

School inspection report

26 September 2023 to 28 September 2023

Hydesville Tower School

25 Broadway North
Walsall
West Midlands
WS1 2QG

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. Proprietors and school leaders are knowledgeable so that they meet their responsibilities effectively. Leaders create a safe environment by ensuring that procedures to promote pupils' welfare, health and safety are robust and that the pastoral system provides effective support.
2. Long-term strategic planning sets ambitious targets for the school, drawing on the school's self-evaluation and taking into account the needs of the pupils. Leaders have a secure understanding of risk management in all areas of school life and are alert to unintended consequences, for example the potential for perception of academic pressure related to curricular decisions.
3. Leaders ensure that the curriculum covers a range of subjects and that teaching is suitably challenging and meets the needs of most pupils. Pupils' attainment is carefully monitored. As a result, pupils generally make good progress. They are usually well motivated, keen to succeed and pay careful attention in lessons. They take pride in their work. Teachers give them effective guidance on how to improve their work further.
4. On occasion, some pupils do not make the progress of which they are capable because teachers do not match activities in lessons to the ability of the pupils. Leaders express an aim to increase pupils' readiness for the next stage of their education by creating additional opportunities for them to learn independently. However, they do not provide these opportunities consistently.
5. Effective pastoral systems mean that pupils develop positive attitudes to their education. Leaders set clear expectations of behaviour in lessons and pupils focus well on their learning as a result. Pupils of all ages show a clear understanding of the value of respect for their peers, and they appreciate the importance of diversity and equality. Their behaviour is generally good. However, teachers do not apply the recently restructured behaviour policy consistently, creating a sense of unfairness among pupils. Anti-bullying measures are effective. Pupils develop self-confidence and self-esteem and know their own strengths.
6. Leaders plan the personal, social and health education (PSHE) programme with care and ensure it includes suitable careers guidance. This means that pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education and for adult life as responsible, contributing members of society.
7. Leaders at all levels prioritise the wellbeing of pupils. Safeguarding procedures are robust, reflect current guidance and staff are well trained in them. There are numerous staff trained as designated leads of safeguarding, ensuring effective support in all areas of the school. Pupils feel happy and safe in the school as a result.

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:

- improve the quality of all teaching through effective questioning and well-planned activities which meet the needs of all pupils
- ensure the opportunities planned for pupils to develop their independent learning skills are made available more consistently
- ensure that all staff apply the recently introduced behaviour policy consistently.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders are knowledgeable and implement policies and procedures that reflect and support the school's aims. The proprietors exercise effective oversight through a team of professional advisors and a board of governors to support them in aspects of governance, including to oversee the school's health and safety measures. The board is supported by an education advisor who provides additional advice and support. This results in effective and informed support for the school. Leaders are careful when considering elements of risk within the school's context and potential risks are managed with care.
9. Strategic decision-making is informed by regular and rigorous self-evaluation. The advisory board of governors work with school leaders to review progress against a development plan, which sets clear targets for further improvement and promotes pupils' wellbeing. The school focuses effectively on preparing pupils for 11+ examinations or entry to selective senior schools. Many pupils are successful in these examinations.
10. Leaders also consider the possibility of unintended consequences, such as how to mitigate any negative impact on pupils' mental health from the drive to improve academic standards. Pupils feel their teachers know them well and understand how best to support them, both academically and personally. School leaders have overseen the development of a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils, so that they make good progress overall.
11. Leaders ensure that most policies are well understood and followed by staff so that the school environment is safe, supportive and conducive to learning. However, staff do not consistently follow the new behaviour policy.
12. Children flourish in an early years setting that is well resourced, welcoming and nurturing. Effective planning of appropriate provision means that children make good progress.
13. Leaders and staff are committed to promoting respect for individuals. As a result, pupils respect the different characteristics of people represented within the school community and beyond. Leaders emphasise the importance of equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice, underpinned in character development lessons, so that pupils feel valued and respected. Pupils consistently speak of the school's family atmosphere and pupils understand the importance of the values of trust and respect on which this is based.
14. The accessibility plan minimises any barriers encountered by those with disabilities. This includes improvements to physical access which overcome some constraints of the school's Victorian buildings. Leaders have put in place rigorous systems, including prompt logging of potential hazards, which ensure that their responsibilities regarding health and safety legislation are fully met.
15. Leaders make sure that parents have easy access to required information. This includes an appropriate complaints policy. Any concerns raised are managed in line with this.
16. School leaders are highly conscious of their safeguarding responsibilities and proprietors conduct a rigorous annual audit of the school's current practice. Leaders create effective links with external agencies for support and advice to help them fulfil their responsibilities to keep pupils safe.

