

School inspection report

8 to 10 October 2024

Oundle School

Oundle

Peterborough

Northamptonshire

PE8 4GH

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 leaders at all levels have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They work together systematically to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's provision. They use this information to inform their strategic planning and to ensure that the school continues to build on its current successes.
2. Leaders' active promotion of pupils' wellbeing permeates all aspects of school life. This is a significant strength of the school. It is evident in the high levels of mutual respect between all members of the community, the routes for pupils to receive specialist support when needed, the ways in which the school seeks and responds to pupils' views, and the work of the pupil-led pastoral forum. Pupils see that their feedback has a demonstrable impact on the school's future planning. This helps them to develop self-awareness, confidence and moral responsibility.
3. The broad, ambitious curriculum promotes intellectual curiosity and enables pupils to develop knowledge, skills and understanding across a wide range of areas. An enriching programme of co-curricular activities provides opportunities for pupils to further develop their skills and interests. Well-planned and highly effective teaching supports pupils to make good progress. GCSE and A-level results are well above the national average. However, in a small number of subjects, teaching is less effective.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are supported well by the educational support department. They make good progress from their starting points.
5. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) quickly develop fluency in English. They also make good progress and attain in line with their peers.
6. The 'learning for life' curriculum provides age-appropriate programmes of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, and relationships and sex education (RSE). Leaders consult pupils to make sure lessons and talks are helpful and relevant. Highly effective pastoral systems, including individual tutorials and a wide variety of physical activities, support pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing.
7. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, are very positive and reflect the strong mutual respect which is a key component of the school's ethos. Leaders' clear expectations promote high standards of behaviour, both in lessons and around the school.
8. Boarders appreciate the strong sense of community and support available within the boarding houses. Boarding accommodation is well maintained, and the school is highly effective in meeting boarders' needs. Leaders, teachers and pastoral staff successfully promote the integration of pupils within and across day and boarding houses.
9. Leaders prioritise the safety and wellbeing of pupils, and safeguarding is effective. Procedures for the recruitment of staff are robust. The school consults external agencies promptly for safeguarding advice. Staff are well trained and implement effective policies and processes that protect pupils from harm. Pupils feel safe and happy in school and in boarding.

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:

- further develop its focus and interventions for individuals to further improve progress at GCSE.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors know the school well. They receive detailed reports from leaders and scrutinise feedback from pupils, parents and staff. Governors visit the school regularly and question what they read, see and hear. This informs their oversight of school policies, procedures and pupils' wellbeing. They check that all the required policies are in place and working effectively. Governors provide appropriate challenge and monitor the impact of leaders' decisions. This assures them that leaders have suitable knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles well.
11. The pupil pastoral forum is an extremely effective way in which leaders put the promotion of pupils' wellbeing at the forefront of their work. The forum is led by pupils. Its work penetrates and positively impacts all areas of school life. Leaders do not pay lip service to the forum. They value it very highly, understand the enormous contribution it brings to the school and act upon its findings frequently.
12. Effective self-evaluation is integral to leaders' approach to strategic development. It informs the development plan, the priorities of which are closely aligned with the school's aims. In addition to working with the pupil pastoral forum, leaders seek the views of pupils through detailed questionnaires. This feedback is used to shape the school's development planning. The analysis of the questionnaires and subsequent actions are shared in assemblies. As a result, pupils understand that their opinions matter and that they can influence change within the school community.
13. Governors and leaders ensure that the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 are met. The school's disability equality steering group includes a governor, staff, members of the school community who have disabilities, and neurodiversity ambassadors from the pupil pastoral forum. It meets regularly to review the school's accessibility plan. Clear strategies are identified in the plan to enable those who have SEND to access all aspects of school life.
14. Leaders ensure that boarding staff have the appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles. Staff undertake regular and relevant training. Links between academic and residential staff are well developed to ensure highly effective communication regarding all aspects of boarders' wellbeing.
15. Leaders ensure that pupils' health needs, including those of boarders, are met by the school's health centre medical team. The curriculum, enhanced by the extensive opportunities in the co-curricular programme, effectively promotes pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing.
16. Reports to parents on pupils' progress and attainment are regular, detailed and informative. Information about school policies and procedures is made available on the school's website or sent directly to parents. Leaders take parental concerns and complaints seriously. They respond quickly, in line with published procedure. They maintain records appropriately, including of actions that they have taken and how complaints have been resolved. Leaders systematically review the causes of complaints to identify repeated issues or trends.
17. Leaders take a strategic, broad and inclusive approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing. Leaders regularly review risks, are alert to new risks that may arise and take appropriate action. Suitable policies cover a wide range of potential risks related both to pupils' welfare and safety. These give staff clear direction about how to minimise risks, which is followed in practice. Thorough risk assessments are carried out for school accommodation, including boarding houses, for activities that take place both on and off the school site, and for recruitment.

