

School inspection report

25 to 27 February 2025

Sutton Valence School

North Street

Sutton Valence

Maidstone

Kent

ME17 3HL

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 are supported and challenged effectively by the governing body. Governors provide regular oversight and have an accurate view of the school. Policies reflect current statutory guidance and are implemented fully. Consequently, the Standards are met.
2. Leaders throughout the school actively promote its aims, which pupils, staff and parents know consistently well. The school community is kind, inclusive and respectful. Preparatory school pupils, for example, follow the mantra 'better never stops'. Pupils are encouraged to be aspirational, supportive and tolerant towards others.
3. Pupils are conscientious. They demonstrate consistent effort and application towards their work. Pupils enjoy and are challenged by the broad and balanced curriculum. As a result, they make good progress across the range of subjects.
4. Teaching is mostly effective. Leaders observe teachers by conducting learning walks and visiting lessons. However, leaders do not always provide effective ongoing guidance or oversight of teaching throughout the school. This means that some pupils are not taught as consistently well as they might be.
5. Leaders in the early years plan a stimulating curriculum. Children are provided with an exciting range of activities and lessons. They are positive about their learning and approach new experiences with confidence. Children are prepared well for the transition to Year 1.
6. Boarding leaders receive appropriate training. The boarding community is inclusive and friendly. Those with designated boarding responsibilities communicate clearly with academic staff. As a result, boarders' academic and pastoral wellbeing is supported effectively.
7. Leaders provide a broad and well-planned physical education (PE) curriculum. Pupils participate in physical activities which support their positive mental health and emotional wellbeing. They are taught values of teamwork within sport effectively.
8. Pupils are provided with many opportunities to hold positions of responsibility. They are appointed as prefects and serve as committee members and ambassadors. Pupils are keen to support others and act as positive role models.
9. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are knowledgeable, experienced and trained appropriately. The school implements effective welfare plans for vulnerable pupils. However, leaders do not systematically record, monitor or evaluate the school's ongoing provision relating to individual welfare plans consistently.

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:

- provide thorough oversight of teaching, by identifying weaker aspects and addressing them promptly, so that all pupils' needs are met consistently well
- develop a systematic and thorough approach to consistently monitor and evaluate record-keeping relating to pastoral concerns.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The school's aims are known well by its community and have a positive impact on pupils' development. For example, pupils are courteous and kind in their relationships with each other and with their teachers as a result of leaders' expectations. This means pupils typically develop high levels of self-esteem and approach their education with confidence.
11. Leaders consult with staff, evaluate school provision and take appropriate actions in response. Staff consultations and pupil wellbeing surveys help leaders to identify patterns and trends. Leaders use this information to make positive changes. For example, leaders revised the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum and assembly programme to offer pupils further guidance and support on issues such as body image, promoting self-esteem and healthy sleeping. Pupils' wellbeing is supported well.
12. Governors attend school functions, consult with staff and pupils and conduct learning walks so that they learn about the school and its community. Leaders are supported and challenged by the governors through, for example, scrutinising school policies and records. This helps governors to be confident that leaders have the necessary experience and knowledge and are effective in their roles. Leaders and governors work effectively together so that the Standards are met.
13. Leaders provide a range of useful and required information for parents, primarily through the school's online parent portal. Parents receive regular reports about their child's progress and attainment. Parents are informed in a timely manner about school events, school policies and how their child is progressing. The school consults appropriately with the local authority about any pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
14. The school engages constructively with external agencies. Their expertise and guidance inform school policies and provision. Leaders engage and network with teaching professionals from other local schools. They share resources and ideas for best practice that help the school's provision to evolve and remain suitable. For example, leaders share practice and training materials relating to the 'Prevent' duty. This helps staff to teach pupils about the dangers of extremism and radicalisation in an effective and suitable manner.
15. Boarding leaders maintain a close-knit, respectful and appropriate boarding community. Boarding accommodation is clean and comfortable. Boarding policies and provision are consistent across the school's three boarding houses. Leaders consult regularly with boarders and respond appropriately to any concerns and suggestions they raise.
16. An effective risk assessment policy is implemented by skilled and knowledgeable leaders. Staff are trained well to carefully identify risks and take appropriate actions to mitigate them. Written risk assessments are consistent throughout the school. They are reviewed and challenged by leaders to check that they are suitable. Staff review risk assessments in their teaching areas annually. A systematic schedule is maintained so that risk assessments are revised in a timely manner. Leaders monitor risks and take suitable actions so that the wellbeing of pupils is considered carefully.
17. Leadership in the early years is effective. Leaders hold regular meetings so that teachers in the early years are supported well. Leaders maintain regular contact with parents, including at the beginning and end of each school day. This means that any concerns are addressed quickly. As a result, the wellbeing of children is effectively promoted.