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

All relevant standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The school's curriculum is well planned, covering a wide range of subjects. Leaders have clear expectations for the progress of pupils and aim for them to achieve at least in line with the expectations based upon their prior attainment. Leaders monitor the quality of teaching and take action on their findings. For example, they recently provided digital safety lead training, which resulted in teachers becoming more confident in their skills in this area.
18. The curriculum provides for well-planned progression as pupils move through the school, so that they develop increasingly advanced skills and understanding. Pupils' creativity is encouraged in artistic and musical endeavours, for example in lessons on the music of Nigeria. Pupils make good progress in literacy and numeracy through a curriculum which builds on and reinforces previous learning. Pupils are confident communicators and express their opinions clearly, both orally and in writing as a result of consistently effective teaching. Pupils are conscientious and well motivated, taking pride in the presentation of their work because of the clear expectations of their teachers.
19. Well-planned teaching in the early years enables children to make good progress. They develop early reading skills, and their writing matures steadily into clear letter formation. Leaders in the setting use every opportunity to encourage children to count. For example, when counting the Halloween objects in the outside area, so that the children develop a secure foundation in basic mathematical concepts of size, shape and number.
20. Teaching in the early years encompasses activities that encourage children to become enthusiastic learners by building on their interests. For example, activities in the Nursery role-play area set up as a veterinary practice help develop the children's mathematical understanding, writing skills and awareness of the natural world as well as their ability to share and take turns. Skilful teaching consistently extends children's vocabulary while encouraging them to think and explore for themselves.
21. Leaders ensure that the prep curriculum focuses developing effective numeracy skills. This provides a secure basis for the higher-order mathematical and investigative skills developed in senior school. The curriculum helps pupils to develop a secure understanding of scientific concepts, such as when exploring the impact of deforestation on climate change. Lessons in computer studies throughout the school allow pupils to develop good coding skills and a secure understanding of how to utilise technology effectively in their everyday learning.
22. There are comprehensive procedures in place to track the progress of individual pupils against their starting points. Leaders use this information to provide prompt support should a pupil be falling behind. Pupils find their teachers' feedback on their work extremely helpful and appreciate the advice on improving their performance.
23. Careful planning by leaders and a close understanding of the children and their needs ensure that children are well prepared for Year 1. Pupils in Year 6 make good progress to attain well in standardised tests.

24. Almost all pupils attain grades at GCSE which are in line with or exceed the expectations of their starting points. Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) achieve at least in line with their predictions, thanks to careful and precisely targeted support.
25. Leaders monitor teaching standards across the school regularly by observing lessons and looking at pupils' work to check that pupils are making good progress. Teachers draw on their secure subject knowledge to engage the pupils' interest. Teaching generally takes account of the needs of all pupils, including those who have SEND. Many lessons use well-focused questioning to engage pupils. On occasion, however, teachers' questioning is unclear so that pupils are not sure what response is expected of them. Other lessons do not always provide activities which challenge the full ability range. In their development planning, leaders have expressed an aim to provide opportunities for pupils to develop their independent learning skills, with the intent of increasing their preparedness for the next stage of their education. However, the provision of such opportunities is currently inconsistent.
26. School leaders create opportunities for a range of recreational activity for pupils to have fun and to develop their skills and self-confidence, for example through elocution sessions. Lunch time clubs are well attended, especially by younger pupils. Opportunities for engagement in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme provide the opportunity to develop effective teamwork and life-skills, and to serve the community.

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

All relevant standards are met.

