year 3 to improve their high-knee drives and sprinting starts. Pupils deepen their knowledge and understanding as a result. They participate regularly in competitive matches and achieve highly at regional and national levels, notably in hockey, rugby and netball.
42. Children in the early years increase their physical development through regular outdoor learning and PE lessons. A range of equipment, including a climbing wall, tyres and stools to reach tree branches, enables children to practise balance and strength. Activities such as drawing circles and using hammers develop their skills in finer co-ordination. Children thrive because of the warm and nurturing relationships they have with the early years staff. Children grow in self-confidence. Staff encourage children's independence. They know when to stand back and when to intervene.
43. The school's behaviour policy sets out a clear code of conduct which is well understood by staff and pupils. Boarding leaders operate a system of stars to recognise positive behaviour in the boarding houses. Pupils are well-behaved and respectful. They are natural communicators and reflect insightfully on the choices they make. Leaders create a reassuring environment so that pupils are at ease and content. Pupils form positive relationships with their teachers and each other.
44. The anti-bullying strategy is effectively implemented. Incidents of bullying seldom occur. Leaders follow up promptly when behaviour falls below the school's high standards.
45. Supervision at breaktimes is suitable, and staff offer support to pupils, when needed. In the early years, an appropriate ratio of adults to children is consistently maintained.
46. There is a positive culture around pupil attendance. Pupils understand why it is important to attend school as often as possible. Leaders monitor absence in line with current statutory guidance and work closely with families to support them and their children as required. The local authority is informed when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points.
47. Leaders demonstrate a robust approach to health and safety. Measures are in place to minimise the risk of fire. School buildings are well maintained, and appropriate checks are routinely carried out. Fire evacuation notices are clearly displayed to remind everyone of the necessary procedures. Fire

drills, including in the boarding houses, take place regularly and at different times of the day to ensure that procedures are fit for purpose.

48. Pupils' medical needs are well catered for. Medication is stored securely. Staff are well trained in first aid and suitably qualified staff support children in the early years. Boarders have access to an on-call nurse, if needed.
49. Boarding accommodation is well resourced. Opportunities for boarders to personalise their areas with photographs, cards and toys help them adjust to new routines. Boarders' valuables are stored securely. Boarding leaders take boarders' views into account to improve pupils' experience. Boarders' suggestions have recently resulted in a separate Year 8 lounge, table football and a dart board.
50. Boarders learn to take responsibility through leadership opportunities as prefects and participation in regular boarding council meetings. Prefect roles are clearly outlined. Prefects ensure that they work closely with house parents to enable all boarders' views to be heard.
51. Meals are suitably adapted to meet boarders' dietary needs. Boarders are provided with healthy meal options, including a salad bar and fruit juices at breakfast. Boarders enjoy opportunities to prepare snacks, in particular toasted sandwiches.

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

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

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

53. The curriculum enables pupils to develop financial and social awareness. Across a range of subjects, teachers introduce pupils to monetary and economic systems. For example, in geography, older pupils learn about global wealth and the impact of poverty. Younger pupils develop budgeting skills when given a set amount of money to raise funds for charity. Through role-play activities in the early years to PSHE topics on savings, investments and pensions in higher years, pupils learn relevant strategies to inform their future decision-making.
54. Leaders introduce themes around diversity and inclusion in different ways so that pupils understand the importance of mutual respect. They select topics thoughtfully to reflect a diverse society, including the study of Black British poets during Black History Month and powerful female role models on International Women's Day. This enables pupils to hear a range of voices and views different from their own. Pupils' mature classroom discussions reflect their consideration of others and appreciation of different views and beliefs. For example, pupils in Year 7 reflect insightfully on the impact of preconceptions about the ways in which different sexes share emotions.
55. Pupils develop their cultural awareness through meaningful activities such as Diwali art workshops, Passover presentations and Thanksgiving celebrations. Pupils study the beliefs, principles and values of different world religions during religious education (RE) lessons and chapel readings. They share their own cultural identity and experiences with teachers and their peers.
56. Leaders arrange for visiting speakers to present to pupils across a range of topics. Talks, including from an archaeologist, a doctor, an MP and a cyber-security expert, offer pupils early insight into various occupations. However, sufficient opportunities are not available to broaden older pupils' awareness of possible career options nor provide them with an understanding of the different further education and training pathways available to prepare them for their adult lives.
57. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their educational journeys. Teachers support pupils' preparation for senior school by providing entrance examination guidance, interview practice and targeted revision sessions. Talks by senior-school leaders offer pupils insight into the expectations of senior school.
58. Pupils confidently distinguish between right and wrong. During assemblies, philosophy-based activities and classroom discussions, leaders encourage pupils to reflect on ethical issues. For example, pupils consider religious freedom and lessons learned from global disasters such as the bubonic plague epidemic.
59. Pupils develop greater empathy and a wider understanding of their social responsibilities through leadership roles, including as prefects and school councillors. Pupils act as positive role models by reading stories to younger pupils, and school councillors participate in decision-making for charity fundraising. This enables pupils to grow as responsible citizens.
60. Pupils engage purposefully with their local community. They take part in litter picks, deliver foodbank donations and provide instrumental accompaniment for a choir of local elderly residents. In this way, pupils understand how they can contribute positively to the lives of others.

