

School inspection report

27 to 29 January 2026

Sancton Wood School

2 St Paul's Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EZ

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 knowledgeable and experienced. They have a clear sense of purpose and well-defined aims for the school, which they promote effectively. Leaders monitor the quality of the school's provision closely, and carefully consider the views of pupils, parents and staff. Leaders focus effectively on promoting pupils' wellbeing. As a result, the school is a happy place where pupils feel welcome and safe.
2. Governors know the school well. They provide leaders with appropriate support and challenge. This enables them to be sure that leaders have the skills and knowledge they need and that they carry out their roles effectively. Governors ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
3. A suitable curriculum is in place throughout the school. It focuses well on English, mathematics and science while also providing an appropriate breadth of other subjects and a wide range of choices for GCSE studies. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They present new learning clearly and give pupils opportunities to practise what they learn through well-chosen activities. Staff develop very positive, supportive relationships with pupils that have a clear impact on how well pupils achieve. Pupils make good progress throughout the school.
4. A small amount of teaching is less effective. Where this is the case, at times, some pupils make more limited progress.
5. The early years provision in Reception gets children's learning off to a positive start. The early years curriculum is interesting, engaging and well matched to children's needs. Staff provide opportunities for children to develop their skills and understanding across all areas of learning. Children make good progress in the early years so that they are ready to move on to Year 1 when the time comes.
6. Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is taught effectively. Pupils learn about the similarities and differences between people, such as race, religion and disability. They learn about the importance of tolerance and fairness. Pupils develop positive attitudes and celebrate the diverse nature of society.
7. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as democracy and respect for other people's beliefs. They are encouraged to think about the inequalities in the world and what they can do to help, such as taking part in charity work. Pupils take on various roles and responsibilities as they progress through the school. They gradually develop resilience, which enables them to become more independent.
8. The school has an effective safeguarding culture. Staff receive suitable training. This helps them to know about and understand safeguarding procedures and practices. Staff report any concerns about pupils promptly using the school's agreed systems. Leaders respond to these in a timely fashion, taking effective action to protect pupils where necessary.

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:

- develop the small amount of less effective teaching so that it more consistently meets the needs of all pupils.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have a shared sense of purpose and a clear rationale for the school. They are determined that the school should be a kind, welcoming and inclusive place, characterised by high levels of trust, where pupils are valued as individuals. They achieve this well. Leaders' vision permeates the school. Leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. They lead a school that feels like 'a family' to pupils and staff. This helps pupils to feel safe, enjoy school and achieve well.
10. Governors have frequent contact with leaders and visit the school regularly. This enables them to assure themselves that leaders have the knowledge and skills they need and that the Standards are met consistently. Governors provide both challenge and support to the school's leaders. For example, they use formal reviews, carried out by the proprietor body's central education team, to help them to identify what the school does well and where there is room for improvement.
11. In addition to feedback from reviews, leaders use a range of other methods to evaluate the school's effectiveness. For example, they use monthly anonymised surveys to gather the views of staff on aspects of the school. Leaders regularly survey pupils' and parents' views. They also liaise with pupil groups, such as the wellbeing committee and the school council, and class parent representatives. Leaders analyse and evaluate the information they gather in order to identify key priorities. These then form the basis of the school's well-considered development plans.
12. Leaders have up-to-date knowledge and understanding about statutory requirements and non-statutory guidance. They review policies routinely as well as in response to changes to guidance. Leaders share policies appropriately with staff, parents and pupils so that they are known and understood. Policies are implemented fairly and consistently.
13. The school provides reports to parents that include information about their child's progress and attainment. Reports also include feedback on aspects such as pupils' effort, resilience and social and communication skills. Leaders provide a wide range of information for parents and others, mainly via the school's website.
14. Risks are identified and managed effectively, including those that are not immediately obvious. Leaders and staff receive appropriate training in this area. This enables them to identify risks thoroughly and to put effective measures in place to mitigate them. Leaders review risk assessments regularly and make changes to them where necessary.
15. Leaders focus well on equality and inclusivity. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The school has an appropriate accessibility plan that focuses both on ensuring pupils' access to the curriculum and physical access to the building for pupils, parents and staff.
16. Leaders work effectively with a range of outside agencies to benefit pupils. For example, they work with well-chosen charities to provide support and information to pupils about issues such as relationships. Leaders work closely with local authorities to seek advice and guidance as well as to secure specific support for individual pupils, when necessary. Leaders provide local authorities with the information they require about pupils' education, health and care plans (EHC plans). Leaders report to the local authority when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points. They also report pupils' absences to the local authority, when necessary, as they are required to do.