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

27. School leaders have created a respectful and tolerant school culture. Any unacceptable language or behaviour is swiftly challenged by teachers. Teachers are good role models, treating each other and pupils with courtesy and kindness. In the senior school, lessons on character development ensure pupils understand the importance of personal values such as courage and honesty. Staff educate pupils on discrimination and equality issues so that pupils develop a clear understanding of the legal and moral importance of such matters. Pupils are encouraged to think empathically so that they can understand how discrimination might impact on victims. As a result, pupils treat others respectfully.
28. There is comprehensive personal, social and health education (PSHE) and age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) provision. Children in the early years understand the importance of a healthy diet and hygiene. Physically, their fine motor skills develop well and they manipulate pencils and small objects confidently because of the many opportunities to develop these skills through their activities. Their physical confidence and gross motor skills develop well in carefully planned outdoor play activities and visits to the neighbouring arboretum. Teachers successfully encourage children to articulate their feelings so that they learn to understand and manage their emotions.
29. Older pupils understand the need for a balanced lifestyle, including the importance of exercise and sufficient sleep. They know how to keep themselves safe physically and online. They value the open discussions in PSHE and RSE lessons on what characterises a healthy relationship and the importance of the value of all as unique individuals. In consequence, pupils develop secure levels of self-knowledge and self-confidence, evident in their demeanour and their interactions with adults.
30. Leaders encourage pupils to be physically active, in both physical education classes and in additional activities. These encompass team games as well as individual sports such as fencing, so that the programme appeals to pupils of different interests, encouraging pupils' effort and participation. Wellbeing days, when the normal timetable is suspended, allow pupils to focus on strengthening their mental and physical health, for example by walking or running in the nearby arboretum.
31. Pupils' awareness of a spiritual dimension to life is evident in the open way in which they speak of their own faiths. The structure of the school day provides for moments of quiet reflection and ends with the recitation of a non-denominational school prayer. Pupils are respectful of the range of faiths within the school community and appreciate that these share many of the same moral values.
32. Leaders have recently reorganised the tutorial structures and clarified the behaviour policy, setting out their high expectations. There is some inconsistency in the way staff apply the new rules and sanctions, which creates a sense of unfairness in pupils. Logs of sanctions indicate that there is some inconsistency in the implementation of the policy. Pupils feel that the new policy has resulted in improved behaviour because they understand the school rules more clearly and respect them. Pupils generally enjoy positive relationships. If bullying incidents occur the school deals with them appropriately and sensitively. When there have been significant issues the school has taken swift and appropriate action.

33. Leaders ensure there are always appropriate numbers of staff on duty outside lesson time including the start and end of the school day to supervise pupils. Leaders are proactive in addressing potential risks. For example, they made changes to reduce congestion as pupils leave the grounds at the end of the day.
34. Care is taken to ensure all health and safety requirements are met. The school building and grounds are secure and well maintained. Access to the school is carefully controlled. Fire prevention measures are robust and fire evacuation drills take place regularly. There is a suitable first aid room and trained first aiders to provide immediate care. All staff in the early years are trained in paediatric first aid.
35. Admission and attendance records are maintained as required. Staff assiduously follow up on any absences from school. They check the destination school of pupils who leave before the end of Year 11 or at other points, to guard against the risk of pupils missing education.

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

All relevant standards are met.

