ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

16 to 18 April 2024

Ditcham Park School

Ditcham Park

Petersfield

Hampshire

GU31 5RN

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 successfully developed an ethos where every child is known and valued. However, governors and leaders have not ensured that all of the Independent School Standards (the Standards) are met consistently. Governors have not ensured that leaders and managers demonstrate good skills and knowledge and that they actively promote the wellbeing of pupils at all times.

2. Parents have access to all of the required information. They receive regular and detailed reports regarding their child's attainment, progress and personal development. Parents have open access to leaders, governors and staff. The school implements its complaints policy appropriately.

3. The curriculum is wide ranging, creative and well planned, and takes into account pupils' abilities, needs and interests. Pupils enjoy a wide range of extra-curricular activities. Well-planned teaching enables pupils to enjoy learning and make good progress. Most pupils attain above their predicted grades and above the national average at GCSE level.

4. Most pupils are kind, considerate and respectful. Although rewards and sanctions are appropriate and tailored to meet individual needs, some older pupils feel giving consequences to the whole group, rather than to those who are responsible, is unfair. Bullying of any kind, including online, is not tolerated. Pupils appreciate the rewards they are given for effort and positive behaviour. They participate enthusiastically in school life and work hard to achieve their academic targets.

5. The school's nurturing ethos, which focuses on knowing each individual well, supports pupils' personal and emotional development effectively. Pupils develop respect for others through the school's comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) schemes of work, assemblies, visiting speakers and tutorials.

6. Leaders have recently restructured the tutorial system in the seniors as part of prioritising pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing. However, the new system is not embedded fully throughout the school so that all pupils consistently receive effective support from tutors and heads of year in line with the school's pastoral care policy.

7. Early years staff work effectively as a team, supporting the personal, social and emotional development of children through play and effective role modelling. Pupils are supervised appropriately throughout the school, including in the early years.

8. The premises are maintained to a high standard. Detailed risk assessments are maintained for health and safety and monitored regularly by leaders and governors. Health and safety arrangements are thorough. Maintenance checks are completed routinely, and accurate records are kept.

9. Staff have received suitable safeguarding training. However, some staff do not understand the requirements, particularly with regard to the staff code of conduct, low-level concerns and the 'Prevent' duty. As a result, the school's safeguarding policy and procedures are not implemented consistently. Leaders have not always implemented the required procedures when making referrals to the local safeguarding partnership. Safeguarding risk assessments and a strong and consistent culture of safeguarding are not in place.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that:

- the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and
- they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- leaders and governors monitor the effectiveness of safeguarding training in order that statutory requirements are understood by all staff
- the school's safeguarding policy and procedures are implemented consistently
- safeguarding concerns are referred to the appropriate agency without delay, when necessary
- low-level concerns are recorded and managed in line with statutory guidance
- suitable risk assessments for safeguarding are put in place, implemented and monitored consistently.

Recommended next step

Governors and leaders should:

- ensure that all tutorial staff have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the school's pastoral care policy and that they implement it effectively and consistently.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders have conducted extensive self-evaluation with regular review and updates of school policies. However, leaders and governors have not ensured that all staff and governors attend, understand and implement safeguarding training, that referrals to children's services are made appropriately and in a timely manner and that low-level concerns are managed in line with statutory requirements. Although appropriate risk assessments are in place in relation to health and safety, governors and leaders have not ensured that these are implemented for safeguarding. A secure culture of safeguarding is not currently embedded throughout the school. Consequently, the standards relating to safeguarding and risk assessment are not met.

11. Governors and leaders have a clear vision for the school. They are highly committed to the success of the school and are dedicated to ensuring that every child is known and valued. The school successfully achieves its aim of finding the best in every child through an 'all round' approach to education which identifies and develops all abilities including academic, sporting and creative.

12. Governors and leaders have recently implemented a new and much improved governance structure which now includes a whole-school safeguarding committee set up and chaired by the DSL. This structure is in the early stages of implementation. It has started to provide a mechanism to support the evaluation and monitoring of safeguarding, but it is too soon to see the full impact of these changes.

13. Health and safety procedures and checks, including for fire and evacuation of the building, are understood by staff and carried out efficiently. There is a suitable accessibility plan in place which identifies clearly how the school supports inclusion, including access to the curriculum and physical access to the premises. The requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met well, including through the school's comprehensive PSHE and RSE schemes of work.

14. The well-maintained premises and specialist facilities create a learning environment that is stimulating, rich and varied, enabling pupils to be active, creative and reflective.

