

School inspection report

21 to 23 October 2025

Hurtwood House School

Holmbury St Mary

Dorking

Surrey

RH5 6NU

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. The proprietor's oversight does not ensure that leaders display good skills and knowledge or fulfil their responsibilities to promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. As a result, not all of the Standards are met.
2. Leaders do not identify or mitigate potential risks to boarders effectively. In particular, they do not adequately assess the risks relating to mixed-age boarding arrangements for pupils between 15 and 19 years old, or the potential risks of boarders having unrestricted access to the boarding houses when no adults are present.
3. At the start of the inspection, some windows in boarding houses did not have restrictors fitted. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
4. Leaders, supported by the proprietors who know the school well, work to continually develop the educational experience of pupils. They regularly update and evaluate strategic plans for the school's development in order to maintain the school's core values, which are centred on providing a caring environment that values academic, creative and practical knowledge and skills equally.
5. Leaders ensure that the premises and accommodation are well maintained.
6. Attendance procedures, including the use of correct codes in the attendance register, now reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance. However, this was not the case during the preceding academic year. Leaders identified and rectified this before the inspection commenced.
7. Pupils develop a wide range of creative and artistic skills through lessons and the wide range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils engage in high quality performances throughout the year that offer the opportunity for a variety of performing, crew and technical roles, such as lighting and filming support. Pupils' engagement with dance, drama and performing arts production helps develop their mutual respect and sense of collegiality.
8. Pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and life beyond school. A well-developed careers programme is in place that develops pupils' confidence in planning their next steps through the clear guidance and support on the wide range of opportunities available to them.
9. Leaders ensure that safeguarding concerns about pupils are managed and recorded appropriately and in line with local procedures. Leaders maintain relationships with relevant external agencies and seek guidance when required. The school has a centralised system for recording low-level concerns about adults. However, this system is not always effectively used or fully understood by all staff.
10. Relationships throughout the school are positive. Teachers know the pupils well. Pupils feel that staff are interested in them and what they have to say. Pupils feel valued. This helps pupils grow in self-esteem and self-confidence. Teachers' high expectations of behaviour and consistent implementation of a clear behaviour policy results in a calm, ordered environment that is based on mutual respect.

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 met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school:

- demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school Standards are consistently met
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school Standards are consistently met and
- actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- all potential risks to boarders are appropriately mitigated by the drawing up and implementation of appropriate risk assessments
- pupils do not have unrestricted access to a boarding house when no adults are present
- the sharing of houses by boarders of mixed ages is appropriately risk assessed
- windows in boarding accommodation are fitted with appropriate restrictors.

Recommended next steps

The proprietor should:

- ensure that staff have a secure understanding of the school's procedures for recording and reporting low-level concerns and apply these when appropriate
- ensure that attendance procedures consistently reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The proprietors do not ensure that leaders demonstrate sufficient knowledge and skill to fulfil all their responsibilities. As a result, the wellbeing of the pupils is not always promoted effectively, and some Standards are unmet.
12. Leaders do not ensure effective risk assessment with regard to boarding. They do not identify or put in place effective measures to mitigate all potential risks. In particular, leaders have not risk assessed the unrestricted access to boarding houses that boarders have during the day, including when no staff are present. Leaders have not risk assessed or mitigated potential risks raised by the placing of boarders aged 15 to 19 years together in boarding houses. In addition, when the inspection commenced, not all windows in boarding accommodation were fitted with window restrictors to prevent potential risks to boarders. Leaders rectified this particular situation before the end of the inspection.
13. The proprietors have a clear vision for the school's future and put in place strategies to develop the school towards this. Leaders communicate the school's aims and clear focus on independence, mutual respect and the development of self-confidence effectively so that these are promoted by staff and known by pupils and parents.
14. Other aspects of risk assessment are effective. For example, risk assessments relating to trips and educational activities identify hazards and the actions to be taken to reduce risk. These risk assessments are well documented and accessible to all staff.
15. The school provides and makes available all required information for parents, mostly through the school's website. Parents receive regular reports about their child's progress. Leaders implement appropriate arrangements to provide the local authority with required information relating to the use of funding for any pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). The school also notifies the local authority promptly of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition times.
16. Leaders implement the complaints procedure effectively. They respond to complaints within published timescales and attempt to resolve them at an early stage. In addition, leaders record and respond to any complaints by boarders in an appropriate manner.
17. Through suitable self-evaluation, leaders have identified the curriculum development for the GCSE foundation course and the academic tracking for A-level pupils as areas for further development. Work has already started on both aspects, with some impact already in evidence. For example, the weekly grading meetings ensure that pupils receive the support and advice that enables them to understand the successes and areas for development of their work.
18. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The school's accessibility plan sets out the adjustments to the facilities and curriculum to make access possible for all. Leaders review the plan annually to check that it is still relevant. Leaders ensure that the provision does not discriminate against any groups of pupils.
19. Leaders maintain appropriate links with outside agencies to promote the welfare of pupils and ensure that they are safeguarded effectively. They ensure that staff are aware of which agencies they can contact if required.