61. Pupils are taught about democratic systems. Pupils vote for their preferred annual charity and act out a courtroom trial. School councillors recognise the importance of shared decision-making when proposing suggestions for mealtime choices and playground equipment. This helps pupils to learn the importance of fair processes.
62. Staff in the early years act as positive role models, promoting turn-taking and careful listening skills, so that children learn how to form successful friendships. Through imaginary play and regular visits by other adults, including care home residents, children experience wider social situations. Leaders and staff encourage children's independence so that they build relevant skills for Year 1 and their later lives.

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

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

Safeguarding

64. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained to carry out their roles. They liaise effectively with external safeguarding partners to seek advice and make referrals, when needed. When situations arise, leaders follow up promptly and sensitively so that any concerns are addressed.
65. Comprehensive measures are in place to protect pupils from harm. Leaders arrange regular training, most recently on county lines, so that staff are knowledgeable about the latest safeguarding guidance. The detailed induction programme introduces new staff to the school's safeguarding expectations and protocols. Staff understand safeguarding procedures and reflect on their training to inform their practice. They follow procedures for reporting low-level concerns and use their in-depth knowledge of pupils to identify any changes in their behaviour.
66. There are a range of strategies to limit pupils' access to inappropriate websites. Leaders carry out regular testing of filtering and monitoring systems and teach pupils how to keep themselves safe online, both in school and outside. Pupils speak knowledgeably about the risks of social media and how the use of passwords helps to protect them when online.
67. The positive relationships between pupils and staff enable pupils' concerns to be heard and addressed. Pupils share their concerns confidently with teachers during circle time, through surveys and during conversations with the school's wellbeing counsellor. Older pupils have access to a designated email address so that they can voice their worries confidentially. However, at the start of the inspection, not all arrangements for boarders to share their concerns were in line with requirements. This was rectified during the inspection visit.
68. Those with responsibility for carrying out safeguarding checks on newly appointed staff operate thorough processes to safeguard pupils' welfare. All required checks are carried out before a person commences work at the school.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Winchester House School
Department for Education number	941/6000
Registered charity number	310639
Address	Winchester House School 44 High Street Brackley Northamptonshire NN13 7AZ
Phone number	01280 702483
Email address	office@winchester-house.org
Website	www.stowe.co.uk/winchester-house
Proprietor	The Stowe Group
Chair	Mr Simon Creedy Smith
Headteacher	Mrs Antonia Lee
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	339
Number of boarding pupils	90
Date of previous inspection	18 to 21 January 2022

Information about the school

70. Winchester House School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located in Northamptonshire. The school is part of The Stowe Group, which is a registered charity. The school is overseen by a board of governors.
71. Male and female boarders aged 7 to 13 are accommodated in two separate boarding houses on the main site.
72. There are 49 children in the early years comprising two Nursery classes and two Reception classes.
73. The school has identified 82 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Very few pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
74. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for a small proportion of pupils, of whom very few require additional support.
75. The school states its aims are to develop each pupil as an individual, to nurture their ambition and to grow their potential. It aims to enable every pupil to benefit from a rounded education based on traditional values and high standards that will prepare them thoroughly for their next school and life beyond.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 March 2025

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

77. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and an assembly
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

78. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit isi.net