15. Parents are kept well informed about the school through, for example, the detailed newsletters that they receive regularly. They have access to the required policies and information through the school's website. In addition to regular parental consultations, parents are able to liaise directly with class teachers and tutors if they have any concerns or queries. In the junior department, parents receive a detailed written report about their child each term. In the senior department, parents receive short, half-termly reports detailing attainment and homework effort, with full reports in the autumn and summer terms.

16. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented appropriately. 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 and records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken and the outcomes of the complaint.

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

17. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The curriculum is planned carefully, encompassing the required areas of learning, with breadth and depth of study alongside the development of pupils' literacy and numeracy skills. It meets pupils' needs well, including those who have special educational needs and/disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL). The school offers a wide range of subjects at GCSE level. All pupils learn to play an instrument from Year 3 to Year 6, which contributes strongly to their creative learning and cognitive development and, to them learning to play instruments at a high level in the senior school and beyond. The school's 'STEAM' programme (science, technology, engineering, art and maths) is implemented from Year 1 onwards. Pupils enthusiastically undertake extensive projects, such as designing and building a robot or a car. These projects enable pupils to develop their digital and creative skills, solve problems and think critically as well as enabling them to take part regularly in STEAM and creative arts festivals

19. The early years curriculum is based on the seven areas of learning in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework. It supports children in developing their independence, resilience and empathy. Children learn to understand and celebrate the differences between people. They make good progress in the early years. The majority of children achieve a good level of development by the end of the Reception Year.

20. Teachers in the early years provide a wide range of interesting activities based on their knowledge of children's individual interests and needs. These stimulate children's curiosity and support their learning. Specialist teaching in dance and music helps children to extend their learning and relationships with other adults. The introduction of an extensive range of opportunities for children to develop their gross and fine motor skills enhances children's independence and writing skills as well as their physical development.

21. Leaders have extensive subject knowledge which they use well to plan their areas of the curriculum. They keep pupils' needs and interests at the forefront of their planning. Leaders consistently monitor how well pupils are doing in their subjects in order to ensure their high expectations and challenging targets are met.

22. Most pupils gain entry to their first-choice colleges and schools, including a range of scholarships. Attainment at GCSE in most subjects is above the national average. Pupils' individual progress is tracked rigorously and thoroughly. This information is shared with pupils, enabling them to focus on what they need to do to achieve their targets. Regular and specific marking and feedback effectively support pupil progress. Specific interventions are put in place for any pupils who need additional support. Consequently, pupils make good progress and most attain at or above their predicted grades at GCSE.

23. The school has an effective process for identifying and meeting the needs of pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Pupils who have SEND are supported well, academically and personally. They each have a 'pupil passport' detailing their individual needs and how best to support them. Teachers refer to the 'pupil passports' continually and consistently adapt their teaching so that all pupils make good progress.

24. Teaching is based on knowing pupils' abilities, needs and interests thoroughly, and providing pupils with opportunities to be creative and to learn through practical experiences. These include a wide

range of educational visits, use of the school's extensive grounds, and specialist resources and facilities. Teachers throughout the school have high expectations and create a positive learning experience for pupils. Consequently, pupils engage enthusiastically in learning. They are self-motivated and articulate, and apply their personal, creative flair to their work, such as when making Giacometti sculptures based on photographs of themselves moving.

25. Pupils have access to an extensive range of extra-curricular clubs and activities, including artificial intelligence, exploring space, debating, bushcraft, mountain biking, LAMDA (London Academy of Music and Dramatic Art), judo, photography, orchestras and choirs, fencing and street dance. These are well attended and help pupils to develop practical skills and independence that benefit their learning and development.

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. Pupils' wellbeing and mental health are given a high priority throughout the school. Staff specialising in mental wellbeing provide effective training and advice for staff, as well as sensitive and helpful support for pupils. Leaders have recently re-structured the school's pastoral system in the senior school in order to provide pupils with more effective personal support from tutors and heads of year. Consequently, the implementation of this structure is in the early stages and is not implemented consistently. Pupils appreciate being in smaller groups. Staff know them well and support their wellbeing, and their academic and personal development.

28. Children in the early years develop positive relationships with staff, who work as a strong team to ensure that children feel safe and happy. Children's personal, social and emotional development is supported well. The new sensory room supports children's physical development, self-regulation and wellbeing. Children are taught to understand and be respectful to one another. Self-esteem is nurtured through following children's interests and a wide range of activities, including sharing stories and role play.

