ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

03-05 October 2023

Russell House School

Station Road
Otford
Sevenoaks
Kent
TN14 5QU

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

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor and governors ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities throughout the school are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge, and as a result, fulfil their responsibilities well. The school's aims and ethos, which are focused on the promotion of pupils' wellbeing, are firmly embedded.

2. Leaders and managers have put in place a highly effective behavioural system that is well understood by both pupils and staff. Leaders have arranged frequent opportunities for all teaching and support staff to meet and discuss pupils' learning needs. As a result, staff know pupils extremely well. This helps to ensure that pupils' needs are spotted early with swift and appropriate support for pupils put in place where required. Consequently, behaviour is exemplary, and pupils learn in a cordial and relaxed environment. This enables pupils to flourish at this school. This is a significant strength.

3. Leaders have ensured that pupils' individual educational and pastoral needs are carefully considered. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs met well. There is a systematic and thorough approach to identification and provision and as a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress. Pupils with English as an additional language (EAL) are well provided for and supported to make very good progress with their acquisition of language and communication skills.

4. The education pupils receive across the school's broad and interesting curriculum is of high quality. This enables pupils of all ages to acquire knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects. Staff use their good subject knowledge to plan engaging lessons and they carefully adapt work to meet the needs of pupils. This enthuses pupils to enjoy the range of subjects on offer. Most pupils make very good progress in relation to their starting points.

5. In the early years, children blossom and enjoy their learning experiences. Children achieve well and make good progress because leaders ensure that the curriculum is appropriate and includes interesting learning experiences. Leaders take care to ensure that any specific learning needs are catered for and this results in children being enthusiastic learners who are highly engaged in their learning activities. High quality interactions between staff and children advance children's learning very well. Adults encourage children to explore and have a go at new and potentially challenging experiences, with any associated risks carefully mitigated, for example by reminding children how to use equipment and resources safely.

6. Leaders and governors have suitable measures in place to check that health and safety legislation is adhered to and that the site is well maintained. This includes the management of risk, although some written samples of site risk assessments lacked detail and did not reflect the robust system that was seen to work in practice.

7. Pupils are well prepared for their future lives. Leaders ensure that the social and economic education pupils receive is relevant and prepares them for life in modern British society. They foster pupils' understanding of the need to contribute to society by providing opportunities for pupils to support charities.

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8. Governors, leaders and staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities and ensure that appropriate measures are in place to protect children from harm. The safeguarding policy is comprehensive, well understood by staff and implemented effectively. Pupils know who to turn to should they have a safeguarding concern and feel safe in school.

9. Leaders understand safer recruitment requirements. However, whilst most recruitment checks have been undertaken in a timely manner, a small number had not. This was identified by leaders prior to the inspection process and has resulted in leaders and governors adding an additional layer of oversight.

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

- Ensure close monitoring of processes for recording recruitment checks and other safeguarding procedures so that all records continue to be maintained effectively.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietor maintains a close involvement in the school and checks that leaders and managers, including those in the early years, understand their responsibilities and meet them effectively.

11. Leaders' self-evaluation is linked to appropriate plans for further school development. Leaders consider the views of staff, parents and pupils when implementing new initiatives such as a new reading scheme that is reflective of life in modern Britain and which aims to develop pupils' understanding of the diverse world in which they live.

12. Leaders aim to include, inspire and challenge all pupils to achieve highly, and this is evident in pupils' positive attitudes to their learning and the good progress they make.

13. Governors are committed to ensuring the success of the school and routinely monitor all areas of the school's provision. Governors keep abreast of relevant requirements and are rigorous in their focus on what is in the best interests of pupils. Ongoing work is being undertaken to ensure that the school has accessible spaces in line with the requirements of the Equality Act.

14. Parents are able to quickly access important school documentation through the well-maintained and up to date school website.

15. Governors and leaders have appropriate systems in place for checking that health and safety requirements are followed. Together, they carefully consider risk management and ensure suitable mitigation is in place, for example with the implementation of a well-considered system for dropping off pupils in the morning.

