

# School inspection report

4 to 6 June 2024

## **Vinehall School**

Vinehall Road  
Mountfield  
Robertsbridge  
TN32 5JL

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. Governors provide effective support and challenge to the school leaders and help ensure that requirements of the Standards and statutory guidance are met. Governors play an active role in the formation and evaluation of the school's strategic plan.
2. Pupils of all ages make good progress as a result of effective teaching from skilled and knowledgeable teachers and teaching assistants in a caring environment. In the most effective lessons, teachers adapt their teaching methods well to meet the needs of all pupils.
3. In the early years there is a diverse programme of activities covering all seven areas of learning. Children are well supervised, and staff form warm and caring relationships with them. Adults engage effectively with children during guided play, promoting their language development well. Children make rapid progress from their starting points.
4. An appropriate assessment framework is in place. However, leaders' use of assessment data to identify the extent to which any pupils require additional support should be strengthened.
5. Leaders prioritise well-being. A well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme is in place and is taught effectively. Leaders and staff successfully promote positive relationships and the importance of mutual respect. The 'life skills' programme teaches pupils about the importance of the rule of law, democracy and British institutions effectively. Pupils learn about and develop their appreciation of diversity well.
6. The school's safeguarding arrangements are effective and in line with current statutory guidance. Staff are appropriately trained and regularly updated on safeguarding procedures. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained for their role. Staff know how to report concerns, and leaders ensure that child protection records are maintained as required. However, leaders' review of the single central record of appointment is not sufficiently robust to prevent it containing minor administrative errors.

## 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:

- strengthen the use of assessment data to identify where pupils might need additional support to help them make good progress
- strengthen oversight of recruitment procedures to ensure that the single central record of appointments is completed without minor administrative errors.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders and governors carry out robust and ongoing analysis of the school's work to identify areas for improvement. As a result, governors and leaders have implemented a variety of recent initiatives that are currently being embedded, such as teaching and learning walks and peer lesson observations where effective practice is shared to strengthen pupils' outcomes.
8. Governors maintain methodical oversight of the school. They provide effective support and challenge where necessary to ensure leaders have the skills, knowledge and understanding to fulfil their responsibilities to meet the Standards consistently and promote the wellbeing of pupils.
9. Leaders ensure that the school provides a nurturing and inclusive environment for pupils which provides many opportunities for them to succeed. The school's values of 'confidence, respect and kindness' are ingrained throughout the school and consistently encouraged by the school team. As a result, pupils enthusiastically participate in all aspects of school life. Leaders communicate the school's aims to parents, pupils and staff effectively.
10. Leaders provide current and prospective parents with all required information. Most of this information is accessible through the school's website. Parents receive information about their children's progress through regular meetings and written reports. The school informs the local authority when any pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times.
11. The school publishes and implements a suitable complaints procedure. Leaders resolve issues promptly, with most being handled informally through face-to-face discussions that often successfully resolve the complaints. Leaders keep appropriate records relating to any formal complaints, including of any actions that they have taken in response to these.
12. The leadership of boarding is effective. Leaders ensure that boarding staff receive appropriate training for their responsibilities. Leaders ensure that boarding accommodation is suitable and well-maintained. Leaders ensure that the school does not discriminate against pupils and meets its requirements under the Equality Act. A suitable accessibility plan enhances access to the curriculum and buildings for any pupils with disabilities.
13. There is a systematic and effective approach to the management of risk, the importance of which is understood by staff. Robust risk assessments are implemented for all areas of the school, trips and activities. They identify appropriate actions to minimise potential risks. Risk assessments take into account pupils' specific welfare needs, such as with regard to dietary requirements or medical conditions. Leaders review risk assessments regularly to ensure that they remain effective.
14. Leaders in the early years support children's emotional well-being well. They make effective use of puppet characters to help children to recognise and moderate different feelings and emotions. Highly skilled teachers and early years practitioners provide a safe and stimulating learning environment that is fully risk assessed and well supervised.
15. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities consult relevant external agencies for advice and refer safeguarding concerns to the appropriate agencies when required.

