

School inspection report

14 to 16 October 2025

Cokethorpe School

Cokethorpe Park

Witney

Oxfordshire

OX29 7PU

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and governors have successfully developed an ethos of inclusion. Consequently, pupils throughout the school display a positive approach to their learning.
2. However, governors and leaders do not ensure that all Standards are consistently met. They do not ensure that all aspects of statutory guidance is followed regarding safeguarding. They also do not effectively assess and mitigate the risks to vulnerable pupils and the wider school community following any safeguarding incidents.
3. Leaders and managers have ensured that the curriculum is broad and balanced with an emphasis on creative and outdoor learning. The curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure it is fulfilling its aims. Pupils also benefit from a diverse co-curricular programme, which is fully embedded in the school day. This enables pupils to enjoy a wide range of new experiences and develop new skills.
4. Early years provision is well planned and ensures that all children make good progress. The early years team works effectively and closely with the prep school to ensure that children's needs and prior attainment are shared with their next teacher to enable their continued progress.
5. Teachers plan and deliver lessons effectively across the school so that pupils make good progress from their starting points. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified and supported appropriately. They make good progress.
6. There is a well-planned programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) across the whole school, which is delivered through a combination of timetabled lessons, tutor time, assemblies and visiting speakers. Through this, pupils gain self-knowledge, self-confidence and an understanding of British values such as democracy, the rule of law and tolerance.
7. Leaders promote a culture of kindness across the school and as a result most pupils behave well. There is a clear behaviour policy in place. However, sanctions are not always implemented consistently and in some lessons low-level disruptive behaviour can limit other pupils' progress.
8. The school site is well maintained and meets health and safety requirements, including those for fire safety. Suitable maintenance records are kept and are reviewed regularly. Risk assessments for the site and for trips and visits are effective in promoting the health and safety of pupils.

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 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 met consistently
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
- actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- all safeguarding practices fully reflect statutory safeguarding guidance
- any safeguarding concerns reported by pupils are listened to and dealt with swiftly and effectively
- leaders' decision-making in safeguarding is fully documented
- safeguarding risk assessments are implemented and monitored consistently.

Recommended next steps

Governors and leaders should:

- develop behaviour management strategies so that staff apply sanctions consistently and pupils understand the reasons for them.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders and governors successfully promote an ethos of inclusion across the school.
10. However, leaders do not always follow statutory guidance, and governors do not always exercise effective oversight of leaders. Consequently, they do not ensure that the Standards are met. Leaders do not always operate safeguarding procedures which adhere to statutory guidance. They do not always correctly identify child-on-child sexual harassment and do not routinely follow the process as set out in Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE).
11. Leaders do not identify and mitigate the risks to vulnerable pupils effectively or keep appropriate records of their decision-making, as they are required to do. In other areas, such as for the physical environment of the school and for trips and visits, leaders demonstrate a thorough approach to assessing and managing risks.
12. Throughout the school, leaders have created a broad and age-appropriate curriculum which is reviewed regularly to ensure it is fulfilling the needs of all pupils, including pupils who have SEND and children in the early years. Provision includes an extensive co-curricular programme, all of which is delivered within the school day. Leaders' decisions in this respect have successfully created a culture of participation and community cohesion.
13. Leaders have created an appropriate vertical house system across the school, which is successful in promoting the welfare of pupils so that they develop a sense of belonging and are well supported academically and pastorally.
14. Across the school leaders promote an emphasis on outdoor education. In the early years children benefit from activities in the woodland area and leaders and teachers seek opportunities for pupils of all ages to learn outside, both within and beyond the curriculum.
15. There is a suitable behaviour policy, but this is not always being applied consistently across the school. Pupils do not always fully understand the reasons for some sanctions and leaders do not always ensure that concerns raised by pupils are followed up effectively.
16. Leaders' inclusive approach and their arrangements for implementing the school's accessibility plan ensure that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The school's website provides all required information for parents. Leaders provide the local authorities with all required information relating to education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Leaders also report to local authorities when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
17. The school has a suitable complaints policy which is implemented appropriately. Where formal complaints are received, they are handled effectively through a three-stage process with clear timescales. The number of complaints received is published in the complaints policy.

