



ISI

Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Sutton Valence Preparatory School

March 2022

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School's Details

School	Sutton Valence Preparatory School			
DfE number	886/6019			
Registered charity number	309267			
Address	Sutton Valence Preparatory School Church Road Chart Sutton Maidstone Kent ME17 3RF			
Telephone number	01622 842117			
Email address	enquiries@svprep.org.uk			
Head	Miss Claire Corkran			
Chair of governors	Mrs Gillian Swaine			
Age range	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	276			
	EYFS	75	Pre Prep	53
	Prep	148		
Inspection dates	8 to 11 March 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Sutton Valence Preparatory School is a co-educational independent day school. First opened in 1958, the school joined Sutton Valence Senior School in 1994 and took its current name in 2001. The schools now form part of an educational charity, the United Westminster and Grey Coat Foundation, which provides governance through an advisory panel of non-proprietary governors. The school comprises a nursery, pre-prep and prep departments which are all located on the same site. Since the previous inspection, the chair of governors has changed, and the Nursery, re-named Little Lambs Nursery, is now open all year round and can accommodate 2-year-olds.
- 1.2 The inspection took into account the circumstances faced by schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and the restrictions imposed by government guidance at various points of the pandemic.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to enable pupils to fulfil their true potential and add value to their lives, within a community where each cares for all, and individuality is cherished.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from a range of cultural backgrounds, most living within a 15-mile radius of the school. Nationally standardised data provided by the school indicate that the ability profile of the pupils is average, with a wide spread of abilities represented. The school has identified 46 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which are predominantly specific learning difficulties. They all receive additional support in class and from specialist teachers as necessary. English is an additional language (EAL) for 15 pupils, five of whom have their needs supported by their classroom teachers with some additional support outside the classroom. No pupil currently has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. More able pupils are supported through the curriculum and extra-curricular clubs which provide a range of challenges.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school's own framework for assessment confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils and EYFS children have highly positive attitudes to learning and are confident communicators.
- Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve well in relation to their abilities.
- Pupils display excellent information and computing technology (ICT) skills.
- Pupils are highly successful in competitions, sport and entry to senior schools.
- As seen in the best lessons, pupils' progress is improved by fast-paced teaching, well planned to meet the needs of all. Progress is restricted where teaching does not challenge all pupils.
- Pupils' abilities to use their initiative and work independently are not fully developed.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils mix with ease across all age groups, they actively support each other in a collaborative atmosphere, respecting and recognising individual differences and needs.
- Pupils develop an excellent degree of self-understanding through the high levels of care and teacher support, which creates a safe place for pupils to get to know themselves.
- Pupils have an excellent appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, and the quality of their spiritual development is evident throughout the school.

Recommendations

3.3 The school should make the following improvements:

- Enable pupils to further develop the ability to use their own initiative and become more independent by providing more open-ended and self-directed learning tasks.
- Ensure pupils make consistently rapid progress through the improvement of opportunities for peer review and sharing good practice amongst the staff.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 Pupils achieve at a high level in a wide range of sporting, musical and creative activities, reflecting the ethos of the school, which actively promotes pupils' development in every area of school life. In the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the school provides a suitable range of extra-curricular activities. Musical instrumentalists are numerous and many achieve good grades in external

examinations. During a choir rehearsal, older pupils sang with high levels of enthusiasm and were keen to perform well. Pupils perform at a high level in productions and presentations and even the youngest pupils look forward to participation in assemblies. Pupils' creative talents and expertise were evidenced through the wealth and variety of work on display around the school. Pupils participate wholeheartedly and successfully in the wide range of physical opportunities provided. Outside the classroom, pupils enjoy success in competitions both locally and nationally, including sporting, musical, artistic and academically focused events. Those with particular talents are able to pursue their own areas of expertise through the wide-ranging extra-curricular programme, including academic clubs offered to pupils preparing for senior school entrance exams. The large majority of Year 6 pupils gain a place at the senior school of their choice, and they are regularly awarded art, design technology, drama, sport, music and academic scholarships.