16. Current risk management processes are appropriate. While, in some cases written risk assessments lack detail, the process of risk management in practice is effective. Leaders give suitable consideration to harder-to-spot risks, such as those linked to pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health, and because staff know pupils well, any arising concerns are dealt with swiftly on an individual basis.

17. The early years setting is well maintained, with effective daily monitoring checks and suitable risk assessments also in place. Regular supervision meetings ensure that staff in the early years are well supported in their role and have an opportunity to share any views with school leaders, including requests for training. Weekly departmental meetings provide further opportunities for leaders and staff to share ideas and key messages so that pupils' needs can be carefully considered and catered for appropriately.

18. Parental concerns at any level are dealt with by the school efficiently, in line with the published procedure. Complaints across the school, including any relating to the early years, are dealt with appropriately and within the required timescales.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders have designed a curriculum which is delivered by subject specialists and meets the needs of all pupils. Leaders' quality assurance and monitoring of the curriculum are effective. High quality teaching allows pupils across the ability range to make good progress and to acquire the expected knowledge and skills in preparation for the next stage of their education. The high quality of provision has built confidence in pupils who work well independently and with their peers.

20. Staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils' ability to plan work that stretches and challenges pupils and helps pupils to develop a keen interest in their learning. As a result, pupils make good progress from their starting points.

21. Specialist heads of department lead their subjects effectively. They closely monitor the quality of teaching in their department and provide appropriate support to non-specialist teachers so that the curriculum consistently meets the needs of all pupils. Teachers consistently use praise to encourage pupils and this contributes to the supportive and nurturing learning environment in the school where pupils achieve well.

22. Leaders support heads of department to work together to ensure that essential skills, for example, in literacy, numeracy and critical analysis are delivered across the curriculum alongside subject knowledge. Pupils apply these skills well in their lessons and in their recreation time. Information technology is taught effectively and integrated into lessons, enhancing pupils' digital competency.

23. Leaders adopt a systematic and thorough approach to provision for pupils who have SEND. Leaders share helpful information about pupils' needs to the wider staff in an appropriate and timely manner. As a result, teachers adapt their lessons in light of new information so that pupils' needs are met effectively. Pupils who have SEND also receive additional support within or outside the classroom. As a result, pupils who have SEND make rapid progress.

24. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), receive effective, ongoing support to develop their language and speaking skills. This enables pupils with EAL to be able to rapidly access the curriculum and to make good progress.

25. Staff use data from regular marking and from assessments benchmarked against similar institutions to adapt work to meet pupils' needs across the ability range, including the most able. Teachers give regular feedback to pupils about their strengths and areas for improvement. Pupils respond appropriately to helpful feedback from their teachers and feel proud of their achievements and visible progress. Pupils describe how their teachers have inspired them to succeed. Most pupils gain entry to their first-choice senior school with some being awarded scholarship places.

26. Children in the early years prosper because leaders have developed a well-planned curriculum that captures children's interests and meets their individual needs. There are suitable systems in place for assessing children's progress across the setting.

27. Good communication with parents is a strong feature of the early years provision. Leaders greet children and their carers personally in the morning and this provides an opportunity for important information to be shared. Parents attend regular coffee mornings where children showcase their

learning. This enables parents to see at first-hand what their child has been learning and to ask questions of staff. Regular reports, including the progress check at age two, are shared with parents and provide useful information on children's progress and next steps.

28. Leaders have created an interesting outdoor learning environment for children in the early years. The children keenly explore the space and develop their independence. Careful planning by staff has enabled all areas of learning to be promoted within the outside space. A range of open-ended resources help to develop children's physical skills, for example, children play with large planks and wooden blocks to build a variety of structures. Adults interact appropriately with children while they play in the outdoor environment, by helping to keep children safe and by promoting language acquisition.

29. In the early years, children, including those who have SEND and EAL, settle quickly and make good progress from their starting points. Children are interested in their learning and build and sustain their concentration and engagement in tasks for an appropriate period. This is because early years practitioners structure children's learning well. Staff expertly model language and extend children's play, reinforcing concepts and skills such as early literacy, number, and subject specific vocabulary. This helps children to gain a deeper understanding in the areas of learning.