18. Leaders provide a clear and suitable complaints policy which includes a three-stage process and suitable timescales. Leaders and governors analyse informal complaints and take appropriate actions in response to identified trends. When formal complaints are made, leaders follow procedures appropriately and keep careful and timely records.
19. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The school maintains a suitable accessibility policy which includes a three-year development plan. The school makes reasonable adjustments so that pupils can access the curriculum and wider provision. Additional lighting and handrails are provided, for example, to improve access around the school site.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The broad curriculum is planned well and provides pupils with all the required areas of learning. The curriculum actively promotes the values of respect and inclusion. An academic extension programme enables pupils with higher prior attainment to develop their knowledge and understanding further. Pupils who need further consolidation are also supported effectively. Senior pupils select from a wide range of subjects including further mathematics, psychology and media studies. Younger pupils follow a wide curriculum which includes dance, music and drama. The curriculum provides appropriate opportunities so that pupils make good progress and develop their knowledge and understanding across a wide range of subjects. Pupils achieve well in GCSE and A-level examinations and typically gain places at their chosen subsequent educational establishments.
22. Most teaching is effective. Teachers have secure subject knowledge which they use to plan and deliver interesting lessons. They use digital resources carefully. Pupils respond with enthusiasm, particularly when their learning involves collaboration and independent study. Year 8 pupils, for example, work effectively with others to develop informative digital presentations on topics such as the Spanish Armada. When teachers' marking and feedback is informative and focused, it provides pupils with clear direction on how to make further progress.
23. Leaders' oversight of the quality of teaching is not always thorough enough. Where this is the case, leaders do not promptly identify areas where aspects of teaching are weaker and address them effectively. This sometimes leads to inconsistencies in the quality of teaching. For example, the feedback pupils are given about their work sometimes lacks precision so that they are unclear on how to improve. This inconsistency means that, at times, some pupils are not taught as effectively as they might be in a few aspects of their learning.
24. Pupils demonstrate a mature and diligent approach to their learning. They show responsible attitudes, well-developed independence and confidence when approaching new challenges. In design and technology, for example, pupils research, design, discuss and build effective and functional appliances for the home. In physics, pupils explore fossil fuels and nuclear power and use artificial intelligence to generate and answer challenging questions about renewable energy. Younger pupils discuss and expand their vocabulary to add greater description to their creative writing. Pupils are confident speakers who listen well to each other, respecting the fact that others may hold different viewpoints.
25. Teachers in the early years provide regular and stimulating opportunities for children to engage with language through the curriculum. Children enjoy their lessons and activities and are inquisitive and curious. Staff help children to develop their writing skills, including using capital letters and full stops. Children write interesting sentences and captions about things they see and learn about. Teachers are skilled at knowing when to question children and when to pause to allow them time to think and reflect. As a result of the well-planned and well-delivered curriculum, children in the early years communicate and use language with confidence.
26. Leaders implement an appropriate assessment framework which carefully tracks pupils' progress. Leaders use assessment information to identify pupils who require further challenge or additional support. Leaders consult on and plan subjects effectively. For example, leaders assess the mathematical curriculum carefully, making changes as necessary, so that pupils continue to build on their mathematical knowledge when moving into the senior part of the school. Parents are informed

appropriately about the progress their child is making through written reports and parents' meetings.

27. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are usually suitably supported. Staff write individual support plans for pupils who have SEND which are reviewed and adapted regularly. Staff usually follow the plans well and employ the agreed strategies. For example, teachers provide enlarged text on coloured backgrounds for pupils who require this. As a result of these measures, pupils who have SEND typically make good progress.
28. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are carefully assessed and identified promptly. They are provided with appropriate help, for example through the provision of vocabulary lists. They make good progress and quickly catch up with their classmates.
29. Boarders are supported well. Academic staff are easily accessible during prep time and pupils feel confident to speak with teachers if they need support. Boarders value the suitable, quiet study spaces that are available, where they can focus on their academic work. Boarders are provided with a wide variety of extra-curricular opportunities including sports clubs and visits to places of interest. The balance of organised activities and free time is appropriate.
30. The school implements a varied programme of extra-curricular activities. In the ukulele club, for example, pupils develop their musicality and learn how to tune the instrument and play chords. Pupils attend first aid club and learn how to carry out cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR). Pupils who join the basketball club learn the importance of stretching muscles alongside improving their skills in shooting accurately. The extra-curricular programme provides pupils with opportunities to make new friends and to develop their learning, skills and confidence.

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

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

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

32. Leaders promote respect and inclusion through the curriculum, assemblies and the PSHE programme. Pupils work together effectively to maintain a school community which is tolerant and kind and respects diversity and individuality. They approach their education with a high level of self-esteem and confidence.
33. Pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is developed through religious education (RE), tutor discussions and chapel services. Pupils attend chapel and consider the importance of moral responsibility and behaviour. The RE curriculum teaches pupils about humanism and many of the world's religions. This helps pupils to widen their understanding of other cultures and religious perspectives.
34. Leaders implement an effective and well-planned PSHE curriculum. Staff know the programme well and deliver it skilfully. Pupils learn about, for example, sleeping well and eating healthily, which contributes to their mental health. Leaders revise the PSHE curriculum to support any identified needs. For example, sixth-form pupils explore how to approach examinations with confidence.
35. Pupils are taught an appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) programme. Pupils in the preparatory school explore how to build secure and supportive relationships and begin to learn why consent is important. Senior pupils are taught about the dangers of cyber-bullying and how to respond to inappropriate social media messages. Pupils learn to take responsible decisions and demonstrate respect for others.
36. Pupils are taught a broad PE curriculum by skilled and knowledgeable staff. They understand that exercise contributes to a healthy, balanced lifestyle. Pupils learn about strength and conditioning, strategy and fitness. Pupils develop their knowledge and understanding in a variety of team sports. Teachers model skills, in hockey for example, so that pupils learn how to dribble, pass and shoot with speed and precision.
37. Pupils behave respectfully and appropriately. Leaders promote a positive approach to behaviour. They consult with pupils and revise the code of conduct in response to their feedback. Pupils understand that respect and kindness contribute to responsible behaviour. Staff recognise pupils' positive behaviour through 'super hoot' and 'blue badge' awards.
38. The school implements a suitable anti-bullying strategy. The PSHE curriculum includes work on how 'banter' can lead to and be perceived as bullying. Incidents of bullying are rare. Pupils are confident that they can easily report bullying and that it will be dealt with appropriately and promptly.
39. Leaders promote an inclusive and warm boarding community. Staff know the boarders well and support their needs and wellbeing effectively. Leaders provide a thorough induction process when new boarders join the school. Leaders consult regularly with boarders and respond to their feedback appropriately, for example by adjusting mealtimes and revising menus. Accommodation is suitable and well maintained. Boarders participate in social events such as off-site excursions and themed dinners. This supports them in building friendships with others.