17. The school has a suitable complaints policy that meets requirements. It allows for concerns to be raised informally in the first instance. The policy provides for panel hearings, as required. The school follows its own policy and keeps appropriate records of the complaints that are received. Leaders review complaints to identify what can be learned from them.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. Leaders have a clear rationale for the curriculum. They think carefully about what should be taught when. As a result, the curriculum enables pupils to build their knowledge and skills, step by step, as they progress through the school. The curriculum is delivered effectively so that pupils make good progress and achieve well. GCSE results are above the national average and reflect the good progress that pupils make during their time at the school.
20. The curriculum is suitably broad and balanced throughout the school. In the early years, the curriculum is ambitious, well sequenced and age appropriate. The curriculum reflects children's interests and developmental stages. It covers the seven areas of learning well, giving children a positive start to their school life. The development of communication and language skills is given a high priority. Staff prioritise speaking and listening through, for example, daily stories and songs. Children are taught phonics using a carefully chosen programme. They are given plentiful opportunities to apply their new knowledge through practical activities such as word hunts. Children learn early mathematics skills such as counting, recognising shapes and measuring. Staff plan interesting and engaging activities, some of which are led by adults and others for children to explore independently. Children make good progress in the early years.
21. The curriculums in the prep and senior schools are similarly well planned. Leaders aim for the curriculum to encourage pupils to develop enquiring minds and intellectual curiosity. It does this well. The prep curriculum covers a broad range of subjects including science, history, art and physical education (PE). English and mathematics are prioritised appropriately without narrowing the curriculum. The curriculum is mainly delivered by class teachers, with some subjects, including computing, music and Spanish, taught by specialist staff.
22. In the senior school, the curriculum continues to provide a suitable breadth of subjects. Pupils study a core of subjects at GCSE level that includes English language and literature, mathematics and science. Pupils are also offered a wide range of options to choose from, including business studies, classical civilisation, drama, French, psychology, sociology and astronomy. Younger senior pupils study the Foundation Project Qualification (FPQ) and older pupils the Higher Project Qualification (HPQ). This is an effective part of pupils' transition between school and local sixth form colleges, which offer the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).
23. Teachers implement suitable schemes of work across the range of subjects taught. They have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. They explain new material clearly so that pupils understand what is taught. They answer pupils' questions well, pre-empt common misconceptions and check pupils' understanding of what has been taught.
24. Teachers plan tasks and activities that interest pupils and meet their needs. They select suitable resources and use them effectively in lessons. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well so that classrooms are productive places where pupils can concentrate and learn. Relationships between staff and pupils are notably positive. Staff develop a trusting rapport with pupils that has a direct impact on how well they achieve. There is some inconsistency in the quality of teaching, and a small proportion is less effective. Where this is the case, some pupils make less progress than they are capable of.

25. Provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) is effective. Teachers adapt tasks and scaffold learning so that all pupils can access the curriculum and make good progress. For example, teachers use well-chosen resources and reduce unnecessary writing demands, where appropriate. Specialist support, including targeted one-to-one sessions and effective deployment of teaching assistants, helps to ensure that pupils who have SEND are supported well without limiting their independence. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
26. Leaders assess the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) as soon as they join the school. They put support in place based on pupils' stage of learning to help pupils to speak and understand English. For example, pupils are taught key vocabulary in advance of the introduction of new topics so that they can understand the content of lessons. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress.
27. The school's approach to assessment is well considered and appropriate. Teachers assess pupils' understanding of what they have been taught as part of their day-to-day teaching. In addition, they use more formal assessments periodically to check what pupils have understood and remembered in the longer term. Leaders review assessment information with teachers to identify where pupils need further support or challenge. They adjust provision accordingly, which helps pupils to make good progress.
28. The school provides a wide range of enrichment and co-curricular activities in both the prep and senior schools. For example, on Wednesday afternoons, pupils in the senior school select from an extensive list of enrichment options including creative writing, climbing, special effects make-up and zoology. The school provides a range of visits, such as theatre trips linked to English and drama. The school makes good use of the facilities available in Cambridge, such as museums and exhibitions.