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

**16. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. The broad and balanced curriculum is well-planned and supports effectively structured and successful lessons. Subject leaders often plan effective cross-curricular links, such as between English and art when exploring the theme of fairy tales, to help deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. The range of subjects taught provides pupils with effective opportunities to acquire knowledge and develop key skills in many areas.
18. In the most effective lessons, teachers use their secure subject knowledge and their understanding of pupils' previous learning to adapt their lessons and activities to meet the needs of individual pupils. Teachers' questioning is typically effective and encourages pupils, including those with high prior attainment, to develop their answers more fully, as well as challenging them to use key vocabulary in several instances. As a result, pupils are attentive, enthusiastic about their learning and make good progress.
19. In the early years, learning is carefully planned, using a wide range of suitable resources, and is personalised to the individual child. Children become enthusiastic learners, as they are engaged with various exciting challenges. Teachers encourage children to speak confidently in a range of situations using a rich array of vocabulary for their age. Adults interact appropriately with children while they undertake guided play in the outdoor environment, making effective use of spontaneous opportunities to foster their language development.
20. Leaders and staff effectively support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The learning support department identifies pupils' learning needs promptly and, typically, teachers adapt their lessons to meet these. Pupils who have SEND receive additional support, both within or outside the classroom, often provided by skilled and knowledgeable teaching assistants. The learning support department works with parents and, where relevant, external specialists to ensure pupils receive effective support. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress.
21. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate individual support to develop their language and speaking skills. Teachers provide effective feedback materials in pupils' first languages, enabling them to access the curriculum rapidly and make good progress with their learning.
22. Leaders track pupils' progress in core subjects. Regular standardised testing takes place across the school, which informs senior managers of pupils' attainments. However, the use of assessment data to identify where pupils might need additional support to help them make good progress requires strengthening.
23. Leaders facilitate a wide range of extra-curricular activities, such as board games, carpentry and sewing, plus a large range of sporting activities. These foster confidence and extend the skills of pupils in the activities that they participate in. Boarders have sufficient free time and are able to make use of the school's grounds and facilities, helping them to develop their independence and create supportive relationships with other boarders. In boarding time, there are activities organised in the evenings and weekends, which include cricket, drama, art club, music, swim team, as well as trips out, which enhance and support their interests.

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

**24. All the relevant Standards are met.**



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

25. Leaders and staff promote pupils' mental and emotional health effectively through the comprehensive and well-planned 'life skills' programme, which includes PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE). The 'life skills' programme includes themes designed to support pupils' mental and emotional health. For example, pupils are taught about strategies that they can use to support their own physical and mental wellbeing, such as ways of recognising and managing their emotions and dealing with stress. This begins in the early years, when staff utilise puppet characters known as 'the pals' to represent different emotional dispositions and behaviours.
26. The RSE programme contains appropriate content for the pupils' age. Teaching enables pupils to explore helpful themes in an accessible way. Pupils learn about behaviours that help relationships be healthy and about the importance of respecting privacy and what consent means. The religious studies (RS) and PSHE programmes support pupils' spiritual understanding. Pupils learn about the ideas and principles of range of different religions in RS and explore the connections between themselves and the world as part of the PSHE programme's 'mindfulness' strand.
27. Pupils experience a broad range of planned physical activities, including in their extra-curricular programme. The physical education (PE) scheme of work is planned effectively to include pupils of all physical abilities. It educates pupils about the benefits of being active and ways of developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, including through exercise.
28. Leaders and managers have a comprehensive behaviour policy in place, detailing a variety of appropriate sanctions. This is embedded across year groups and has a positive effect on behaviour. As a result, pupils are typically attentive and focused in class and enthusiastic about their learning. The supplementary behaviour policy in the boarding house, based on a system of points, is effective and adhered to by the boarders, with sanctions applied as necessary.
29. Staff in the early years gently correct any loss of learning focus to bring children back on task. They praise children for being polite and responsive. As a result, children follow instructions well and demonstrate positive behaviour.
30. An effective anti-bullying strategy ensures that bullying is rare. Leaders and staff deal with the few bullying incidents that arise promptly and effectively. All staff receive appropriate training on the types of bullying and how to support pupils after an event.
31. Leaders and managers ensure that there is suitable supervision of pupils across the site at all times of the school day, including during boarding time, and when on trips and visits. Early years children are carefully supervised by a sufficient number of staff, both in the indoor and outdoor areas. Boarders can contact staff overnight should any support be required.
32. Oversight by governors ensures that health and safety processes are effective. Leaders make use of external expertise to help ensure that all required checks and maintenance are carried out. Leaders ensure that appropriate precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire, including through an up-to-date fire risk assessment. Fire evacuation drills take place termly, including additional drills in boarding time.

33. Boarding accommodation is comfortable and well maintained, the accommodation is well lit, clean and comfortable with personal spaces to keep possessions safe. Boarders have a suitable shared area where they can relax and play games. Boarders are provided with regular healthy meals by the school kitchen, and evening snacks are provided by the school.
34. Leaders provide suitable accommodation to meet pupils' medical needs, and there are thorough and effective procedures for dealing with any medical issues in a timely and competent manner. Many staff have first aid training, including in the early years, where the large majority of staff have completed paediatric first aid and administration of medication training.
35. The admissions and attendance registers are maintained accurately. Leaders carefully track any patterns of absence, to ensure that these are appropriately followed up. As a result, the rates of attendance are high.

