

School inspection report

18 to 20 November 2025

Great Walstead School

East Mascalls Lane

Lindfield

Haywards Heath

RH16 2QL

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

Summary of inspection findings

1. Governors gain appropriate oversight of school activities, issue effective challenge to leaders and monitor the implementation of policies diligently. As a result, they successfully ensure that the Standards are met.
2. Leaders regularly survey the views of pupils, parents and staff, keep the school's provision under review and undertake rigorous development planning. The curriculum uses national expectations as its starting point and extends these through an emphasis on learning both indoors and outside the classroom. For example, in addition to French, which is taught throughout the school, older pupils also learn Spanish. Leaders provide pupils with frequent opportunities to participate in sporting activities, which promotes their physical and mental health.
3. Teachers plan lessons well and use assessment outcomes effectively to ensure that learning appropriately builds on pupils' prior attainment. Staff demonstrate consistent enthusiasm for the topics they teach, display secure subject knowledge and motivate pupils to aspire to their high expectations of success. As a result, pupils thrive in their learning and make good progress.
4. Leaders implement systems that acknowledge and reward learning strategies that are beneficial to pupils, such as perseverance, creativity, confidence and commitment. These systems are managed effectively and consistently for younger year groups so that these pupils understand which strategies they use well and which they need to develop further. However, leaders do not apply the same level of consistency to older pupils, which means that their self-knowledge is less secure.
5. The school's code encourages pupils to develop the necessary traits to enable them to become valued members of a harmonious and supportive community. Older year groups extend their readiness for future experiences by discovering how laws are made and developing an appropriate appreciation of public institutions such as Parliament. As a result, pupils respect each other and are appropriately prepared to play a positive role in current and future society.
6. Pupils develop comprehensive financial awareness and are taught about concepts such as debit, credit and compound interest, banking, debt, and profit and loss. Leaders provide pupils with effective opportunities to put their knowledge into practice by running their own enterprises in aid of charity.
7. Teachers provide a limited number of opportunities for pupils to think about their future careers. These are restricted to a few themed days throughout the year, such as International Women's Day, and a short unit of work for pupils in the oldest year group. This means that pupils are not provided with a sufficiently diverse understanding of their future career pathways.
8. Governors and leaders understand the potential risks that face the school and implement appropriate measures to mitigate these, overall. However, leaders do not record, file or update some risk assessments consistently to ensure that information is easily available when required.
9. Leaders and staff implement suitable safeguarding procedures. Staff receive effective safeguarding training and respond appropriately to any concerns that are raised. All required pre-employment checks are carried out on staff in a timely manner. However, at the start of the inspection, some of the dates when recruitment checks were completed were found to be incorrectly recorded on the

school's single central record (SCR) of appointments. These errors were corrected during the inspection.

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:

- ensure that teachers' guidance to older pupils consistently helps them to understand the steps they should take to improve and manage their work
- strengthen the provision of careers guidance so that it develops pupils' knowledge of future pathways and opportunities more effectively
- develop a more systematic approach to review, update and manage risk assessments
- ensure that information relating to school recruitment is recorded accurately on the SCR.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors assure themselves that senior leaders manage the school competently and effectively so that the Standards are met consistently. They work closely with senior leaders to gain a comprehensive oversight of the school's activities, including through issuing effective questioning and challenge relating to policies and procedures.
11. Leaders engage in an effective process of continuous review which prioritises rigorous analysis of pupils' performance data alongside the views expressed in regular surveys of pupils, parents and staff. Following such consultations, leaders implement changes which improve and develop the school's provision so that pupils' wellbeing is promoted well. For example, a broader range of extra-curricular sporting activities and additional outdoor lighting around the site have both recently been implemented as a result of feedback received from pupils.
12. Governors, leaders and staff have a secure understanding of the major risks facing the school, and effective measures are implemented to mitigate these. Leaders maintain a centralised risk register and a range of suitable risk assessments. Risk assessments for trips, visits and events are thorough and well managed. However, some of the risk assessments that cover the premises and accommodation are not sufficiently detailed, evaluated effectively or kept clearly. As a result, key documents are not always easily accessible to the leadership team when needed.
13. Leaders forge effective links with the local authority and other external agencies, including local schools. The school provides the local authority with appropriate information about pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
14. Leaders ensure that required information is made available to parents of current and prospective pupils through a detailed and informative website. Parents receive written reports about their child's progress and attend a regular schedule of parents' meetings. Leaders communicate the school's aims and ethos effectively so that these are known by pupils, parents and staff.
15. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders respect diversity within the school community, ensure that no pupils are discriminated against and implement a comprehensive accessibility plan which aims to make the premises and curriculum accessible for pupils, staff and visitors.
16. Leaders ensure that staff working with pupils in the early years have appropriate knowledge and skills through ongoing professional dialogue, training and mentoring. This effective support helps staff to develop their practice and enrich children's experiences so that they learn and develop confidently and effectively.
17. Leaders manage and resolve concerns and complaints appropriately and effectively. They maintain detailed records of any submitted complaints, which summarise the school's investigations and include the decisions and actions taken.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders implement a diverse and balanced curriculum that uses national expectations as its starting point. All pupils learn French, and older pupils are also taught a second foreign language. The timetable is planned so that pupils receive regular opportunities to engage in sporting activities.
20. Teachers plan learning through a programme of diverse topics. For example, pupils in Years 3 and 4 spend time focusing on wide-ranging topics, such as the Victorians, India, ancient civilisations and rainforests. Pupils develop and broaden their understanding of these and explore different viewpoints and perspectives. Older pupils are taught by specialist teachers who plan carefully and prepare pupils well for entrance assessments to their chosen senior schools. In all subjects, teachers place emphasis on learning both indoors and outside the classroom, encouraging pupils to explore the woodland environment around the school and share the discoveries they make so that they develop respect and appreciation for the natural world. As a result of such measures, pupils throughout the school are prepared well for the next stages of their education.
21. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and hold ambitious expectations for pupils to make good progress in their learning. Pupils enjoy their lessons and apply themselves diligently to what is being asked of them. Lessons are planned and paced well so that they build on pupils' prior learning and include continuous encouragement and praise.
22. Teachers provide pupils with effective learning experiences to promote their understanding of topics. Staff ask pertinent questions that develop pupils' understanding, such as when they learn about the Great Fire of London through a practical demonstration in the playground. Teachers' subsequent questioning enables pupils not only to understand how the powerful wind and close proximity of buildings helped the fire to spread quickly and dangerously but also how the collapse of one property created a firebreak so that the speed of the spreading fire decreased.
23. Leaders develop age-appropriate reward systems that recognise and celebrate pupils' learning and promote their self-knowledge and understanding. Younger pupils, including children in the early years, receive stickers when they demonstrate characteristics such as curiosity, perseverance and self-improvement. This is managed effectively by teachers because they ensure that these pupils understand what they have done well and what they need to focus on to improve further. Teachers aim to acknowledge and reward older pupils who demonstrate learning characteristics such as collaboration, commitment and craftsmanship. However, staff do not consistently help older pupils to understand the steps they need to take to make further progress in their work or explain how responsible learning decisions, such as managing homework diligently, will contribute to the effectiveness of their learning.
24. Leaders implement an appropriate assessment framework to track pupils' achievements, analyse progress and identify areas for development. Leaders use assessment outcomes effectively to determine and implement support and extension activities appropriate for each pupil. For example, staff provide additional electronic resources which enable access to recordings of complex texts or lists of sophisticated vocabulary which are used to challenge pupils who have higher prior attainment in their writing. As a result, pupils develop their knowledge, skills and understanding continuously and make good progress in their work.

25. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) receive individual support in lessons. Well-qualified leaders use a variety of appropriate resources and strategies to ensure pupils' needs are identified accurately and communicated to staff effectively. As a result, pupils who have SEND make consistently good progress in their work.
26. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate support to ensure that their skills, vocabulary and comprehension are sufficient to enable them to access the curriculum fully.
27. A wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities provides effective opportunities for pupils to discover new interests and to extend existing skills. Leaders arrange early morning swimming, gymnastics and cross country for pupils who benefit from an active start to their day. Pupils develop teamwork and skills in different sports, music and drama clubs and experiment with a wide range of resources, such as in ceramics and music technology.
28. Leaders in the early years refine and develop the curriculum to match children's individual interests and needs. Teachers model appropriate language and introduce children to new vocabulary when they teach new topics. This means that pupils experiment with and use ambitious language and explore and discover new knowledge. Children use ambitious words to discuss and describe the formation of ice in their outside water trays when they notice that nearby mud has remained as liquid during a sudden burst of cold weather. Children enthusiastically express their gratitude to visitors by writing thank you cards and confidently describe bracelets made of alternating coloured beads as 'repeating patterns', which demonstrates their developing proficiency in both language and mathematics.