- 3.6 Pupils display excellent information and computing technology (ICT) skills, they make excellent progress and develop high levels of skill and competence. Pupils across the school effectively use electronic devices across a variety of subjects as well as in ICT. Children begin to acquire good skills in ICT in the EYFS, learning to use different programmes to consolidate their learning and are then challenged to learn to write in code as they move throughout the school. In a prep assembly, Year 3 pupils showcased their well-developed ICT skills through their confident use of music technology software to create tracks. Year 5 pupils demonstrated highly competent ICT skills when independently accessing the programmes required to research famous rivers and working effectively on their devices to complete the work set. The governors have supported the acquisition of well-resourced provision of ICT equipment for pupils in all parts of the school which has allowed for rapid progress for the pupils in the use and application of ICT skills across the curriculum.
- 3.7 Throughout the school pupils display positive attitudes and an enthusiasm for learning, encouraged by committed staff reinforcing a productive work ethic and positive can-do approach. The recent introduction of the school 'learning powers', which include independence, collaboration and tenacity, by the leadership team has ensured pupils are rewarded for their attitudes to learning. Pupils spoke very positively about these and how they help everyone to feel successful. Year 2 pupils used their initiative to spontaneously access the class working word wall to source for themselves a word more interesting than 'said'. Most pupils actively participate in lessons, and those who are less willing are encouraged by teachers to join in. They are productive when working individually and collaboratively, with their learning partner or in a group. Pupils take working collaboratively for granted, supporting each other productively and with sensitivity. Pupils enjoy the opportunities of different styles of teaching across different subjects and to rise to challenging opportunities when these are offered. However, their abilities to work independently and to use their initiative in their learning are not fully developed due to limited open-ended and self-directed tasks in lessons.
- 3.8 Pupils achieve at levels which are good and often excellent in relation to their abilities, as confirmed by their results in standardised tests. Pupils make good short- and long-term progress, recorded and monitored by the school's effective use of tracking in literacy and numeracy. In the inspection questionnaire, most pupils agreed that teachers help them to learn and that marking and feedback helps them to improve. Children in the EYFS make strong progress from their starting points, with the majority reaching good levels of development in line with national expectations. There is no discernible difference in the achievement of male or female pupils. Pupils with SEND and EAL achieve very well in relation to their abilities due to the support which is tailored to their needs and the systems in place to monitor such pupils. Most pupils listen attentively in lessons and can speak confidently in a range of settings, and respond to others with engagement, empathy and understanding. However, where the pace of the lesson is not appropriate pupils lose engagement and do not listen attentively to their peers or to the teacher, thus limiting the learning opportunities in these lessons.
- 3.9 Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are good, successfully developed through the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum and the pursuit of the school's aim to encourage pupils to achieve

their full potential. Year 1 pupils demonstrated confidently their knowledge and understanding of the mummification process and wrote accurate instructions using time connectives in a literacy lesson. Pupils think carefully about the knowledge and skills they acquire. Specialist teaching provides pupils with challenging and motivating opportunities, notably in art and design technology (DT), where pupils demonstrate well-developed artistic skills as seen in displays around the school and in their sketch books. Pupils develop good musical skills and show a mature appreciation of the musicianship of their peers. Pupils develop advanced physical skills through the provision of a wide-ranging programme of physical education, resulting in school successes in many different sporting competitions.