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

18. Standards relating to safeguarding and risk assessment are not all met.
19. As a result, Standards relating to leadership and management are not met.

20. 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

21. Pupils across the school benefit from carefully considered curriculum design, which is regularly reviewed to ensure it is meeting the needs of the pupils. The curriculum encompasses a wide range of learning, including the teaching of literacy, numeracy, creative skills and additional study skills workshops, which help pupils to improve their own understanding of their learning. All pupils in Years 4 and 7 can learn to play a musical instrument for half of the school year, which supports their creative and cognitive development, as well as developing musical appreciation across the whole-school community.
22. The curriculum builds links between the prep and senior school. Pupils at the end of Year 6 benefit from careful planning of curriculum time to enable teachers and pupils to prepare thoroughly for the transition to secondary school. Teachers in the prep school are reflective and adapt readily to the needs of the pupils. In English, they have redesigned the curriculum to include lessons taken outside the classroom, using nature as an inspiration. As a result, pupils are using descriptive language in their short story writing more effectively. They enthusiastically take part in a short story competition to develop their writing skills.
23. In the early years the curriculum is planned effectively to cover all the required prime and specific areas of learning. It reflects children's interests and is engaging and flexible. Teachers are knowledgeable and the setting is well resourced, including specialist teachers in, for instance, French and music. Children gain confidence in their language and communication skills because of careful questioning by skilled staff. They develop their fine and gross motor skills effectively in the well-equipped outdoor area where they climb, balance and ride bicycles with ease. They make good progress and are well prepared for their transition into Year 1.
24. Leaders in the prep school promote an approach to feedback which is focused on responding to the needs of each pupil. Teachers give detailed feedback and encourage pupils to self-evaluate their work carefully. As a result, pupils, including those who have SEND, understand how to improve their work. They make good progress from their starting points.
25. In the senior school, teachers are knowledgeable and plan lessons carefully, taking account of pupils' prior attainment and needs. For instance, pupils with higher prior attainment in Year 8 who are enthusiastic mathematicians, solve advanced problems with confidence and no fear of failure. Pupils' skills are enhanced using technology which facilitates their learning. Teachers use questioning effectively to encourage pupils to think carefully. As a result, pupils are motivated and keen to learn. They participate enthusiastically in a variety of activities in their lessons and are supported by their teachers to make good progress. In some lessons pupils' progress is more limited due to teachers' less effective management of low-level disruptive behaviour by some pupils.
26. Leaders have designed a comprehensive assessment framework throughout the school so that pupils' progress is carefully monitored. Pupils receive helpful feedback from their teachers so that they understand how to improve and can focus on their long-term goals. In design technology, for instance, they refine their design projects several times to ensure the best possible result. Overall pupils learn effectively and achieve well at the end of Year 6, at GCSE and A level. In the senior school, leaders identify pupils who join the school with gaps in their learning. Leaders are proactive and decisive in their approach to support these pupils, including providing extensive support sessions for pupils within the school day.

27. Leaders ensure that pupils who have SEND are identified early. There is a cohesive relationship between specialist staff and academic teachers. Individual strategies for pupils are shared widely and used effectively in the classroom. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress and achieve well at GCSE and A level.
28. Pupils benefit from an enriching co-curricular programme, which provides challenge and a wide range of possible activities for all pupils. This programme is fully embedded into the school day and also provides a structure for academic support as well as the opportunity for pupils to broaden their skills and experiences. Pupils try new experiences and develop new skills in clubs such as card games, dissection, cookery and ancient Greek.