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

36. Pupils are able to explore and reflect on social matters in Britain and in the wider world. A weekly extended form time is used to discuss current affairs. For example, when teaching draws on pupils' mathematical skills in a discussion focused on the current economic situation in Britain and the impact of current global conflicts. The PSHE programme includes elements of economic awareness, such as an introduction to personal finance, which prepare pupils for life beyond school. Schemes of work in humanities subjects strengthen pupils' grasp of the factors which shape our modern world.
37. Leaders successfully enable pupils to understand British values and political structures. These are covered in PSHE lessons and reinforced in discussions and by displays around the school. Pupils have a broad general knowledge of British institutions such as Parliament and the electoral system. They understand the need for laws and rules to support a harmonious community, in school and in wider society. Their sense of what is and is not acceptable behaviour, is well developed because this is reinforced by staff. Pupils are ready to challenge actions which they deem inappropriate. They welcome the diversity of their school community and enjoy learning from the culture of others. This is also evident in their artwork and music. Trips within the local area and to European destinations develop further pupils' understanding of others' beliefs and cultures.
38. Leaders prepare pupils well for the next step of their education and for taking their places as responsible adults in society. From an early age, pupils are encouraged in PSHE lessons to consider their own personalities, aptitudes and interests. They learn to understand the importance of determination and hard work. The careers guidance programme provides effective support as pupils consider which senior school is best for them and their options for further education. Pupils are supported in finding appropriate work experience placements. The school organises career events and visits to sixth-form colleges. It provides pupils with clear, objective information booklets on the range of educational qualifications available for post-16 pupils.
39. Pupils have a keen sense of social responsibility. Leaders encourage them to contribute to the school community. Pupils take pride in such roles, or as subject ambassadors, eco-representatives, and school council members. In their local community, pupils have supported local foodbanks and raised money for a local children's hospice. Pupils are conscious of the needs of the wider world and have initiated fundraising activities, for example in response to the earthquake in Turkey.

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

All relevant standards are met.

Safeguarding

40. Leaders have established a safeguarding team with appropriate capacity, so that there is always support available. Staff understand the safeguarding procedures and are vigilant about the safety and wellbeing of the pupils. The written safeguarding policy includes the relevant information and guidance. The proprietors commission an annual audit of the school's practice, which ensures that safeguarding practice reflects the policy.
41. Leaders ensure that all the required safeguarding checks are completed before staff, governors or volunteers start work at the school. These checks are accurately recorded on a single central record.
42. Leaders promote an awareness among staff that 'it could happen here' and that all are responsible for acting upon concerns. They encourage a climate of transparency and the sharing of concerns with designated safeguarding leads. Staff are well trained in safeguarding procedures on taking up employment. Training includes safeguarding procedure, internet safety and the risks of extremism. Staff receive regular updates. The designated safeguarding leads and deputies are well trained and experienced. A system of distributed leadership ensures consistent and effective oversight in all sections of the school. Staff are confident in their understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities and that swift, appropriate action is taken when necessary.
43. Leaders have established positive relationships with local children's services and the designated officers within the various local authorities responsible for pupils. Detailed records are kept and stored securely. Action is taken promptly when required and followed up wherever necessary.
44. As a result of the school's policy and its careful implementation, pupils feel safe and cared for by their teachers.

The extent to which the school meets standards relating to safeguarding

All relevant standards are met

School details

School	Hydesville Tower School
Department for Education number	335/6007
Address	Hydesville Tower School 25 Broadway North Walsall West Midlands WS1 2QG
Website	www.hydesville.com
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd
Chair	Mrs Nicola Lambros
Headteacher	Mrs Raj Samra
Age range	3 to 16
Number of pupils	294
Number of children in the early years registered setting	35
Date of previous inspection	November 2018

Information about the school

45. Hydesville Tower School is a co-educational day school situated in a residential area close to Walsall town centre. Founded in 1952, it has three sections: an early year setting for children aged 3 to 4; a prep school for pupils aged 5 to 11; and a senior school for those aged 11 to 16. All sections occupy the same site, occupying four Victorian buildings.
46. The head has been in post since 2022 and the chair of governors, appointed by the proprietor, took up this post in 2023.
47. There are 35 children in the early years. They are taught in their own areas on the site, with dedicated classrooms and play spaces.
48. The school has identified 15 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. No pupils have English as an additional language (EAL).
49. The school states that its aims are to provide a safe, supportive environment within which pupils are encouraged to achieve their full potential in all areas. It intends that by the time they leave the school pupils will be confident, caring, proactive and independent individuals.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 26 to 28 September 2023

50. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
51. Inspection activities included:
- reviewed the school's policies and records
 - toured the school facilities, held discussions with governors, staff and pupils, observed lessons and looked at the pupils' work
 - conducted activities such as work scrutiny with school staff
 - visited form times and an assembly held during the inspection
 - 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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