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

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

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

37. The school's values of respect and kindness are embedded throughout the school. The 'life skills' programme and assemblies often focus on one of these core values. Pupils are encouraged to embed these values in their daily lives and are pleased to earn credits by displaying them. Teachers model the values they expect, including respect for people's protected characteristics, such as belief, race and sex. The assembly programme promotes respect for diversity by exploring issues related to neurodiversity, sexual orientation and disability.
38. Leaders in the early years carefully plan many opportunities to develop the children's social skills. Early years staff facilitate games and challenges where children need to take turns and learn to share resources. Older pupils learn about social responsibility and British institutions through the 'life skills' programme and other subjects, such as history. The 'life skills' programme explores a range of British institutions, including key services, such as the police and fire and rescue services. Pupils learn about the welfare state and its principles. Such study also serves to develop pupils' moral sensibilities through, for example, discussions of what the priorities of such services could be and why. Younger pupils develop their understanding of the rule of law and social institutions and services through visits from representatives of public institutions, such as the local fire brigade. Pupils explore issues relating to employment, the use of money and how power is exercised in society. Leaders and staff ensure that any such discussions are impartial and unbiased.
39. Pupils develop an understanding of and respect for democracy through learning about the Houses of Parliament and how government works. They engage with the democratic process through initiatives such as voting for and representing others through the school council, academic committee and eco committee. The youngest pupils begin their engagement with democracy by voting for their favourite stories at the end of the day.
40. Leaders ensure the 'life skills' programme provides opportunities for pupils to think about their futures and to learn about potential career and education options. Careers guidance is planned with reference to national benchmarks. Visiting speakers provide pupils with information about their own experiences of particular careers.
41. Pupils develop their economic understanding effectively. The 'life skills' programme teaches pupils about the value of money, the importance of budgeting and how the stock market and investments work. Pupils explore ethical issues relating to economics, such as about what might constitute fair trade. Older pupils take on an 'enterprise challenge' to try to raise funds for charities that they support.
42. Pupils develop their sense of responsibility towards others by taking on roles such as prefects and house captains and support the younger pupils during breaktime and around school. Pupils support a range of charities each year, selected by the house captains, which range from the local food bank to national and international charities.
43. The school effectively supports and prepares pupils for the next stage of their education. Older pupils are prepared effectively for entrance examinations to a wide range of senior schools. They are given advice about changes that are likely to occur as they move to their next schools.

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

**44. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

45. Leaders effectively implement the safeguarding policy in line with current statutory guidance. Governors maintain a clear oversight of all aspects of safeguarding and review safeguarding arrangements regularly. There is a nominated governor who has specific oversight of safeguarding within the school. The monitoring process includes reviewing the annual completion of a local authority safeguarding audit, regular discussions with the safeguarding team and appropriate oversight of any concerns that have arisen. All governors have received appropriate safeguarding training.
46. Staff are appropriately trained in safeguarding, including at induction and through regular updates provided by the designated safeguarding lead (DSL). Leaders with designated safeguarding lead responsibilities receive appropriate training to equip them for their role. Leaders work closely with the school staff and have a positive and effective relationship with external agencies, consulting with and, when required, referring concerns to children's services, and the local authority-designated safeguarding officer (LADO).
47. Staff understand their responsibilities and know how to deal with disclosures or any concerns they may have about a pupil's welfare. Staff are aware of the expectations of their conduct and the importance of identifying low-level concerns. There are suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff and potential misconduct in place, and staff are aware of when and how to use them.
48. Boarding staff are all appropriately trained in safeguarding matters and they are aware of their role in keeping the boarders safe and listening to their worries and concerns. They are clear to whom they should report their concerns.
49. Leaders provide a variety of methods which pupils can use to share any worries in confidence. They are aware there is always someone to talk to if they have a problem. There is an anonymous system via an online platform in the prep department and 'worry boxes' in place throughout the school.
50. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe, including when online. Pupils learn about the potential dangers when using the internet, the importance of not sharing personal information and how to recognise when certain internet sites may be unsafe. The internet is suitably filtered, and effective monitoring procedures are in place.
51. Leaders conduct the necessary safer recruitment checks before staff and governors take up their appointments. However, some minor administrative errors were found in the recording of these checks on the single central register of appointments. These were corrected during the inspection.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

**52. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## School details

<b>School</b>	Vinehall School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	845/6004
<b>Registered charity number</b>	307014
<b>Address</b>	Vinehall School Vinehall Road Mountfield Robertsbridge East Sussex TN32 5JL
<b>Phone number</b>	01580 880413
<b>Email address</b>	office@vinehallschool.com
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.vinehallschool.com/">https://www.vinehallschool.com/</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Vinehall School Governors
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Daniel Lewis
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Jonathan Powis
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 14
<b>Number of pupils</b>	215
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	29
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	19 to 21 May 2021

## Information about the school

53. Vinehall School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school. It was founded in 1938 and is a charitable trust administered by a board of governors. The school comprises three sections: Nursery, for children aged 2 to 4 years, pre-prep, for pupils aged 4 to 7 years; and prep, for pupils aged from 7 to 13 years.
54. The boarding accommodation is situated within the main school building and male and female pupils are accommodated at opposite ends of the house.
55. The early years setting is in a self-contained unit surrounded by areas for outdoor learning. This area accommodates children from two years old to five years old.
56. The school has identified 79 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
57. English is an additional language for 27 pupils.
58. The school states its aims are to provide the best possible all-round education for their pupils. It seeks to encourage pupils to reach their potential by aiming to provide a nurturing environment, rich in opportunities to excel. Aligned with the Repton family of schools, the school intends that its personal values and learning habits enable achievement, foster a positive community spirit and encourage enthusiastic participation in all aspects of life.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

4 to 6 June 2024

59. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

60. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assembly
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of governors
- discussions with the head, 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

61. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)