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

- 20. Standards are not met consistently with respect to the management of risk of harm.
- 21. As a result, Standards relating to governance, leadership and management are not met.
- 22. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. Leaders provide a broad and balanced curriculum, with particular emphasis on providing rich opportunities for pupils to develop their creative and artistic skills and attributes. There are opportunities for pupils to follow a wide combination of subjects to meet their personal interests and aptitudes. Many pupils choose to follow a predominantly artistic and creative curriculum while others choose a more traditional programme of study. The curriculum is planned to enable pupils, particularly those studying the performing arts, to pursue their interests and develop their own skills to a high degree. As a result, a large proportion of pupils go on to undertake specialist art and drama studies and pursue careers in the creative arts.
24. Leaders ensure that appropriate schemes of work and activities are in place to meet the pupils' needs. The one-year GCSE foundation course is thoughtfully structured to ensure that the Year 11 pupils are in a position at the end of their first year at the school to transition to the two-year A-level courses. Heads of department plan their A-level lessons in clear and logical detail, with suggested activities and extension work. As a result, pupils benefit from well planned and resourced teaching programmes which enables them to develop secure subject knowledge and make good progress. Achievement for all pupils, in national examinations, is above average.
25. Leaders ensure that academic tutors meet weekly with their tutees to review their assessment grades and effort levels. Teachers encourage pupils to be reflective through these meetings and encourage the pupils to develop their learning independently and responsibly. Teachers plan appropriate tasks, and provide effect support, so that pupils can continue to make progress. Boarding staff also monitor pupils' academic progress through the weekly grading system and quickly pick up on any boarder who is finding challenges with either effort or attainment.
26. Staff are creative in using a range of methods to deliver the subject material and tailor their teaching and subject matter to meet the needs of different groups of pupils including pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Teaching and support respond to the pupils' needs and interests. Teachers plan their lessons well, making appropriate use of the individual education plans (IEP). When required, they offer pupils who have SEND one-to-one support and subject workshops outside of their lessons. This impacts positively on pupils' learning and enable them to make good progress.
27. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) achieve well. Each academic department monitors the performance of pupils who speak EAL to identify any areas that require further support. All subject teachers are given additional training, with specific practical advice on meeting the needs of pupils who speak EAL to further facilitate pupils' progress in their subject.
28. The extensive extra-curricular programme of 'Enigma' activities, the additional activities programme and the 'Lifeskills' programme, which runs alongside GCSE and A-level courses, ensures that pupils experience a wide range of additional opportunities.

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. Leaders maintain an environment and curriculum which encourages pupils' mutual trust and respect for other people. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, supported by regular visiting speakers, provides opportunities for staff to address these topics with pupils in a variety of ways. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of the importance of having respect for all people.
31. Health and safety arrangements are effective. Leaders arrange for required checks and servicing to be carried out. As a result, the school premises are well maintained and provide pupils with a suitable physical environment. Fire safety procedures are also effective. The school utilises external specialists to conduct annual fire risk assessments. Fire practices take place each term throughout the school with regular practices taking place in boarding time.
32. Appropriate supervision is provided by staff who have a clear understanding of their duties and responsibilities.
33. The school promotes pupils' development of high levels of confidence and self-esteem. Leaders and staff listen carefully to pupils and encourage them to express their views. Pupils learn to think for themselves and are encouraged to develop their own view on social and wider issues. Through PSHE, the exploration of character and personal identity give pupils confidence in the vocabulary needed to further understand aspects that contribute to their own identity.
34. Pupils participate in a physical education (PE) programme that is appropriate for the different age groups, with some opportunity for competitive fixtures. There are prescribed activities and teams that pupils can join, and activities that can be self-selective such as dance passes, recreational basketball and personal gym sessions. Pupils develop their skills and understanding in a range of sports. Boarders live in houses that have ample outdoor space, facilities and indoor gyms that offer them the opportunity to participate in physical activity during their free time.
35. The school provides plentiful opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual knowledge and understanding. Pupils are taught about different faiths and the importance of respecting those with different spiritual beliefs to their own.
36. Leaders ensure that relationship and sex education (RSE) lessons and talks are age appropriate and that presentations from visiting speakers and workshop programmes are specific to the needs of the pupils. The 'Lifeskills' department encourages pupils and staff to provide feedback about the RSE programme through questionnaires, to help highlight topics and themes for further inclusion. The RSE programme is thoughtfully devised with topics being taught when they are most useful for the pupils.
37. Leaders and staff communicate high expectations of pupils' behaviour and provide them with clear guidance about sanctions, including those known as 'red line sanctions'. Leaders apply sanctions, including those below this threshold, appropriately and proportionately and provide pupils with support to help promote their positive behaviour. Pupils respond well to the rewards programme which is fair and appropriate. As a result, pupils behave well and relationships between pupils and staff are mature, highly respectful and harmonious.