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 school promotes pupils' confidence and self-esteem. Staff know pupils well and build positive relationships in their form groups and houses so that pupils trust them. In the early years and throughout the prep school, careful lesson planning and skilful questioning by teaching staff ensure that pupils have the language to identify their feelings and develop their own emotional awareness. For instance, teaching staff in the prep school enable pupils to record their feelings via a 'mood meter' at the start of the day.
31. Leaders have created an age-appropriate, comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education programme (PSHE) known as 'Lif-Ed', which incorporates relationships and sex education (RSE). Through this programme pupils learn how to take care of themselves, different types of relationships, diversity, inclusion and consent as well as the values which characterise British society. Teachers are well trained and plan the curriculum to be responsive to the needs of the pupils.
32. Staff in the early years build positive relationships with children so that they make progress in personal, social and emotional development. They teach an enriching programme to promote wellbeing, which includes woodland activities where pupils are encouraged to be calm and still in nature. Children reflect on their day and consider what they would do differently tomorrow. As a result, they develop an understanding of how to relate to others and be tolerant of each other's differences.
33. Leaders have carefully planned the school's physical education (PE) and games programme to ensure that pupils have a broad and balanced range of activities available to them, both within the timetable and in the extensive co-curricular programme. The programme promotes a healthy lifestyle and provides opportunities for pupils to develop their sports skills to a high standard, which many do. Pupils in the prep school take part in a physical literacy programme which includes gymnastics, physical and ball skills. As a result, pupils successfully develop their gross and fine motor skills. In addition, pupils can participate in house activities, such as the whole-school outdoor run and house cricket matches, which build their confidence as well as their sense of belonging.
34. Across the school, leaders promote the value of outdoor education. Leaders encourage all pupils to participate in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme. Consequently, pupils learn to appreciate nature and benefit from the opportunities it affords for maintaining positive mental health. Within houses, experienced staff prioritise the welfare of pupils in their care. Senior pupils act as peer mentors for younger pupils, assisting them to remain positive and increasing the peer mentors' sense of responsibility and self-worth.
35. There are clear and appropriate policies in place for behaviour and anti-bullying. Leaders respond to incidents appropriately and they regularly review rewards and sanctions. Leaders identify trends and patterns in behaviour and put support in place for individual pupils and groups where necessary. However, in some lessons low-level disruptive behaviour is not managed consistently and pupils do not always understand why particular sanctions are applied.
36. Health and safety policies and procedures are comprehensive and implemented effectively, including those relating to fire risk. The school site is secure and well maintained. Pupils are supervised appropriately, including in the early years. First aid provision is appropriate and effective.

Staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid, as required. The school takes a proactive approach to risk assessments for the school site and in relation to school trips and activities. This approach ensures pupils can learn in a physical environment where safety is promoted.

37. The school's attendance and admissions registers are accurately maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and take appropriate action in response to any absences. Leaders inform the local authority of any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard transition points or where there are concerns about their attendance.