18. Leaders have established highly effective relationships with the wider community. Opportunities are provided to work in partnership with a range of schools, universities and other organisations in activities such as termly music masterclasses. Through these connections, pupils develop a broader life experience and a better understanding of the world around them and their place within it. Leaders consult with external agencies when appropriate and develop open and productive relationships with them. For example, leaders contact local safeguarding partners for support and advice when necessary.

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. Leaders plan the curriculum effectively so that pupils' aptitudes and needs are met. They regularly review and adapt it to ensure it offers a wide range of subjects and plenty of opportunities for academic enrichment. The breadth of subjects taught ensures pupils have opportunities to gain knowledge and develop skills across an extensive range of curriculum areas. Pupils have the opportunity to sample a range of modern and classical languages and, as a result, develop strong linguistic skills.
21. The curriculum supports pupils to develop strong speaking, listening and literacy skills. For example, pupils are given regular opportunities to consider and debate philosophical matters. They learn to articulate their ideas and listen critically to the views of their peers. The curriculum also focuses well on mathematics. Pupils' mathematical skills are developed not only in mathematics lessons but also in subjects such as the sciences, geography, psychology and economics.
22. Teachers use their expert subject knowledge to plan and deliver lessons that actively engage pupils with their learning. Well-chosen teaching strategies, coupled with individual support, are very effective in supporting pupils of all abilities to make good progress. GCSE and A-level results are well above the national average.
23. Teachers are knowledgeable, enthusiastic and supportive. As a result, pupils are at ease with their learning and comfortable asking questions. Pupils are intellectually curious, showing eagerness to extend their knowledge and understanding. Pupils reflect on the feedback they receive from their teachers, which helps them to improve their work and supports their progress. Pupils are proactive in seeking additional support when they need it and show high levels of independence.
24. Leaders and teachers analyse the results of assessments to check on the progress made by pupils. They tailor the provision and develop appropriate strategies, where needed, to enable pupils to raise their attainment. Pupils' achievements at A level are above those expected from their assessed starting points. At GCSE, pupils generally attain grades in line with expectations. However, in a few GCSE courses, teaching is less consistent and finely tuned.
25. Leaders provide effectively for pupils who have SEND so that their individual needs are met. The well-structured support provided includes specialist guidance in educational support sessions, additional support within subject lessons and the use of targeted strategies identified in personal learning plans. As a result, pupils who have SEND make progress in line with that of their peers.
26. Pupils who speak EAL receive specialist teaching via the school's 'English for academic purposes' curriculum. They also receive appropriate support from their subject teachers, who understand their competency with written and spoken English. With this additional support, and through its full integration in the boarding houses, pupils rapidly develop their speaking and literacy skills.
27. The co-curricular programme provides an extensive range of opportunities for pupils to develop their interests and widen their learning experiences. The school provides a broad range of creative, cultural, intellectual, physical and spiritual activities. Pupils achieve high standards in music and drama and have a wide range of performance opportunities. The school has recently replaced Saturday morning academic lessons for the youngest pupils with 'omnia', a bespoke skills-based enrichment programme. It provides opportunities for pupils to develop a wide range of skills, including critical thinking, teamwork and leadership.

28. Boarders participate enthusiastically in a range of house activities. Pupils understand that engagement in activities promotes their wellbeing. Pupils are mindful of the need to balance keeping busy with having quality free time to relax and socialise with friends.