- 3.10 Pupils' communication skills are good. Children in the EYFS are able to speak in well-formed simple sentences, seen when a pupil was able to talk clearly to their parent on their 'mobile phone' to ask if she would like cake at their tea party. The majority of pupils are confident to talk to adults and share their thoughts and opinions, as seen in lessons and interviews with inspectors. Many pupils appear to relish the opportunity to contribute to discussions and are able to further develop their oracy skills through the many varied clubs and the LAMDA exams that are offered at the school. Children in the EYFS demonstrate good knowledge of letter sounds and emerging writing, whilst older pupils in the pre-prep are inspired to write imaginatively through the use of pictures and the sharing of creative ideas amongst their peers to help inspire them. By the time they reach Year 6 pupils write at length and redraft with care, displaying good use of creative language and stylistic devices such as metaphor and simile in their writing. Pupils speak with enthusiasm of their love of reading, which is fostered by regular visits to the well-stocked library and the use of an online reading comprehension programme to track their progress.
- 3.11 Pupils' mathematical competency develops steadily as they progress through the school, supported by a curriculum that is well-planned and assessed. Children in the EYFS could count and recognise numbers to 10 with confidence, and were able to articulate if objects were lighter or heavier through a well-planned activity in the unit. Older pupils described how they are able to apply mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding across other areas of the curriculum, for example to plot co-ordinates in geography and to produce graphical results in science. Leadership has been particularly assiduous at identifying areas of relative weakness in cohorts after lockdown so that pupils' achievements are now in-line with age related expectations. Pupils in Year 5 confidently found percentages of 3-digit numbers and consolidated their mathematical knowledge and understanding by discussing their methods with their peers. Progress in some lessons is not as rapid when pupils are not given the opportunities for independent and collaborative investigation, and more able pupils are not offered sufficiently challenging tasks.
- 3.12 Pupils' study skills show incremental development as they progress through the school. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school equips their children with the team-working, collaborative, and research skill they need in later life. Pupils draw knowledge effectively from sources to which they have been directed, though in some cases they show little initiative in determining which information they will use. Where more open-ended tasks are presented to pupils, they develop their thinking and learning to a higher level. This was seen in a Year 3 lesson, where pupils successfully used a variety of skills to create their comic strips. Pupils were able to independently access helpful hints to resize, flip and layer their characters to allow them to create the scenes they wanted. The older pupils, displayed considerable skills of synthesis when required to work out how to clean muddy water in a preparation for learning, leadership and life lesson.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Throughout their time in the school, pupils grow steadily in confidence as, encouraged by staff, they successfully meet their personal challenges. Pupils develop a good degree of self-understanding through the high levels of care and teacher support offered from their first days in school, which create

a safe place for pupils to get to know themselves. Pupils are not afraid of being wrong and consider a failure as a learning opportunity. They react positively to challenges and occasional setbacks, and thus develop resilience and self-confidence which enables them to respond successfully to choices appropriate to their age and stage of development. Pupils develop their self-knowledge and self-discipline, regularly being encouraged and given time to self-reflect, especially after incidents of poor behaviour. Older pupils have a sound understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance. Pupils are motivated and well prepared for the next stage of their lives, helped by the high standard of pastoral care that they receive from their teachers and the leadership team.

- 3.15 Social development in pupils of all ages is excellent and they form productive, supportive relationships with their peers, in line with the school's ethos that 'each cares for all'. Pupils have excellent social skills and they work effectively with others, inside and outside of the classroom, in an extremely positive and constructive manner. The youngest children played well with each other and shared toys appropriately at playtime and in the classroom. Pupils were often seen collaborating effectively, engaging in lively discussion, and enjoying successfully completed shared tasks, such as finding the 'wanted word' during a phonics lesson. In a science lesson, the oldest pupils organised themselves into effective collaborative groups by distributing roles according to perceived personal strengths. Older pupils build strong relationships and feel respected by their warm, friendly teachers, who have high expectations of them in all aspects of school life. Pupils said they missed regular opportunities to mix across the age groups due to the pandemic and they are now enjoying interacting at their lunch tables with pupils from across the year groups.
- 3.16 Pupils have a notably strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life, and the quality of their spiritual development is evident throughout the school. Children in the EYFS acquire a mature appreciation for all aspects of life in their weekly outdoor learning activities, thanks to the commitment of leadership and management to taking full advantage of the school's open surroundings to inspire, challenge and motivate children to learn. Pupils develop excellent spiritual understanding and appreciate the diverse culture in which they live and demonstrate a strong sense of reflection on the non-material aspects of life in assemblies and in the many musical activities they engage in. Pupils' appreciation of art, music, drama and the creative subjects is excellent as shown by the care they put into their work. Their appreciation of beauty and their capacity to think beyond their day to day lives is evident in the high quality of art on display around the school. Pupils are provided with meaningful opportunities to explore a range of spiritual issues and to ask questions. Such issues are handled with care and sensitivity as seen in a Year 3 religious education (RE) lesson exploring symbolism in the Bible, where pupils interpreted what they read, supported by open-ended questioning to help them to reflect on the meaning of the symbols.
- 3.17 By the time they reach the older classes, pupils are able to recognise the implications and difficulties of making important decisions and of having the courage to make the right choices. Children in the EYFS choose which activities to engage in, and they are encouraged to pursue their own interests in the classroom. Older pupils make choices about what clubs and activities they will attend, and are encouraged to create and run their own clubs, having sourced all the equipment and a supervising adult. Pupils are helped to understand that their decisions have an impact on their own well-being and on that of others. In a Year 3 art lesson, pupils decided what they would change about Hundertwasser's picture, and could appreciate that they were a 'guest of nature' with important decisions to make about how to protect the planet.
- 3.18 Pupils show an excellent awareness of the school rules, 'Ready, Respectful and Safe', and are keen to do the right thing. They value the merit system and are proud of the badges they accrue. They know to try and resolve issues themselves if inappropriate behaviour occurs but understand that they should also seek adult help if required. Pupils interviewed were confident that there would be consequences if someone did something wrong and praised their teachers for being kind and fair when dealing with problems. The large majority of pupils show a readiness to take responsibility for their own behaviour. On occasions where unkind words are spoken, pupils are encouraged to reflect on how someone