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

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

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

39. In the early years and the prep school pupils demonstrate mutual respect and tolerance in their relationships with each other. In the senior school pupils belong to a vertical house, where they are taught about the importance of belonging and inclusivity. Teachers reinforce the importance of mutual respect and being a responsible citizen through the curriculum, as well as through the co-curricular programme.
40. In the prep school, older pupils are able to exercise leadership by supporting children in the early years. Across the school, fundamental values such as equality, democracy, the rule of law and tolerance are explored through the Lif-Ed curriculum, assemblies, visiting speakers and wider curriculum themes such as Black History Month and a disability awareness week. Pupils participate in a comprehensive election process to be selected for roles in the school council, which has an important voice within the school.
41. Pupils are taught about human rights and individual liberty through a carefully planned curriculum and broad co-curricular programme. For instance, the debating club enables pupils to carefully consider human rights and to develop their own views on complex topics. Leaders actively promote pupils' moral knowledge and understanding by emphasising the importance of making good choices, being able to argue without becoming heated and considering the way in which people's rights may be threatened in the wider world.
42. Careers education is embedded across both the prep school and the senior school and is assessed against national benchmarks. Within the prep school careers advice is delivered creatively through the 'Minds at Play' programme. Pupils in Year 6 benefit from the opportunity to be involved with proposing their business ideas to a panel. The careers programme challenges stereotypes at all stages. There is a careers and higher education fair for pupils and parents to attend, and impartial advice is available. Pupils benefit from a lectures programme which includes lectures from a range of external speakers, including a prison officer, Oxford University lecturer and information on apprenticeships. Leaders and managers review the programme to ensure it remains relevant for pupils and effectively prepares them for the next stage of their life.
43. The school has established several community outreach programmes, including the 'Corinthian partnership' with local primary schools. Through this project, for example, sixth form students volunteer to go into primary schools to deliver sports sessions for the younger pupils. Consequently, pupils contribute to the local community and develop their self-esteem and interpersonal skills. In the early years and the prep school, pupils join other local schools for trips and sports events, thus broadening their experience of their local community.
44. The school benefits from a close relationship with a local care home to which children in the early years visit regularly, carrying out shared activities such as cake decorating and painting. This helps the children to foster a sense of connection with their local community while also developing their social experiences and understanding of the world around them.
45. Leaders provide an enriching economic curriculum through the 'Lif-Ed' programme, which includes pupils in the prep school taking part in a financial planning project run by a bank and financial

literacy activities. Pupils in the senior school take part in activities around financial planning and the understanding of mortgages and credit cards. They are well prepared for their futures in this regard.

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

46. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

47. Leaders do not follow specific guidance in KCSIE 2025 on how to respond to any incidents of child-on-child sexual harassment. They do not correctly identify, record or manage incidents and the rationale for decisions made is not documented. Additionally, there is no appropriate assessment and mitigation of risk around vulnerable pupils following any incident. In these respects, governors' oversight has not been effective.
48. There is a suitable safeguarding policy which is reviewed by leaders and governors annually. Governors provide some oversight and guidance to leaders with safeguarding responsibilities. These leaders are appropriately trained, and all staff receive induction and ongoing training.
49. Staff understand what to do if they are concerned about any adult working in the school. They report any low-level concerns they have. A suitable record is kept and leaders follow up any concerns appropriately.
50. Recruitment processes are effective and all required checks are completed before an individual is allowed to start working at the school. The school's single central record is well maintained and accurate.
51. Pupils have a range of people whom they can speak to if they are worried or concerned. However, a small number of pupils expressed the view that their concerns are not always responded to effectively. They are given clear guidance about staying safe, including staying safe online. The use of the internet is filtered and monitored appropriately. Systems used are regularly tested.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

- 52. 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 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 ¹ 3.91	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 ² 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 3.5	Providers must have and implement policies and procedures to keep children

¹ Early years foundation stage statutory framework ('EYFS')

² The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

	<p>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.</p>
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School details

School	Cokethorpe School
Department for Education number	931/6046
Address	Cokethorpe School Cokethorpe Park Witney Oxfordshire OX297PU
Phone number	01993 703921
Email address	hma@cokethorpe.org
Website	www.cokethorpe.org
Proprietor	Cokethorpe Educational Trust Ltd
Chair	Mr John Bennett
Headteacher	Dr Sarah Squire
Age range	4 to 18
Number of pupils	572
Date of previous inspection	8 to 10 November 2022

Information about the school

53. Cokethorpe School is a co-educational independent day school situated in West Oxfordshire. It is overseen by a board of governors. The school was founded in 1957 as a boarding school for male pupils. It became co-educational in 1991. The school consists of a prep school, which includes an early years setting, a senior school and a sixth form, which are located on the same site. The current chair of governors has been in post since the previous inspection. A new Headteacher was appointed in September 2025.
54. The school has five pupils in the early years foundation stage in one Reception class.
55. The school has identified 85 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are three pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
56. The school has identified English as an additional language for none of its pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to provide an all rounded research-informed education for its pupils. It emphasises the breadth of its curriculum and its attention to each individual.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

14 to 16 October 2025

58. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

59. 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.

60. 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