38. Leadership actively promotes an effective anti-bullying strategy which makes it clear that the school does not tolerate bullying and minimises bullying within school. Pupils learn about the distinction between bullying and unkindness. Pupils are taught about the negative impact of bullying, including on the internet and bullying based on someone's background, such as their race or sexual orientation. Bullying incidents are rare and effectively managed through appropriate support for all parties. Staff are trained appropriately to recognise and respond to bullying.
39. The admission and attendance registers have not always been maintained as required by current statutory guidance. In particular, the school did not use the correct codes in the attendance registers. Leaders rectified this prior to the inspection in time for the beginning of the current school year.
40. The school provides appropriate first aid and medical provision, including a 'wellbeing and health centre'. Day pupils and boarders are supported by appropriately trained staff including a full-time nurse. There are regular visits by a doctor to the school.
41. The school provides a supportive environment in the boarding houses where pupils feel welcomed, settle quickly, and make friends with ease. Boarders are well supported by staff who know them well and have the skills and expertise to care for them. The school provides a range of nutritious food in sufficient quantities. Boarding accommodation is well maintained and comfortable, with facilities for quiet work and recreation. The school provides boarders with clean laundry and appropriate sleeping and washing facilities. There are appropriate arrangements for storing boarders' possessions and for their travel to and from school at the beginning and the end of the day. Pupils are comfortable making suggestions to catering staff, the headteacher or their house parents. They can also raise concerns and suggestions informally through tutors and house staff or more formally through the house councils, should the need arise.
42. Leaders provide boarders with appropriate roles of responsibility, such as that of house representatives. Boarders in these roles gather and represent the views of their house community.

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

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

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

44. Leaders provide pupils access to accurate, up to date and impartial careers guidance so that they can make informed choices about a broad range of career options. The careers programme for all year groups covers a variety of topics that helps prepare pupils for subsequent education, training or employment. Alumni return to speak about their career paths. The school holds higher education fairs, and careers fairs that include representation from a range of higher education providers and employers. The school utilises links with external organisations to support pupils who make applications to universities overseas. Pupils are encouraged to take the initiative to arrange work experience during the holidays, many of them benefitting from virtual work experiences. Pupils are made aware of a wide range of options including apprenticeships and direct entry into the workplace as well as higher education in the UK and overseas. Pupils benefit from the close links between the careers team and their academic teachers and tutors which facilitates staff having an informed overview of each pupil's aspirations beyond school.
45. The school provides a suitable economic education that equips pupils with knowledge and skills to enable them to make well-considered decisions about their personal finance. Pupils study the British economy and learn how to manage personal finance. In Year 12, pupils receive a compulsory course which looks at personal finance. In Year 13, pupils learn about financial themes such as budgeting, loans, taxation, mortgages and the base rate of interest and its effect.
46. Leaders have supported and developed the additional activities programme includes the 'Friday Enigma' programme. This encourages respect for all pupils, by developing an understanding of pupils' different backgrounds, cultures and religions. Pupils often lead the initiatives, which have included events related to 'neurodiversity week', Black History Month and the exploration and celebration of different languages and cultures.
47. Through the curriculum, in lessons and in assemblies, leaders emphasise the importance of respect and tolerance. House leaders help pupils discuss global issues in a thoughtful and sensitive way. Themes relating to identity, inclusion, discrimination and how people are protected under the law are explored throughout lessons and the PSHE curriculum. As a result, pupils demonstrate a high level of respect for people of diverse cultures and understand the importance of challenging discrimination.
48. Lessons provide pupils with opportunities to consider mental health and wellbeing and to explore human relationships and emotions. For example, pupils consider themes such as power imbalance between male and female characters and attitudes towards homosexuality in the context of texts such as a play by Tennessee Williams. As a result of opportunities for reflective thinking around relationships, pupils are able to confidently and maturely explore themes around human relationships and emotions.
49. Pupils are given the opportunity to think about the rule of law through house competitions and debates which support this topic. Houses are challenged to consider what new law they would introduce if they were in a position to decide on the laws of the land. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to engage with and discuss social, political and cultural issues, including through presentations by visiting speakers. Pupils develop a mature understanding of the importance of recognising and respecting differing political views in a democratic society and of expressing diverging views

respectfully. Leaders ensure that partisan political views are not promoted in any teaching or discussions.