might have felt and will quickly appreciate that they need to apologise. Pupils interviewed stated that their preparation for learning, leadership and life lessons helped them to know what was right and wrong and encouraged them to appreciate others' viewpoints. In a Year 3 lesson on discrimination, pupils were able to explain the meanings of inclusion and exclusion and used appropriate language to describe how this would make others feel, concluding that everyone should be treated equally.

- 3.19 Pupils make an excellent contribution to the well-being of others in the school, through their work as prefects, house captains and head boy and girl. All Year 6 pupils hold a position of responsibility and the pupils interviewed appreciated that this gives everyone the chance to develop their leadership skills. All pupils are part of the school council and this ensures everyone has a part in developing the school. The pupils spoke excitedly about the 'free ideas' session and are delighted when their ideas are implemented, for example 'Mega Manners week' and clubs run by pupils. Pupils develop a sense of belonging and healthy competition through the house system, which enables them to work with pupils from across the school for a common cause. To encourage a global interest amongst the pupils, house points are totalled with their sister school in China and this adds to the excitement when the scores are announced. Older pupils work collaboratively to organise charity bake sales to fundraise for charities in the local community and beyond. The 'smartie tube challenge', which encouraged the pupils to raise money for charity in return for chores, exemplifies the school's wish to promote an awareness of the needs of others.
- 3.20 Pupils engage naturally and without hesitation with those of backgrounds and cultures other than their own, in response to the ethos of kindness and mutual respect which permeates the school. Pupils identify strongly with all class members and gain a strong appreciation of other cultures through the many opportunities offered by the school, such as an African cultural day. Pupils respond with empathy and understanding and will challenge discrimination in any form. Pupils have a thoughtful awareness of British society and in particular the role of tolerance. In a preparation for learning, leadership and life lesson, Year 4 pupils were discussing mutual respect and could confidently identify common characteristics between their classmates which help to unify them. In the questionnaire, almost all parents agreed that the school actively promotes democracy, respect and tolerance of other people.
- 3.21 Pupils have an excellent knowledge and understanding regarding their physical and mental well-being. They appreciate a balanced approach to life, demonstrated in their willing participation in physical education and sports and their awareness of the need to find time to unwind and relax. Pupils stated that their well-being is supported by staff, enabling them to stay safe and physically and mentally healthy. In discussion, pupils stated that they understand how to keep safe online and are confident that they know what to do if something worries them. Pupils fully realise the benefit of a good diet and suitable levels of exercise, and they actively pursue these from their earliest years in the EYFS where children have opportunities for outdoor play and woodland activities. In discussion, pupils agreed that they are encouraged to make healthy choices at lunchtime and explained how the hot pudding was limited and why that was appropriate. An overwhelming number of parents in the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages a healthy lifestyle.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of governors, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Sue La Farge	Reporting inspector
Mrs Diane Durrant	Compliance team inspector (Former head, SofH school)
Mrs Caroline Goodsman	Team inspector (Head, ISA school)