40. Leaders promote a thorough health and safety culture throughout the school. They conduct regular safety checks across the site. Fire evacuation practices are carried out in a timely and efficient manner, including in the boarding houses. Those with designated health and safety responsibilities respond quickly when concerns are raised. As a result of these measures, the premises and accommodation remain suitable and secure.
41. Children in the early years develop well through interesting and imaginative activities. For example, they draw, paint and learn how to use digital platforms. They use the outdoor environment regularly for PE and to explore and play. As a result, children develop self-confidence and self-esteem.
42. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with the latest statutory guidance. Attendance data is analysed closely. Pupils are supported appropriately if their attendance levels fall. The school notifies the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
43. Pupils are supervised vigilantly and supported well throughout the school day and during boarding time. Staff are supported well by prefects who receive suitable training and guidance. This means that the prefects respond to situations appropriately.
44. The school provides a well-equipped medical centre which is managed by qualified nurses. First aid training is provided to staff on a regular basis. First aid is administered in a timely and competent manner. Those who work in the early years hold appropriate paediatric first aid qualifications.

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

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

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

46. The curriculum supports pupils' understanding of cultural diversity. In geography, for example, pupils explore migration. They consider some of the political and economic contexts that influence people to relocate. Pupils study and interpret musical and modern dance influences from different global regions and widen their cultural understanding of the world. In English, pupils study texts through which they learn about segregation and slavery. As a result, pupils learn to be inclusive, respectful and tolerant of others. They are well prepared to take their place in British and global society.
47. Economic education is effective. Pupils' understanding of money and finance is developed incrementally as they move through the school. For example, children in the early years buy and sell items during role-play activities. Pupils demonstrate entrepreneurialism by making and selling products at the Christmas fair to raise money for charity. In business studies, older pupils consider the marketplace and learn about cashflow and financial forecasting. Pupils are prepared well to understand and use money sensibly in the future.
48. The school provides pupils with balanced and useful guidance on careers. For example, pupils learn the importance of maintaining a responsible social media history as this is something that employers may check. Leaders hold a careers fair for Year 6 pupils so that they gain an early understanding about employment opportunities. The school invites pupils and their parents to consider GCSE and A-level choices at information evenings. Pupils benefit from regular and varied work experience opportunities. Senior pupils are provided with advice about future opportunities such as university, degree apprenticeship schemes and leaving school to move directly into the workplace.
49. Pupils are taught that there is a morally right way to behave. They learn about British institutions and law and order effectively. Local police regularly visit the school to discuss their role in maintaining a peaceful and law-abiding society. A magistrate speaks to pupils about the court system and legal processes. In RE lessons, pupils debate capital punishment and explore how attitudes to crime and punishment have changed in British society. As a result of these measures, pupils learn that it is important to act and behave responsibly.
50. Leaders provide plentiful opportunities for pupils to seek positions of responsibility. Pupils serve the school community as ambassadors and prefects and through their involvement in school committees. The pupil team for inclusion, diversity and equality, for example, is active around the school and promotes respectful language, inclusion and personal choice. Year 6 pupils are elected as head prefects in the preparatory school through a democratic process. They support teachers, for example, by writing rotas which identify whose turn it is to look after the school's guinea pigs. Senior pupils apply for positions as school and house prefects. They demonstrate helpfulness and service to others by touring visitors around the school and providing peer mentorship to younger pupils.
51. Leaders in the early years promote children's social development well. For example, during outdoor learning, staff encourage children to support and help each other when playing with water and sand. Children learn to wait for their turn during PE activities and share resources used for throwing and catching. Children follow their teachers' instructions carefully, for example, by waiting patiently in a queue. As a result, children learn to be respectful and confident towards others.

52. Pupils learn about democracy and political systems through PSHE, lunchtime talks and the wider curriculum. In history, for example, pupils visit the Houses of Parliament and learn about the British political parties. Pupils study the United Nations and consider their own role in promoting a peaceful and democratic society. Teachers are careful to present political information in a balanced and impartial manner.
53. Pupils learn that helping others and donating to charities are acts of inclusion, kindness and respect. Pupils visit and support local foodbanks and raise money for charities. The choir and instrumental ensembles visit a local care home to perform for elderly residents. Senior pupils in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF) organise an experience day for Year 5 pupils. As a result, pupils develop leadership skills and a sense of social responsibility.