29. The school's nurturing ethos supports pupils' spiritual development, enabling them to appreciate the non-material aspects of life and the importance of helping and caring for others. Pupils gain a deeper understanding of faith through religious studies. They appreciate that the study of world religions sheds light on their own customs and beliefs. Spirituality is also developed effectively throughout the curriculum including in art, music, history and drama. Pupils are given time and space to think and reflect on the deeper aspects of life including beauty, stillness and achieving one's best.

30. Pupils are provided with a wide range of opportunities to develop their leadership skills. These include becoming head boy or head girl, house captains, eco-council members, librarians and student councillors. Pupils take these responsibilities seriously. They are positive role models taking time to listen to younger pupils and to support their emotional wellbeing.

31. Pupils participate in a wide range of physical activities through their physical education (PE) lessons and through competitive sports and extra-curricular activities. These contribute positively to pupils' mental health and wellbeing.

32. Comprehensive PSHE and RSE schemes have been devised in line with statutory requirements. Pupils understand the importance of PSHE and appreciate the way they can discuss a range of sensitive issues with their teachers. They value presentations from visiting speakers which enable them to gain a deeper understanding of a range of topics including consent and the importance of healthy relationships.

33. The school's behaviour policy sets out its expectations clearly. These are prominently displayed throughout the school, alongside the school's values. Most pupils are kind, considerate and respectful. Although rewards and sanctions are appropriate and tailored to meet individual needs, some older pupils feel that giving consequences to the whole group, rather than to those responsible, is unfair. Bullying of any kind, including online, is not tolerated. Pupils appreciate the rewards they are given for effort and positive behaviour. They participate enthusiastically in school life and work hard to achieve their academic targets.

34. Supervision is well organised so that staff are visible at all times, including before and after school. The attendance registers and admissions register are maintained accurately. A thorough system is in place to follow up on absences, including reporting to the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.

35. The premises are maintained to a high standard by well-trained and conscientious staff. Suitable risk assessments are in place for health and safety. These are monitored regularly by leaders and governors. Lockdown procedures are practised, and fire drills are carried out termly. Detailed records are kept, and suitable action is taken to address any issues that arise.

36. The medical room is suitable and managed by appropriately trained staff. A large number of staff are qualified in first aid, including the early years staff. A thorough system is in place for the storage and administration of medicines. First aid and accident records are detailed and monitored regularly by leaders and governors.

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

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

38. The school's aims and values support an ethos where pupils are valued, and their strengths and talents recognised. Fundamental British values are promoted well through leaders' expectations about sharing, being kind and respectful, and following the school's rules. The PSHE curriculum develops pupils' comprehensive understanding of civil and criminal law in England, respect for public services and British society. Pupils' understanding is enhanced through the wider curriculum and through well-planned and thought-provoking assemblies, which include outside speakers such as the astronaut Helen Sharman.

39. The PSHE curriculum supports pupils' development of life skills and economic understanding including financial decision-making, managing money, opening a bank account and the cost of loans. Opportunities to serve their school community through a wide range of positions of responsibility and pupil-driven initiatives, such as battle of the bands and a house charity weekend, enable pupils to develop economic knowledge and a mature understanding of the world and how they can make a difference.

40. Pupils co-operate and collaborate with each other naturally. There is an atmosphere of friendliness, enjoyment and mutual respect throughout the school. Pupils develop a mature understanding of how humans can impact the environment, through the curriculum and other activities. For example, in geography, pupils learn about the impact of 'fast fashion' and the exploitation of workers in developing countries.

41. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong. They have an appreciation and respect for their own and other people's cultures, which fosters strong values as they prepare for adult life. They are proud to be part of the house system, which enables them to contribute to the whole school community. Children in the early years learn to take responsibility for their own behaviour. They are kind and have good manners. They share and are respectful of the needs of others.

42. Pupils are well prepared for their next stage in relation to career paths, subject choices and developing an awareness of the institutions available to them. Leaders ensure that appropriate funding, time and resources are in place for careers education. Pupils receive individual guidance regarding subject choices and college applications. Talks from outside visitors and trips to a variety of establishments, including the law courts, help pupils to develop a wider view of the options available to them.

43. Pupils throughout the school enjoy playing and having fun together. Sufficient time has been allowed for breaks so that pupils can socialise with each other. The school's policy of storing mobile phones safely during the school day means that pupils socialise and engage extensively, free from the distraction of their phones. 'Free play Friday' enables pupils to choose the resources and activities they are interested in, which strongly supports their physical and mental health in a supportive and fun environment.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. There are weaknesses in safeguarding procedures and how well statutory guidance is followed. Although staff are confident with regard to the actions they must take if a child makes a disclosure of neglect or abuse and they have received appropriate training in using the school's electronic recording system for safeguarding, training does not have sufficient impact. Some staff do not understand and implement safeguarding requirements well enough, particularly in relation to the staff code of conduct, low-level concerns in relation to staff and the 'Prevent' duty. Low-level concerns are not always identified, recorded and managed in accordance with the school's safeguarding policy. The impact of safeguarding training is not monitored effectively.

