ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

19 to 21 November 2024

Birchfield School

Harriott's Hayes Lane

Albrighton

Wolverhampton

West Midlands

WV7 3AF

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 **4**

AREAS FOR ACTION 4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS 4

SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE **5**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE 5

SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION **6**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION 7

SECTION 3: PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING **8**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING 9

SECTION 4: PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY **10**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY 11

SAFEGUARDING **12**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING 12

SCHEDULE OF UNMET STANDARDS **13**

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance *13*
Safeguarding *13*

SCHOOL DETAILS **15**

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL **16**

INSPECTION DETAILS **17**

Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor and leaders ensure that pupils feel known and recognised as individuals within the school. However, they have not ensured that they have sufficient oversight with regards to risk management.

2. Statutory guidance relating to the composition of the safeguarding team is not followed. Leaders have carefully considered the consequences of introducing older pupils into the school. Pupils know where to seek help if they have concerns. The school liaises effectively with external agencies to share information in a timely manner to keep pupils safe.

3. The school has extended the curriculum suitably to cater for pupils who are studying at GCSE level. Teaching is appropriate for pupils of all ages and aptitudes. Teachers have secure subject knowledge, prepare lessons well and use effective teaching methods. As a result, pupils are supported in their learning and make good progress.

4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are promptly identified. Teachers understand pupils' needs so that they can adapt their resources and teaching. Careful planning and individualised support enable these pupils to make good progress from their starting points.

5. Pupils across the school behave well and work effectively with each other, showing respect and understanding. Leaders respond effectively to any behavioural incidents in school; they intervene quickly when difficulties occur, to the benefit of pupils.

6. Leaders plan the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum carefully so that pupils develop self-esteem, resilience and independence in managing their own relationships, as well as an understanding of civil society.

7. Leaders provide some opportunities for pupils to engage in community activities. Pupils have a limited understanding of the positive difference they can make to people in the school's locality and wider society.

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

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:

- the risks associated with access to the school site are understood and effectively managed
- the composition of the safeguarding team reflects latest statutory guidance.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- develop opportunities for pupils of all ages to engage with the local community, to give them a deeper understanding of the needs of others and the positive difference they can make to wider society.

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. In most respects school leaders promote the wellbeing of pupils in the school and create an environment in which pupils learn effectively. However, leaders have not demonstrated a consistent approach to the management of risk. Risk assessment of the school site is not up to date and does not reflect the makeup of the school site. They have not followed statutory guidance with regard to the management of safeguarding. In these respects, proprietorial oversight has not been effective.

9. Leaders ensure that the school's values, aims and ethos are visible in all aspects of school life. Pupils reflect the school's values in their behaviour and attitudes. They have a keen sense of morality; they understand right from wrong and are articulate in expressing their views clearly.

10. Leaders have a suitable risk assessment policy, but oversight of risk assessments is not secure. Leaders do not consistently identify risks relating to site access for visitors and do not consider the risks posed by parental access to the nursery, which is an external entity. Identified risks are not consistently addressed.

11. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies which support pupils. For example, leaders make links with agencies that provide wider specialist provision and resources. Pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans can access resources that support their progress and wellbeing. The school shares information about the use of funds for pupils in receipt of an EHC plan with the local authority.

12. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is well planned and that teachers plan lessons effectively and take into account the needs of pupils who have SEND so that pupils make good progress from their starting points.

13. Leaders make themselves available to hear concerns. There is a suitable three-stage process for hearing complaints and records are maintained. Information is provided to parents as required. Reports giving details of pupils' achievements, progress and attainment are sent to parents. These include pupils' learning in PSHE lessons.

14. The school fulfils its duties in line with the Equality Act 2010. Leaders ensure that teaching does not discriminate. The accessibility plan is regularly reviewed and gives due consideration to enabling access to the physical site and actively considers ways to increase access to all aspects of school life for pupils, including those who have SEND.

15. Leaders and managers actively promote pupils' wellbeing through the effective design and implementation of the PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) policies and curriculum. Leaders have created courses with high quality planning, assessment and pupil-based evaluations with timetabled lessons for Years 1 to 10.

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

16. The standards related to risk assessment and safeguarding are not all met. In consequence, the standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not met.