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

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

Safeguarding

55. Leaders promote an effective safeguarding culture. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities are supported by knowledgeable governors who scrutinise safeguarding procedures at the school thoroughly. Consequently, policies and practices relating to safeguarding are suitable and reflect current statutory guidance.
56. Leaders provide thorough induction and ongoing training for all staff including about the 'Prevent' duty and child-on-child abuse. Boarding staff receive specific training to ensure that boarding arrangements fully support boarders' welfare. Staff have a confident understanding of how to respond to any safeguarding concerns.
57. The safeguarding team are trained well. They maintain safeguarding records in accordance with latest statutory guidance. Leaders seek advice from local authority safeguarding partners and make timely referrals when safeguarding concerns arise.
58. The school's safeguarding team consults and considers how to support pupils who are vulnerable. Leaders implement appropriate welfare plans, when necessary, to reduce and manage any safeguarding risks that pupils may encounter. However, systematic and clear recording and evaluation of the ongoing support offered to individual pupils could sometimes be more thorough.
59. The curriculum provides effective opportunities for pupils to learn about personal safety. For example, pupils learn about the dangers of extremism, radicalisation and alcohol and drugs misuse. Pupils are taught how to protect themselves when online through PSHE lessons, assemblies, tutor periods and information and communication technology (ICT) lessons. They are taught about digital literacy and participate in an online safety day. The school implements a robust filtering and monitoring system. Leaders receive alerts quickly if pupils navigate to inappropriate areas of the internet. Alerts are logged carefully and investigated swiftly, and actions are taken, where necessary.
60. Suitable systems are in place so that pupils can seek support, if needed. Pupils understand why requesting help is important. Senior pupils visit the wellbeing centre, speak to tutors and request support through an online form. Junior pupils speak to trusted adults, use 'suggestion boxes' or visit the prep school's wellbeing hub known as 'the lighthouse'. Boarders understand how to contact an independent person should they need to.
61. Staff in the early years are careful that daily routines reflect the particular safeguarding expectations relating to working with very young children. For example, medicines are stored securely and administered appropriately. Parents and other visitors to the early years are reminded not to use mobile phones.
62. Leaders carry out all required checks on adults before they start working at the school. These checks are recorded appropriately in a suitable single central record (SCR) of appointments. Leaders are trained well and the school's safer recruitment processes are thorough.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Sutton Valence School
Department for Education number	886/6019
Registered charity number	1181012
Address	North Street Sutton Valence Maidstone Kent ME17 3HL
Phone number	01622 845203
Email address	hmsec@svs.org.uk
Website	www.svs.org.uk
Proprietor	The United Westminster and Grey Coat Foundation
Chair	Mrs Gillian Swaine
Headteacher	Mr James Thomas
Age range	2 to 19
Number of pupils	861
Number of boarding pupils	113
Date of previous inspection	2 to 3 December 2024

Information about the school

64. Sutton Valence School is a co-educational day and boarding school in Maidstone, Kent. The preparatory school is on a separate site which lies half a mile from the senior school. The preparatory school includes a pre-prep and a Nursery. The school is part of The United Westminster and Grey Coat Foundation. It is governed by an advisory panel of non-proprietorial governors.
65. Pupils may board from Year 7. The boarders are accommodated in three on-site boarding houses.
66. There are 55 children in the Nursery, divided into two areas according to age. There are 24 children in Reception, divided into two classes.
67. The school has identified 281 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
68. The school has identified English as an additional language for 27 pupils.
69. The school states that its aims are to help pupils become confident, civilised and open-minded individuals. It endeavours to enable pupils to possess a love of learning and a strong set of values reflecting the school's principles as a Christian foundation. The school seeks to promote respect, humanity and care in its pupils. The school aims to support pupils in developing leadership skills and community values.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 February 2025

70. A team of nine inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

71. 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- health and safety tour and scrutiny of related documentation
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

72. 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