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

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

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

30. Pupils start to learn about the importance of mutual respect as soon as they join the school. Leaders make very clear their expectations about how people should treat each other. From the early years onwards, children learn to think about how their behaviour can affect other people. The expectation that members of the school community should be kind to each other is widely understood.
31. The PSHE curriculum teaches pupils about the similarities and differences between people, such as race, religious belief and sexual orientation. Pupils learn about disabilities and how these may affect how people learn and interact with each other. These key messages are also woven through other subjects in the curriculum. This is enhanced by assemblies and visiting speakers on issues such as racism and misogyny in sport. This encourages pupils to be accommodating and understanding of each other. They develop positive attitudes towards others and an appreciation of the diverse nature of society.
32. Pupils learn about the major world religions through the religious education (RE) curriculum. They are taught about what followers of different religions believe as well as their customs and practices. Pupils are enabled to be reflective and to think about their own beliefs and spirituality.
33. The PSHE and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculums are taught well throughout the school. Leaders select suitable schemes of work so that pupils learn about an appropriate range of issues. For example, they learn about healthy lifestyles, self-motivation, resilience and the risks associated with drugs and alcohol. They return to topics regularly to build on what they have learned previously. In RSE, pupils learn about friendships, boundaries and how bodies develop over time. As they grow older, they learn about issues such as sexual relationships, contraception and consent. Pupils are provided with the information they need as they prepare for adulthood.
34. The PE curriculum is extensive, well planned and delivered effectively by specialist staff. Pupils are taught that PE is about 'head, heart and hand', not just about physical performance. This encourages pupils of all abilities to be engaged and motivated in PE lessons and beyond. They develop positive attitudes to sport, including teamwork and co-operation with others. Alongside this, pupils are challenged appropriately so that they achieve well.
35. In the early years, staff explicitly teach children how to manage their feelings through, for example, stories, discussions and access to designated quiet spaces. Staff help children to develop perseverance and confidence. As a result, children remain focused for extended periods of time during activities. They respond positively to challenges and show pride in their achievements. Physical development is promoted through well-chosen activities both in the classroom and outdoors. Children develop strength, co-ordination and balance through activities such as climbing, lifting and pouring. They develop fine motor skills through, for example, creative activities, construction and mark-making.
36. Pupils behave well throughout the school. The school's rules are clear and appropriate. They are implemented fairly and consistently. When incidents occur, staff help pupils to understand how their behaviour affects other people and how they can make amends.

37. Pupils learn about bullying and the forms it can take through the PSHE curriculum, assemblies and talks from visiting speakers. Bullying happens rarely. When incidents do occur, they are dealt with promptly and effectively by leaders.
38. Health and safety practices are robust. Leaders use external companies to check aspects of the school such as, for example, by carrying out fire risk assessments. Leaders act promptly on any recommendations arising from such reviews.
39. First aid arrangements are effective. Most staff are trained in first aid, with many qualified in paediatric first aid. Suitable processes are in place for assisting pupils when they hurt themselves and for caring for pupils who become unwell during the school day. Staff in the early years are aware of, and follow, recent guidance around monitoring children when they are eating.
40. The school is well staffed on both the prep and senior sites. Pupils are supervised appropriately and there are always adults available for pupils to go to if they need help.
41. Admission and attendance registers are completed effectively and contain all required information. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance closely and take suitable action in response to absence. Leaders seek advice from the local authority, and act upon it, where necessary.
42. The school's prefect system is well considered. Pupils are selected to be prefects after a thorough recruitment process. Prefects have clearly defined roles and responsibilities. They receive training before they take up their roles and ongoing support to help them carry them out effectively.