30. The curriculum includes a wide range of interesting extra-curricular activities including modern dance, German and eco club which enable pupils to take part at every level. The rate of participation in extra-curricular activities is high because the offer meets the interests of pupils. Leaders' decision to hold many of these activities at lunch time enables greater participation, especially of younger pupils including in the early years.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

31. Leaders have created a calm and respectful culture in school. Governors and leaders work together to ensure that the behaviour policy is effective, well-embedded and consistently implemented. This has resulted in pupils behaving well in and out of lessons with no instances of poor behaviour recorded.

32. Staff know their pupils very well and quickly notice any changes in behaviour which they follow up with appropriate and supportive intervention. In addition, leaders have developed a highly effective system for sharing information about any behavioural trends which includes opportunities for staff discussions about any patterns seen. Pupils receive appropriate attention resulting in consistently positive pupil behaviour.

33. Leaders promote inclusive relationships between pupils by creating frequent opportunities for pupils of different ages to collaborate through the established house system. These opportunities extend to pre-prep children who attend whole school assemblies and understand that they are valued members of the school community.

34. Leaders arrange regular and effective opportunities for pupils to learn about each other's background. This includes parents coming in to talk about their cultural heritage and pupils having planned opportunities to educate each other about their beliefs. As a result, pupils are respectful and accepting of people's differences.

35. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme successfully meets the needs of pupils. This curriculum is well planned and delivered, enabling pupils to develop an understanding of friendships, families, and health. Pupils understand about difference and are aware of the need to respect everyone.

36. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is carefully planned to meet the needs of pupils and is appropriately delivered. Leaders engage specialist teaching from an outside agency to deliver some aspects of the RSE curriculum. This deepens pupils' understanding and provides an opportunity for them to question an expert about sensitive issues. As a result, pupils obtain new knowledge and understanding in this area. Parents are made are of the content of the RSE programme in line with school policy.

37. Pupils experience a broad range of planned activities involving physical exercise. Leaders ensure that schemes of work enable pupils of all abilities to be included. As a result, many pupils feel confident to go on to represent the school in sporting tournaments. Whilst most team sports are organised by gender, pupils have opportunities to take part in mixed gender sports such as cricket. Leaders regularly review opportunities for a greater number of team sports to be mixed.

38. Teachers create a safe and supportive environment in their classrooms, which has a positive impact on pupils' emotional wellbeing. For example, pupils engage fully in lessons, taking part in sensitive discussions about topical religious and historical topics.

39. Children in the early years manage their emotions well as a result of the routines established by highly supportive early years practitioners. Children start their day with enthusiasm. Skilled staff know the children well and are swiftly able to assist and support the needs of all children.

40. Leaders support pupils to develop skills of perseverance and resilience through planned problem-solving opportunities in the curriculum. Pupils respond enthusiastically to their learning experiences and describe the sense of accomplishment and positive self-esteem they gain through participating in creative writing and poetry activities.

41. Leaders have appropriate systems in place to ensure that the premises and accommodation are well maintained and safe. The school has a meticulous maintenance schedule in place indicating a commitment to ensuring the safety and wellbeing of pupils and staff. As a result, the required health and safety standards are fulfilled.

42. Leaders provide suitable accommodation to meet pupils' medical needs and there are clear and effective procedures for dealing with any medical issues in a timely and competent manner. Leaders ensure that staff have the required medical training, including in the early years, where almost all staff have completed paediatric first aid training.

43. Pupils are well supervised, both in and out of lessons by an appropriate number of well-trained staff. Leaders track and monitor pupils' attendance patterns, identifying any irregularities or absences, and take appropriate action to safeguard pupils when necessary. This helps to ensure that pupils are not missing from education.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

44. Pupils receive economic education in their PSHE lessons which they find interesting and relevant. For example, pupils learn about how to open a bank account and understand the difference between a debit and credit card. Older pupils develop their knowledge of economic education through an opportunity to be an entrepreneur for a week where pupils sell their own produce.

45. Pupils are prepared well for their future through learning about business skills in their computing lessons or through planned visits to school by parents who discuss their jobs and choices they made on their pathway to their chosen career.