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

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders in the early years plan an exciting, ambitious and engaging curriculum, which aims for each child to meet their full potential. The curriculum covers all seven areas of learning through a themed-based approach. Leaders have designed an engaging outdoor area which provides opportunities for fine and gross motor control development. It includes a mathematical challenge area and mud creative play. Children in the Reception year are highly engaged, confidently choosing their activities according to their interests. As a result, they make good progress and develop their physical and communication skills.

19. Leaders have designed a well-balanced curriculum which promotes the learning of pupils across the core areas of study. In the prep school, teachers plan schemes of work carefully across the curriculum in all year groups. Schemes include challenging tasks to encourage independent and advanced thinking, including when learning outside the classroom. Teachers encourage pupils to use higher-level vocabulary and knowledge. Pupils make progress in their learning across the curriculum and demonstrate well-developed mathematical and scientific skills.

20. Typically, in the senior school pupils make good progress in lessons due to knowledgeable teachers who are skilled at enabling pupils to think creatively in order to solve problems. For instance, in Year 9 art lessons pupils experiment with techniques and analyse work by artists to gain inspiration. In English, pupils are able to use complex literary terms to analyse a poem and in computer science pupils challenge each other and work collaboratively to solve problems.

21. The school has started to extend the curriculum to include the teaching of subjects to GCSE level. Pupils in Year 10 have access to specialist teaching across the curriculum. Teachers use GCSE criteria to assess pupils' work and regularly update pupils' expected outcomes. Teaching of pupils in all years is appropriate to pupils' ages and aptitudes. As a result, pupils are effectively supported in their learning.

22. Leaders make effective use of resources in supporting the curriculum. Early years teachers use visual aids, prompt cards and differentiated tasks so that children progress in their learning. Teachers in the prep and senior schools use verbal feedback throughout lessons and careful marking of work so that any misunderstanding is addressed and pupils develop skills. In all year groups pupils challenge each other, work collaboratively and make good progress.

23. Leaders use baseline evaluations and achievement data across the school to track and monitor individual pupils' progress and to inform teaching.

24. Pupils who have SEND are quickly identified and their needs met through the school's programme of support. Leaders regularly update teachers about pupils' needs and the adjustments to be made to support learning. Effective planning, assessment and individualised support in lessons help pupils to gain in confidence and make good progress. Leaders identify pupils with high prior attainment in each subject and support them with challenging tasks tailored to encourage independent thinking.

25. Pupils make good progress in their verbal and written communication. In the early years, phonics lessons help children to develop essential reading and writing skills. In the prep school, teachers make effective use of role play and assemblies to enhance pupils' communication skills and vocabulary. Leaders actively promote strategies and initiatives in all years to encourage reading. Consequently, pupils of all ages read with confidence and enjoyment.

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

26. Recreational opportunities, through a wide variety of lunchtime clubs are made available to pupils during the school day. For example, through eco club, football club, STEM club and film club in the pre-prep, there are opportunities for pupils of all ages to develop a wide range of skills.

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

27. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

28. In most respects leaders mitigate risks across the site to prioritise pupils' safety. However, they have not managed the risks associated with access to the Nursery.

29. Leaders oversee the curriculum to ensure that it supports the school's ethos, in which inclusivity and diversity are key features. Differences are celebrated in the early years through activities which enable children to explain who they are. Leaders respond effectively and promptly to any behavioural incidents in school which relate to any form of discrimination. Teachers educate pupils in understanding each other's differences. As a result, pupils respect each other and celebrate the diversity of the school community.

30. Birchfield Values are deeply embedded throughout daily school life. Leaders ensure that children in the pre-prep become aware of their own emotions and develop language that enables them to understand their feelings. Older pupils complete self-registration tasks so that staff can be aware of any particular issues, to provide support when required. Pupils' spiritual and moral development is supported through opportunities to learn about different faiths and cultures within PSHE and in subjects such as history and religious studies.

31. Leaders design the PSHE sessions to meet pupils' needs and support growing independence and confidence. The PSHE curriculum is relevant to pupils and meets their needs. The curriculum encourages and guides pupils from Years 1 to 10 to take responsibility for their own behaviour and attitudes to each other. Pupils encourage each other and value the contributions that they can each make. Pupil reviews at the end of each unit along with assessments inform leaders about how pupils are progressing in their understanding. Changes to the programme are made in response to this feedback alongside incidents in school.