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. Teachers consistently promote the principles of the school ethos throughout the school. Leaders emphasise moral values, such as pupils treating others in the way they would like to be treated, and they remind pupils to demonstrate honesty and kindness in their daily interactions. Pupils develop a secure understanding of morality within the school community and show respect, support and care towards each other.
31. Leaders provide regular opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual understanding. They consider matters beyond the physical world in assemblies, known as 'Chapel'. Pupils listen to music, which encourages individual thought, and engage in prayer or quiet reflection. Pupils visit the 'secret garden', a peaceful area of the school's grounds where they can go during their breaktimes to privately reflect or engage in quiet pursuits such as chess.
32. Teachers provide a broad range of opportunities for pupils to participate in lessons and perform in front of others, both within small groups and to larger audiences. Teachers emphasise praise when they speak to pupils or provide written feedback. As a result, staff reinforce pupils' self-esteem and confidence.
33. Pupils typically behave well at the school. Teachers follow the school's effective behaviour and anti-bullying policies when misbehaviour occurs. They intervene appropriately, resolve matters effectively and keep accurate records. Pupils are proud of their membership in school houses and are enthusiastic to maximise the chance of house success in competitions.
34. Leaders promote pupils' physical and mental health effectively. Pupils are taught age-appropriate units of study in subjects such as science, physical education (PE) and the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum. Pupils learn about the importance of regular exercise and eating healthily. They explore the harmful effects of drugs misuse and illegal substances. Teachers support pupils' understanding about emotional regulation and how to manage the onset of puberty. The school's PSHE programme includes an appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) component. Leaders consult appropriately with parents before any sensitive topics are taught. Pupils explore topics such as consent, respect and inclusion effectively. As a result, pupils are prepared well to take responsible personal decisions which help them to develop respectful relationships and promote their health and wellbeing.
35. Leaders implement a well-planned PE programme which encourages pupils to participate in a wide range of sporting activities. Pupils are provided with regular physical activities that encompass a diverse range of traditional and alternative sports including football, cricket, trampolining, street dance and pickleball. Pupils broaden their physical activities through enthusiastic participation in additional pursuits, such as after-school clubs in skateboarding, mountain biking and horse riding. Pupils frequently represent their school in competitive matches, which develops their self-esteem and confidence. Leaders teach pupils well so that they develop their skills and learn to win and lose gracefully.
36. Teachers in the early years provide children with effective opportunities that support their personal development. Children learn to be independent, for example when they change their clothes proficiently before going outside. Staff encourage children to challenge themselves by planning

activities that use a range of physical resources, including climbing frames, the outdoor area and the school's 'trim trail'. Children develop their fine and gross motor skills in well-taught PE lessons and play games using bats and balls.

37. The school provides suitable first aid and medical provision. Staff are appropriately qualified in first aid, including in paediatric first aid for those who work in the early years. First aid and administration of medication is managed competently. Leaders support pupils with individual strategies such as through the provision of special permits which enable them to access immediate wellbeing support from the learning enhancement team, when required.
38. Leaders arrange duty rotas which ensure that pupils are supervised in a suitable manner. Staff maintain appropriate staff-to-child ratios in the early years.
39. The school's health and safety procedures are managed well and overseen effectively by governors. Leaders implement regular fire evacuation drills so that pupils know how to respond in an emergency. Those with responsibility for health and safety receive specific training and ensure that fire safety equipment is checked regularly. Leaders respond efficiently and effectively whenever any issues are reported. As a result, the premises and accommodation are well maintained and suitable for pupils.
40. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in line with current requirements. They analyse pupils' attendance data, take appropriate action when absence gives cause for concern and liaise with the local authority when required.