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

29. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

30. The comprehensive PSHE education programme is taught through 'learning for life' lessons as well as through assemblies, tutorials and talks from guest speakers. Teachers regularly review feedback from pupils to ensure that content is relevant and useful. The programme is carefully planned and includes age-appropriate provision for RSE. Staff create an atmosphere in which pupils feel comfortable learning about and discussing sensitive issues.
31. Leaders ensure that pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing is given a high priority. Provision is wide-ranging and well developed. It enables pupils to gain an understanding of strategies to promote positive mental wellbeing and cope with stress. Pupils know there is extensive support available to them, if needed.
32. Pupils have opportunities to develop their spiritual understanding through regular chapel services and assemblies. They learn about different religions in theology, philosophy and religious studies lessons. Spirituality activities are included in the co-curricular programme. Activities such as debating and considering moral dilemmas further develop pupils' moral understanding.
33. The 'Oundle opportunities' programme includes an extensive range of activities. Pupils set themselves targets related to leadership, adventure, creativity, culture and service to others. Participation in the Combined Cadet Force and The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme is high. Pupils' involvement in these activities strengthens their resilience and furthers their self-confidence, self-knowledge and self-esteem.
34. Staff promote pupils' physical health through a programme of physical education (PE) and extensive co-curricular sporting activities. Pupils are given opportunities to take part in team sports such as hockey, rugby and rowing, in addition to more individual pursuits such as golf, dance, swimming and fitness. Pupils understand the importance of regular exercise and healthy eating for positive personal wellbeing.
35. An effective behaviour policy is in place and implemented consistently so that pupils behave well. Pupils understand the sanctions and rewards system and the rationale for it. Leaders and staff respond promptly and consistently to any incidents of misbehaviour, tracking any trends and adapting policy and practice as required.
36. An appropriate anti-bullying strategy is in place. Pupils learn what constitutes bullying and strategies they can use to avoid or respond to it. Rare cases of bullying are dealt with effectively by leaders in line with school policy. Pupils can access appropriate support should they experience unkindness or bullying.
37. Supervision of pupils is effective in both day and boarding settings. Prefects are allocated appropriate duties and responsibilities. Older pupils are guided and trained to enable them to fulfil their responsibilities towards younger pupils, who appreciate their help and guidance. Pupils are highly considerate of each other. Expectations about mutual trust and respect for others regardless of difference is evident both around school and in the boarding houses.

38. Highly effective systems, policies and record keeping are in place for all aspects of boarding. Accommodation is of good quality and is well maintained. Suitably trained boarding staff create a warm, collaborative atmosphere based on mutual trust. Boarders feel that their accommodation is homely and welcoming. Appropriate arrangements are in place for boarders to contact their families or outside agencies.
39. Leaders ensure the school site provides a safe and well-maintained environment for pupils. Effective health and safety arrangements are in place that are monitored and reviewed regularly. Precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Staff receive regular fire-safety training.
40. Appropriate arrangements and accommodation are in place for first aid and to care for pupils who become unwell or who have specific medical needs. Arrangements are overseen by suitably qualified medical staff based in the school's health centre. The boarding house matrons also provide support for healthcare needs and work closely with the medical team.
41. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations. Staff monitor attendance effectively and promptly follow up any unexplained absence. The local authority is notified of any pupils joining or leaving the school at non-standard times.

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

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

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

43. The school's community action programme provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to support both the local and wider community. Through partnerships with other schools and activities, such as visiting the elderly, helping in a soup kitchen and supporting the school's annual holiday for a learning disability charity, pupils contribute positively to the lives of others and develop a broader social understanding. Pupils' social awareness and understanding of the positive contribution they can make to society is evident in their charity fundraising, such as the annual charities fair.
44. Pupils keenly take on positions of responsibility, such as being a prefect or a pupil pastoral forum ambassador, running a society or elective, leading the pupil-run radio station or being a buddy within the boarding house. They value the extensive range of leadership roles and the opportunity to contribute to their school community.
45. Leaders have worked with pupils and staff to develop a comprehensive equality, diversity and inclusion strategy which permeates all aspects of school life. This strategy continues to evolve in response to thorough monitoring and evaluation. Pupil ambassadors for areas such as racial diversity and gender equality are involved in assemblies and 'learning for life' lessons. These activities are highly successful in raising awareness and promoting understanding. As a result, there is a culture of mutual respect and inclusivity. This atmosphere enables pupils to have a strong sense of self and of belonging to the school community.
46. Being a valued member of a community with clear rules and expectations causes pupils to be highly reflective of their own behaviour. They take responsibility for their actions and demonstrate a strong understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Considering scenarios in the 'learning for life' curriculum helps pupils to recognise that sometimes it takes courage to do what is right and speak up in difficult situations.
47. Pupils appreciate and welcome the diversity of the school, and the opportunities it provides to learn about other faiths and cultures. This is evident in the boarding houses where pupils of different faiths and cultures form a harmonious and inclusive community, which pupils regard as a family.
48. 'Learning for life' lessons, assemblies, the wider curriculum and an extensive programme of visiting speakers inform pupils about British society and the world beyond school. The topics covered develop pupils' understanding of individual liberty and how democracy works. Opportunities to participate in mock elections and debates encourage pupils to consider different viewpoints. The school ensures that a balanced and unbiased perspective is presented to pupils on political matters. Coverage of British values is woven through the curriculum. For example, in Year 9, pupils discuss the law and how the courts work while studying a film about a libel case linked to the Holocaust.
49. The school follows the Gatsby benchmarks and provides an effective programme of careers guidance. This begins with subject teachers delivering sessions for younger pupils on what career opportunities are available from studying their subject and continues in 'learning for life' lessons with topics such as identifying employability skills. As pupils move through the school, they actively engage with an online careers programme to explore a range of careers and university options. Talks from visiting speakers and work experience placements enable pupils to gain a further insight into different careers. These activities allow pupils to access information and make informed decisions