32. The RSE lessons are delivered by a specialist teacher to pupils from Years 5 to 10. The curriculum has been reviewed to ensure that it meets the needs of older pupils. Issues relating to mental health and pupils' needs in the senior school are supported through initiatives like 'Hello Yellow' for world mental health day.

33. Leaders set clear and high expectations of pupils' behaviour. Teachers manage behaviour in lessons with care when prompts are needed to help pupils to maintain focus. Teachers have an in-depth understanding of the pupils in their classes and support their needs well. Supervision and oversight of pupils are effective outside lessons. Pupils behave well in lessons, in less structured times and in their play.

34. Leaders give pupils access to a games and physical education curriculum which is age-appropriate and supports their physical development. The school also offers a range of sporting clubs and competitive fixtures in a variety of sports. The hockey team has achieved well in regional competitions and pupils are enthusiastic about representing the school. Leaders encourage pupils to be physically active and play their part. Pupils recognise the importance of participation for their overall wellbeing.

35. Admission and attendance records are maintained correctly and take into consideration recent regulatory changes. Leaders inform the local authority when pupils leave and join at non-standard

transition points within the school year. Previous and destination schools are logged correctly. Leaders ensure that the school holds the required information for parents and emergency contacts. Leaders track the attendance of pupils and are aware of their obligations to promote attendance.

36. The premises and accommodation are well maintained by leaders and are suitable spaces in which pupils learn. Leaders complete fire risk assessments in a timely manner and electrical checks are appropriate. Free-flow access to the outdoors is available for pupils in the early years. Through daily safety checks in the early years and robust procedures for chemical handling in labs, risks are reduced. Risk assessments in the early years are thorough and reviewed regularly by leaders to ensure that children are safe. Leaders ensure that pupils learn about online safety in an age-appropriate way. Pupils know how to stay safe online.

37. Leaders maintain close oversight of the arrangements for first aid. Leaders ensure that staff are trained and monitor incidents across the school to look for patterns. Pupils know how to get help if they are unwell. Leaders provide staff in the early years with comprehensive training in paediatric first aid, food hygiene, and medication administration.

38. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to develop leadership skills. For example, through posts such as a sports ambassador, school council and eco council, pupils are given opportunities to represent each other.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

40. Through the curriculum, leaders provide pupils with opportunities to develop economic knowledge and understanding. For example, the Year 7 and 8 'fiver challenge', and budgeting workshops help pupils to learn to value money and develop financial literacy. Pupils learn new skills and show understanding of economic matters. They learn to develop social responsibility and entrepreneurial skills through charity sales raising funds for animal charities.

41. Leaders provide some opportunities for pupils to engage in community activities, but this is limited. For example, pupils in Year 7 raised money on behalf of a local project by selling plants and craft items at a fete, made by individuals with physical and learning disabilities and ill health. Currently, pupils have a limited understanding of the positive difference they can make to people in the school's locality and wider society.

42. Pupils learn to show respect for each other and staff teach them to understand people's differences. Teachers plan lessons carefully, select resources and manage discussion with sensitivity. British values are promoted across the curriculum. Lessons in the pre-prep are designed to develop an understanding and respect for a range of faiths and cultures.

43. Leaders have developed careers advice in the school as the age of pupils has increased. Leaders provide schemes of work which educate pupils about their strengths and skills in relation to possible future subject choices and careers. Pupils moving from the prep to senior school are well supported with induction events. In the senior school, tutors encourage and mentor pupils as they make key decisions for the next phase of their education. Information about different careers includes a wide range of options such as those presented in a recent 'careers week'. Pupils access dedicated online software to help them make informed decisions. As a result, pupils develop confidence in making decisions about their future.

44. Through the enrichment programme, leaders encourage pupils in Years 7 to 10 to participate in schemes such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme and Eco Schools project. Pupils learn practical life skills through their volunteering, though currently such opportunities are limited in scope.

45. Leaders use a range of carefully chosen resources and promote discussions with pupils about global events. For example, younger pupils engaged in discussions about leadership and democracy after the US presidential election. Older pupils enjoy wider discussion about the political elements and debates inspired by the novel 'Animal Farm'. Pupils show an understanding and respect for the law, institutions, other cultures and democracy. Leaders understand the importance of presenting balanced perspectives when discussing political issues.

46. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take positions of responsibility. For instance, through elected positions in the school parliament, pupils contribute to decision making in school. Pupils understand the importance of democracy and show respect for the law, institutions and services. They participate in mock elections and learn about democracy through Parliament week.

47. Teachers plan carefully to encourage discussion and debate in lessons. In Year 9, pupils discuss and debate the principles of right and wrong in the context of motivating workers in a business studies

class. Pupils speak confidently about the moral challenges of this as they consider personal motivations and potential conflict. Through such discussions and the emphasis throughout the school on personal qualities such as integrity, pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

49. The management of safeguarding is not robust. There is no identified lead of the safeguarding team. Since the expansion of the safeguarding team the school operates with two safeguarding leads: one for the senior school and one for the prep school. It is not clear who has overall responsibility. Consequently, the school's arrangements for safeguarding do not reflect the latest statutory guidance.

50. Leaders at the school understand the processes for recruitment. Appointments are clearly recorded on the single central record. Files contain evidence of the required checks for all staff.

51. Arrangements for the induction of new staff are thorough. Training ensures that key areas of safeguarding practice are covered before staff begin teaching at the school. Staff understand school systems for safeguarding and the processes for reporting concerns about pupils.

52. Staff know how to report concerns they have about adults in the school community, including those which do not meet the harm threshold. They report these low-level concerns suitably and also self-report when appropriate. A log of these low-level concerns is kept.

53. Incidents that occur in school are carefully logged and efficiently communicated to ensure that pupils are kept safe. Safeguarding leaders have close links with the local authority and make effective use of a range of support services in helping to manage pupils' wellbeing. Leaders attend safeguarding meetings with colleagues in other schools to better understand local risks to pupils.

54. Leaders have carefully considered the safeguarding implications of extending the pupils' age range to 16. There are many routes available to pupils in communicating any concerns. Pupils are able to identify trusted adults in school who they can speak with if they have concerns.

55. Arrangements for the filtering and monitoring use of the internet in school are secure. Systems are robust and are regularly tested by leaders so that pupils are well protected when working online.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

56. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in 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[1] Part 3, paragraph 16	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that -
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[2] 3.76	Providers must ensure that they take all reasonable steps to ensure staff and children in their care are not exposed to risks and must be able to demonstrate how they are managing risks. Providers must determine where it is helpful to make some written risk assessments in relation to specific issues, to inform staff practice, and to demonstrate how they are managing risks if asked by parents and/or carers or inspectors. Risk assessments should identify aspects of the environment that need to be checked on a regular basis, when and by whom those aspects will be checked, and how the risk will be removed or minimised.
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.
EYFS 3.4	In every setting, a practitioner must be designated to take lead responsibility for safeguarding children. The lead practitioner is responsible for liaison with local statutory children's services agencies, and with the LSP (Local Safeguarding

[1] The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')
[2] Early years foundation stage statutory framework ('EYFS')

	Partners). All practitioners must be alert to any issues of concern in the child's life at home or elsewhere.
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.

School details

School	Birchfield School
Department for Education number	6014/893
Address	Harriott's Hayes Lane Albrighton Wolverhampton West Midlands WV7 3AF
Phone number	01902 372534
Email address	office@birchfieldschool.co.uk
Website	www.birchfieldschool.co.uk
Proprietor	St Philips Educational Holdings Limited
Headteacher	Mrs Amy Jones
Age range	4 to 16
Number of pupils	196
Date of previous inspection	19 November 2021

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

Information about the school

57. Birchfield School is a coeducational school located in Albrighton, Wolverhampton. The prep and senior sections of the school are on the same site. The school has introduced GCSE courses from the start of this academic year. It has extended the age range of pupils to include pupils in Year 10. It is owned by a sole proprietor, who is responsible for its governance. Since the previous inspection there has been a change of headteacher.

58. The school has an early years setting comprising of one Reception class. There are currently 19 pupils in the early years.

59. The school has identified 43 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Nine pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

60. The school has not identified any pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

61. The school states its aims are to provide academic challenge through quality teaching which enables pupils to reach their potential. Through a focus on its core values of diligence, respect, kindness, aspiration, resilience and pride it aims to encourage a lifelong love of learning in pupils who are confident, happy and independent.

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024

Inspection details

Inspection dates	19 to 21 November 2024

62. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

63. 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 proprietor
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. 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

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2024