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

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

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

42. Teachers successfully develop pupils' understanding and respect for cultural diversity and people who may be different to themselves. Pupils explore equality and discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes by celebrating Black History Month and international days which recognise men and women who have campaigned for a fair and just society. Older pupils meet the family of a Holocaust survivor and learn about persecution during World War Two. Pupils visit places of religious worship such as churches, a gurdwara and a Hindu temple, which develops their empathetic understanding of different faiths and cultures. Pupils participate in cultural 'world games' sporting events and play sports from around the world, such as kabaddi, a traditional team game from India.
43. Teachers focus on the school code, which supports pupils' knowledge of right and wrong throughout the school community. Older pupils develop their understanding of appropriate conduct in society by exploring the rule of law and learning about democratic and legal processes during PSHE lessons. Through role play they explore how laws are passed and visit Parliament where they meet their local MP. The school takes appropriate steps to ensure that balanced perspectives are presented to pupils whenever political matters are discussed.
44. Throughout the school, pupils receive age-appropriate education in matters of economics and finance. Teachers of mathematics provide effective opportunities for younger pupils to learn to handle coins and calculate prices. Older pupils participate in a shopkeeping scenario, design a theme park and learn about cost control and profit audits. Pupils organise fundraising events such as a 'gadget sale' when they buy wholesale items, launch appropriate advertising and sell their stock at appropriate prices to raise funds for charity. This complements their PSHE lessons, where they are taught about savings, bank accounts, interest and debt.
45. Leaders provide pupils with suitable opportunities to accept responsibilities that enable them to play an active and effective role within the school and develop their leadership skills. This includes opportunities to take on positions as head pupils, prefects and pupil ambassadors, who work alongside the headteacher in school council meetings to represent the views of each class. Leaders respond well to the school council, such as by revising lunchtime and snack menus and providing new football goals, table tennis tables and additional extra-curricular clubs. The school council canvases other pupils to choose which local, national and international charities to support. Pupils develop an understanding of social responsibility and learn that it is responsible and kind to offer help to others.
46. Leaders in the early years encourage children to take responsibility for their actions. Children are gently reminded, through a process of sensitive mediation, to respect and care for their peers so that they behave well, support each other and share equipment amicably. Teachers encourage children to respect diversity in the community. For example, they build model houses out of bricks, include accessible ramps near doorways and learn that these are to provide access for people who may need to use a wheelchair.
47. Pupils are provided with limited opportunities to consider their future working lives and potential careers. Leaders invite visitors into school to inform pupils about some of their experiences in employment, and pupils use the internet in PSHE lessons to research information about some

careers. However, this provision is limited, which means that pupils do not receive a suitably broad understanding of future careers options.

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. Leaders promote a vigilant and robust safeguarding culture throughout the school. They are supported effectively by governors who provide thorough oversight, including through meeting with the safeguarding team, conducting regular audits of safeguarding matters and reviewing the safeguarding policy.
50. Leaders implement appropriate safer recruitment procedures when appointing new members of staff, including carrying out all necessary checks within appropriate timescales. These checks are recorded in staff personnel files. However, some clerical mistakes were found in the SCR relating to the dates when recruitment checks were completed. These errors were corrected during the inspection.
51. Leaders provide staff with comprehensive and effective safeguarding training, including at induction. This includes the latest updates in relation to the 'Prevent' duty to combat extremism and radicalisation. Appropriate policies for staff conduct are in place, including suitable procedures for whistleblowing should any allegations or concerns need to be raised concerning adults who work at the school. Staff receive regular ongoing safeguarding training through regular staff meetings. As a result, they are knowledgeable about safeguarding requirements and demonstrate a thorough understanding of how they should fulfil their duties and manage any concerns raised by pupils.
52. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are provided with appropriate additional time, training and resources to enable them to fulfil their duties appropriately. They respond effectively to safeguarding concerns and provide suitable support for vulnerable pupils. Leaders liaise constructively with external safeguarding agencies and the local authority and refer safeguarding concerns to them when necessary. The safeguarding team maintains thorough and suitable records which detail the school's response to any safeguarding concerns.
53. Pupils know that they can approach any member of staff if they have a worry or concern and want to discuss matters. Those who prefer to communicate in writing can use a central 'worry box' which staff check and respond to regularly.
54. Pupils receive effective teaching so that they know how to keep themselves secure when online. Leaders ensure that material accessed from the internet is filtered and monitored so that only appropriate content is viewed. The safeguarding team takes suitable actions and maintains clear records when it receives any alerts relating to inappropriate online activities.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Great Walstead School
Department for Education number	938/6203
Registered charity number	1076456
Address	Great Walstead School East Mascalls Lane Lindfield Haywards Heath West Sussex RH16 2QL
Phone number	01444 483528
Email address	gwmail@greatwalstead.co.uk
Website	www.greatwalstead.co.uk
Proprietor	Ardingly College Limited
Chair	Mrs Jayne Adams
Headteacher	Mr Christopher Calvey
Age range	2 to 13 years
Number of pupils	285
Date of previous inspection	30 November to 1 December 2022

Information about the school

56. Great Walstead School is an independent co-educational preparatory day school. Established in 1925 in East Croydon, the present site is situated on the outskirts of Haywards Heath in West Sussex. The school is part of a charitable company overseen by a board of governors. The school's proprietor changed to Ardingly College Limited in September 2024, and a new chair of the governing body was appointed in February 2025.
57. There are 48 children in the early years comprising two Nursery groups and two Reception classes.
58. The school has identified 51 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
59. The school has identified English as an additional language for five pupils.
60. The school states its aims are to build on the values of vibrancy, adventure, determination and empathy. It seeks to place emphasis on kindness, honesty and respect, so that pupils develop curiosity, confidence, communication, collaboration, creativity, commitment and craftsmanship.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

18 to 20 November 2025

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

62. 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.

63. 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