50. The school helps pupils to develop a sense of responsibility towards others. The school's charity committee represents each boarding house and meets weekly to plan and organise charity events throughout the year. Three events are planned per half term. Pupils support a local charity supporting homeless people, with charity performances and an auction. They engage in a 'Christmas Santa run' to support local foodbanks and contribute to the annual shoe box appeal. Every year the school holds the 'Big Walk', which involves a 10 mile walk around the school area and raises money for a range of local charities.

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. The proprietor and leaders ensure that the safeguarding policy and procedures are effective and reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.
53. Pupils learn to keep themselves safe, including when online, through lessons, assemblies and 'life skills' lessons. They are taught how to behave responsibly online, how to protect themselves and be alert to risks. A robust and effective internet filtering and monitoring system is in place. Alerts which are raised are swiftly investigated and records of all actions maintained. The school puts appropriate restrictions on boarders' access to the internet during boarding hours.
54. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share any worries that they might have. Pastoral leaders provide additional support to pupils who are new to the school so that pupils become familiar with staff and processes. This develops pupils' confidence in how to seek support should they need it.
55. Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are carried out robustly before adults begin work in the school. These checks are recorded in a well-maintained single central record of appointments (SCR). Staff files are well organised and accurate.
56. Safeguarding training for staff, leaders and proprietors is regular and systematic. Staff receive guidance about any updates to statutory guidance and the 'Prevent' duty that relates to risks of radicalisation and extremism. Staff know how to report concerns about pupils in a timely manner. However, their understanding and application of the school's procedures for recording and reporting low-level concerns is not as secure as possible.
57. The safeguarding team responds effectively whenever safeguarding concerns are raised, ensuring that pupils receive the appropriate support when required. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities maintain suitable links with external safeguarding agencies and refer concerns on to them when appropriate in a timely manner.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

58. All the relevant Standards are met.

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. |
| 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. |
| NMS ² 2.1 | The school's governing body and/or proprietor monitors the effectiveness of the leadership, management and delivery of the boarding and welfare provision in the school, and takes appropriate action where necessary. |
| NMS 2.2 | The school's leadership and management, including its governing body where appropriate, demonstrate good skills and knowledge, appropriate to their role and undertake appropriate training as required. |
| NMS 2.4 | The school's leadership and management fulfil their responsibilities consistently and effectively so that the standards are met. |
| NMS 2.5 | The school's leadership and management and governance actively promote the wellbeing of pupils. |
| NMS 9.3 | The school ensures that the welfare of borders at the school is safeguarded and promoted by the drawing up and effective implementation of a written risk assessment policy and appropriate action is taken to reduce risks that are identified. |

¹ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

² National Minimum Standards for boarding schools ('NMS')

School details

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| School | Hurtwood House School |
| Department for Education number | 936/6564 |
| Address | Hurtwood House School Holmbury St Mary Dorking Surrey RH5 6NU |
| Phone number | 01483 279000 |
| Email address | info@hurtwood.net |
| Website | www.hurtwoodhouse.com |
| Proprietor | Mr Richard Jackson and Mr Cosmo Jackson |
| Headteacher | Mr Cosmo Jackson |
| Age range | 15 to 19 |
| Number of pupils | 363 |
| Number of boarding pupils | 293 |
| Date of previous inspection | 22 to 23 September 2022 |

Information about the school

59. Hurtwood House School was founded in 1970 as a co-educational sixth-form school, located close to Dorking, Surrey. It now accepts pupils on a GCSE foundation course in Year 11. The school is run by a limited liability partnership whose partners are proprietors. Governance is exercised by the proprietors, two of whom are also members of the school's leadership and management team.
60. There are six boarding houses, four are co-educational and two are for female boarders. Two of the houses are on campus and the other four are within a short distance of the main school site.
61. The school has identified 119 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
62. The school has identified 114 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
63. The school states its aims are to create a structured, safe environment, which is focused on the needs of today's sixth-form pupil, is less formal and institutional than traditional independent schools but characterised by high expectations of academic performance and personal growth.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

21 to 23 October 2025

64. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

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

66. 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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For more information, please visit isi.net