46. In line with the school aims, leaders have implemented a comprehensive and successful programme to help prepare older pupils for their next stage in education. For example, in life skills lessons, pupils learn how to travel on trains independently in preparation for senior school.

47. Pupils learn about democracy in humanities lessons and they apply their learning when voting for their peers who stand for election and take on roles of responsibility, such as the head boy and head girl. Enrichment activities such as mock trials and visits to Parliament are effective in helping pupils to develop their understanding of democratic principles and their role in society. Pupils take pride in the many opportunities they have to be responsible and pupils on the school council are aware of the impact they have in representing the pupil body.

48. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of the impact of their actions on the environment as a result of opportunities in the curriculum to learn about the importance of caring for the planet and through themed opportunities such as environmental awareness week. Leaders enable pupils to support their local community, for example by giving donations to the local food bank.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

49. Governors work together with leaders to foster an effective culture of safeguarding in the school community. Governors monitor the school's safeguarding policy and procedures regularly and ensure that they comply with up-to-date statutory guidance.

50. Leaders, with input from the local authority, have developed a robust safeguarding training programme which enables staff to recognise and understand contextual risks and to be confident to report concerns in line with the school safeguarding policy and procedures. Safeguarding training for new staff is effective and is delivered through a comprehensive induction programme.

51. Leaders ensure that all staff complete regular safeguarding training. Leaders check staff understanding of safeguarding expectations and provide frequent opportunities for staff to discuss and develop their understanding of safeguarding issues. As a result, all staff are fully aware of their duties and take appropriate action to safeguard pupils.

52. Staff respond quickly and effectively when safeguarding concerns are raised. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) maintains detailed records and makes referrals to external agencies or seeks advice in an appropriate and timely manner. Leaders regularly check and review safeguarding logs and take appropriate action where they identify any trends or patterns in referrals. As a result, arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils are effective.

53. Pupils understand how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Governors have put into place an effective online filtering and monitoring system which notifies leaders of any concerns during school time in a timely manner.

54. Governors' monitoring of the single central record of appointments is effective. A small number of late or missing checks had previously been identified by the school and rectified prior to inspection. Suitable risk assessments are put into place in order to keep children safe, for example, ensuring that staff are supervised until all employment check information is received.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Russell House School
Department for Education number	886/6039
Address	Station Road Otford Sevenoaks TN14 5QU
Website	russellhouseschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Russell House School Ltd
Chair	Dr Yvonne Lindsay
Headteacher	Mr Craig McCarthy
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	170
Date of previous inspection	4 to 6 June 2019

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Information about the school

55. Russell House School is a co-educational day school located in the village of Otford, near Sevenoaks, Kent. The school comprises the pre-prep school for children aged 2 to 5 years and the main school for pupils aged 5 to 11 years. The school is overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new head of pre-prep and bursar were appointed in January 2023 and a new deputy head took up post in September 2023.

56. There are 38 children in the early years comprising the three Nursery classes and one Reception class.

57. The school has identified 22 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

58. English is an additional language for two pupils.

59. The school states that its aims are to provide high quality, inspirational education in a happy environment enabling each pupil to achieve his or her full potential. It strives to encourage each pupil to achieve beyond expectations and to be fully prepared for the next stage of education. It seeks to foster motivation, intellectual curiosity and self-confidence, balanced with consideration for others, enabling pupils to embrace life's diverse challenges. The school aims to instil an understanding that most things that are worthwhile and ultimately fulfilling require commitment, time and effort.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	3 to 5 October 2023

60. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

61. The inspectors:
    - Held discussions with pupils, leaders, managers, governors and staff
    - Conducted joint lesson walks with senior and middle leaders
    - Observed lessons
    - Attended registrations and assemblies
    - Visited a sample of extra-curricular activities
    - Visited the facilities for the early years children
    - Visited the facilities for learning support
    - Sampled documentation including policies, curriculum plans and health and safety records
    - Reviewed samples of pupils' work with pupils and heads of department
    - Toured the premises and accommodation
    - Visited the first aid facilities.

62. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

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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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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