for life beyond school. Sixth-form pupils go on to study a diverse range of courses at a variety of institutions.

50. Assemblies, 'learning for life' lessons and talks from visiting speakers provide a strong focus on economic wellbeing, which helps ensure that pupils develop financial awareness. For example, pupils learn about effective budgeting and making sense of the stock market. They evaluate social and moral dilemmas about the use of money.

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. Suitable arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Leaders promote a culture of awareness and openness, which encourages pupils and staff to readily report any concerns. Staff with designated safeguarding responsibilities meet regularly with the safeguarding governor to discuss issues, analyse trends and review how the school responds to matters that arise.
53. Leaders ensure that all staff and volunteers receive appropriate safeguarding training as they join the school. Further training at regular intervals ensures staff have up-to-date knowledge of safeguarding issues. Staff understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern, including potential child-on-child abuse. Older pupils with leadership responsibilities also receive safeguarding training to enable them to react appropriately in their roles.
54. Any reported safeguarding concerns are acted upon promptly and, if incidents occur, they are managed well. Designated safeguarding leads work effectively with external agencies when concerns arise. Any referrals to children’s services, the local authority designated officer and the police are made in a timely manner.
55. The school’s safeguarding policy is in line with the most recent guidance and accurately reflects the school’s safeguarding practice. Effective measures are taken to manage identified risks associated with pupils’ safeguarding needs. Detailed safeguarding records are kept, in line with statutory requirements.
56. Procedures to safeguard the welfare of boarders are effective. Leaders have established systems for boarders to report concerns. These include the availability of staff in the emotional wellbeing team and health centre, and an independent listener who offers pastoral support and advice. Pupils feel safe in their boarding houses as a result of the positive relationships they have with staff and the security arrangements in place.
57. ‘Learning for life’ teaching enables pupils to develop an appropriate understanding of risk taking and personal safety. Feedback from pupils is sought on any locations or times of day where they may feel vulnerable. This feedback is used to inform assessment of risk and planning for the protection of pupils.
58. Online safety is taught effectively, and the programme is regularly reviewed. This ensures that pupils know how to stay safe while online. Suitable monitoring and filtering processes are in place and any flags for concern are followed up swiftly.
59. Recruitment procedures are robust and the necessary safer recruitment checks are completed for all staff, volunteers and members of the governing body. A single central record of appointments is kept appropriately and regularly scrutinised by the safeguarding governor as part of monitoring the school’s arrangements.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

60. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Oundle School
Department for Education number	940/6007
Registered charity number	309921
Address	Oundle School Oundle Peterborough Northamptonshire PE8 4GH
Phone number	01832 277122
Email address	info@oundleschool.org.uk
Website	www.oundleschool.org.uk
Proprietor	Governing body of Oundle School
Chair	Mr Timothy Coleridge
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Kerr-Dineen
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	1136
Number of boarding pupils	821
Date of previous inspection	7 to 11 June 2021

Information about the school

61. Oundle School is a co-educational day and boarding school located in Oundle, Northamptonshire. The school was founded in 1556, is governed by Royal Charter through a board of governors and has supportive links with the Grocers' Company. Since the previous inspection a new chair of governors was appointed in July 2024.
62. Roughly three-quarters of pupils are full-time boarders, with 47 countries represented. There are 14 boarding houses and three day houses, spread across the town of Oundle.
63. The school has identified 164 pupils as having SEND. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
64. English is an additional language for 163 pupils.
65. The school states its aims are to nurture global contributors, to deliver a distinctive and outstanding education that prepares children for their adult lives, and to be associated with the very best of twenty-first century boarding and day education. The education provided aims to develop in pupils the skills, attitudes and habits of mind that will sustain them throughout a long life, enabling them to flourish both at school and beyond.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

8 to 10 October 2024

66. A team of 10 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of chapel 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 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.

68. 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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