46. Pupil records in relation to safeguarding are detailed. However, leaders do not always make timely referrals, such as to children's social care, in response to safeguarding concerns about pupils when it would be appropriate to do so. Leaders and governors have not considered or implemented risk assessments in relation to safeguarding.

47. Governors have recently made positive changes to improve safeguarding practice. The new designated governor has begun to monitor safeguarding through regular meetings with the designated safeguarding leads (DSL) and the scrutiny of records. The school's safeguarding policy and procedures reflect statutory guidance. The recently appointed DSL and deputy DSL are trained to the appropriate level for their roles and are members of the senior leadership team. The recent establishment of a whole-school safeguarding committee which includes governors is a positive move towards addressing the weaknesses in safeguarding.

48. The DSL and deputy DSL know the pupils and their families well. They have established strong links with the staff responsible for pastoral care and mental wellbeing. Where there are concerns about a pupil's wellbeing, an effective 'team around the child' is established, which includes providing support outside of school hours and during holiday periods.

49. Pupils state strongly that there is a wide range of staff they can talk to if they are worried or concerned. They are given clear guidance with regard to staying safe. Pupils are confident of actions to take in order to protect themselves online, including not giving personal information, keeping passwords safe and understanding the importance of sharing any concerns with a trusted adult. The use of technology is safeguarded appropriately, including monitoring and filtering internet access.

50. Safer recruitment procedures are in place. The required checks are implemented and recorded accurately on the single central register. Governors and leaders monitor this appropriately.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

51. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included at the end of the report.

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

Safeguarding

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, paragraph 7	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that –
7(a)	arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school; and
7(b)	such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the Secretary of State.
16 (a)	the welfare of pupils at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy; and
16 (b)	appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified.
EYFS 3.5	Providers must have and implement policies and procedures to keep children safe and meet EYFS requirements. Schools are not required to have separate policies to cover EYFS requirements provided the requirements are already met through an existing policy. Where providers are required to have policies and procedures as specified below, these policies and procedures should be recorded in writing. Policies and procedures should be in line with the guidance and procedures of the relevant LSP.
EYFS 3.7	If providers have concerns about children's safety or welfare, they must immediately notify their local authority children's social care team, in line with local reporting procedures, and, in emergencies, the police. Providers must also take into account the government's statutory guidance 'Working Together to Safeguard Children' and 'Prevent duty guidance for England and Wales'. All schools are required to have regard to the government's statutory guidance 'Keeping Children Safe in Education', and other childcare providers may also find it helpful to read this guidance.

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School details

School	Ditcham Park School
Department for Education number	850/6049
Registered charity number	285244
Address	Ditcham Park School Ditcham Park Petersfield Hampshire GU31 5RN
Phone number	01730 825659
Email address	info@ditchampark.com
Website	www.ditchampark.com
Proprietor	Ditcham Park School Charity Association
Chair	Mr Roger Overend
Headteacher	Mr Graham Spawforth
Age range	2 to 16
Number of pupils	426
Date of previous inspection	February 2020

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Information about the school

52. Ditcham Park School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1976 and occupies its original site on a rural campus in the South Downs National Park. The school is developed around a large Victorian stately home, with specialist facilities, including those for the early years, in purpose-built accommodation. The school is a charitable trust, and a council of governors oversees its work.

53. There are 48 children in the early years comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.

54. The school has identified 136 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Four pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

55. English is an additional language for two pupils.

56. The school states its aims are to find the best in every child through an 'all round' approach to education which identifies and develops all abilities including academic, sporting and creative. With a curriculum focus on science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM), the school seeks to promote academic excellence by inspiring pupils to develop a lifelong love of learning. Through innovative, dynamic and progressive teaching it aims to inspire pupils to be excited, curious and passionate about their learning and interests. The school strives to develop strong links with parents and the local community, providing an environment based on Christian values in which pupils flourish, are happy and self-confident. The school community aims to support all children in developing the necessary knowledge and skills to equip them for further and higher education, underpinned by a desire to shape the modern world for the better.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	16 – 18 April 2024

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

58. 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 headteacher, 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.

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

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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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