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

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

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

44. Pupils learn about fundamental British values, such as individual liberty and democracy, in a variety of ways. Throughout the curriculum, staff look for ways to teach key messages in this area, such as the importance of being mutually respectful. The assembly programme is also used effectively to reinforce and extend pupils' understanding. For example, leaders mark events such as Black History Month, Remembrance Day and International Women's Day, which helps pupils to reflect on other people's beliefs and experiences.
45. Pupils learn about British institutions through the PSHE curriculum, educational visits and other aspects of the curriculum. For example, pupils visit the Houses of Parliament, and a local MP visits the school to speak to the school council and other pupils. Younger pupils learn about public services such as the ambulance, police and fire services.
46. The school has a charity committee which meets regularly. Pupils select the charity that they would like to support each term, sometimes in response to local or world events. For example, pupils recently chose a charity that supports refugees after witnessing their plight through news reporting. Pupils organise events, such as a Christmas fair, to raise money for their chosen charities. Pupils also visit local residential homes for elderly people and take provisions to the local foodbank. These acts encourage pupils to think about other people and to develop a sense of altruism.
47. Pupils are taught effectively about the difference between right and wrong. When pupils do not do the right thing, leaders and staff help them to understand why their behaviour was the wrong choice. This helps pupils to develop a good understanding of what is and is not acceptable. Pupils follow the school's rules and understand why they are important. As pupils move through the school they learn about laws and the consequences of breaking them.
48. In the early years, children's social skills are developed well. Staff provide plentiful opportunities for children to learn to co-operate with each other, such as through playing games. Children learn to take turns, share and be tolerant of each other.
49. Economic education is taught effectively through the PSHE and mathematics curriculums. Pupils learn about setting goals and realistic ways of achieving them. They are taught about key aspects of financial literacy such as saving, credit cards and taxes. The school works with a local bank that provides sessions for pupils about how to use money wisely.
50. Pupils are provided with opportunities to develop a sense of responsibility as they move through the school. For example, they can apply to become prefects or members of the school and charity councils. Pupils are also encouraged to start to take responsibility for their own learning, such as through generating their own targets. These steps help pupils to gradually prepare for their adult lives.
51. Pupils are provided with suitable careers advice and guidance. The programme provides them with information about the full range of pathways available to them, including academic, vocational and technical routes. This is enhanced by visiting speakers who provide information about a range of career options. Pupils take part in work experience opportunities which give them an insight into the world of work.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

53. Suitable safeguarding arrangements are in place throughout the school. Leaders give safeguarding a high priority. They put robust procedures in place to ensure that the school has an effective safeguarding culture.
54. Staff receive suitable training. When new staff join the school, they receive safeguarding training as part of their induction. All staff receive regular and ongoing face-to-face training, which is topped up by online learning and other updates. As a result, staff know and understand their roles and the school's procedures. They report any concerns about pupils promptly when they arise.
55. The school's safeguarding leaders receive regular training for their roles. They take timely action, when necessary, in response to the concerns that staff raise. Leaders work with agencies such as the police and children's social care to gather advice or to secure the support that pupils need. Leaders have a good understanding of the 'Prevent' duty and their roles and responsibilities around it.
56. Safer recruitment processes are robust. All required checks are made before anyone starts work at the school. These are recorded accurately in the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks (SCR).
57. Leaders put suitable arrangements in place to filter what pupils can access on the internet and to monitor their online usage. The safeguarding team receives alerts about pupils' internet use, to which it responds quickly and appropriately.
58. Suitable processes are in place for reporting allegations against staff, including low-level concerns. Staff receive training to remind them of what to do if they have a concern. Staff report concerns appropriately and leaders respond effectively to any that are raised.
59. Pupils are taught about safety matters through PSHE and other aspects of the curriculum as well as through assemblies and visiting speakers. Pupils learn about online safety and are regularly reminded of how to keep themselves safe while using the internet.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | Sancton Wood School |
| Department for Education number | 873/6009 |
| Registered early years number | EY536962 |
| Address | Sancton Wood School 2 St Paul's Road Cambridge Cambridgeshire CB1 2EZ |
| Phone number | 01223 471703 |
| Email address | richard.settle@sanctonwood.co.uk |
| Website | www.sanctonwood.co.uk |
| Proprietor | Mr Aatif Hassan |
| Chair | Mr Aatif Hassan |
| Headteacher | Mr Richard Settle |
| Age range | 4 to 16 |
| Number of pupils | 351 |
| Number of children in the early years registered setting | 51 |
| Date of previous inspection | 15 to 17 November 2022 |

Information about the school

61. Sancton Wood is a co-educational day school in Cambridge. The school consists of a prep school and a senior school. The school operates on two sites, which are a short distance apart. The senior school is located on a separate site approximately a third of a mile from the prep school. The school is part of Dukes Education and is overseen by a board of governors.
62. There are 12 children in the early years, comprising one Reception class. There is also a separate early years setting, which is registered with Ofsted, that provides for children between nine months and four years.
63. The school has identified 55 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
64. The school has identified 28 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
65. The school states its aims are to provide a nurturing, inclusive and academically ambitious education that enables every child to thrive socially, emotionally and intellectually, within a supportive all-through community.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

27 to 29 January 2026

66. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

68. 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