



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

Heatherton School

October 2021

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School's Details

School	Heatherton School			
DfE number	825/6021			
Registered charity number	310630			
Address	10 Copperkins Lane Amersham Buckinghamshire HP6 5QB			
Telephone number	01494 726433			
Email address	office@heatherton.com			
Headmistress	Mrs Nicola Nicoll			
Chair of governors	Mr Gavin Crawford Laws			
Age range	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	140			
	Boys	7	Girls	133
	EYFS	33	Years 1 to 6	107
Inspection dates	12 to 15 October 2021			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Heatherton School is a prep school, founded in 1912. It is co-educational in the Nursery, which is for children aged 3 and 4 years and caters for females only thereafter in Reception and Years 1 to 6. In 2011 the school became a member of the Berkhamsted Schools Group which is a registered charity and incorporates six schools for pupils between five months and 18 years of age, all under the direction of the principal. All schools share governance and oversight from both the principal and the Berkhamsted Schools Group board of governors.
- 1.2 During the period March to July 2020, the school maintained its provision for children of key workers at another site within the Berkhamsted Schools Group and then for Nursery, Reception, Year 1 and Year 6 in the final weeks of term following government guidance.
- 1.3 During this closure the school provided remote learning materials for all pupils.
- 1.4 In the interests of infection control during the COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic, inspection evidence was gathered partly remotely and partly on-site to reduce contact within the school setting.
- 1.5 In line with the direction given by the Department for Education (DfE) at the time, no evaluation has been made of the nature or effectiveness of any provision made during the period March to August 2020, including its impact on pupils' learning, achievement or personal development. Any concerns relating to pupils' welfare during this period which directly relate to measures implemented by the school have been considered.
- 1.6 During the lockdown period of January to March 2021, all pupils other than the children of key workers or vulnerable pupils received remote learning provision at home.
- 1.7 In 2020 and 2021, public examinations were not held. Since 2020, EYFS profiles have not been externally moderated.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.8 Within a family community, the school aim is to instil in every pupil the confidence to face challenges, to be educationally enthused and motivated, confident, polite, curious, resilient, outwardly thinking and ready to take on the next steps of their educational journey. The school seeks to develop pupils' moral awareness and strong appreciation of their own traditions and compassion and respect for others.

About the pupils

- 1.9 Most pupils come from professional and business backgrounds. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average. The school has identified eleven pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include a wide range of difficulties, all of whom receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care plan or statement of special educational needs. English is an additional language (EAL) for three pupils, none of whom receive additional support. The curriculum is modified for pupils identified as the more able in the school's population, and also for other pupils who have special talents in sport, drama, dance, art and music.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

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

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

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

COVID-19: Inspection judgements do not cover the period March to August 2020 inclusive.

Key findings

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

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

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

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

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

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

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

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

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

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

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

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

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

PART 6 – Provision of information

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

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

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

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

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

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

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

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

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

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

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

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

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

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

- Pupils throughout the school show extremely positive attitudes towards their academic studies and make excellent progress, achieving at outstanding levels in relation to their ages.
- Pupils show a high degree of confidence in and enjoyment of their learning and are willing to take risks, due to the close and productive relationships they maintain with staff and peers.
- Pupils communicate with each other and their teachers at a high level. They exhibit excellent listening skills and the ability to use higher order subject related vocabulary is a strength.

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

- Pupils have an extremely well-developed sense of self-belief and self-confidence whilst showing humility and empathy towards others.
- Pupils' behaviour is excellent. They are caring, courteous and respectful of each other and all members of their school community.
- Pupils flourish in roles of responsibility and have an understanding of the needs of others outside their own community, regularly organising fund raising and community activities.

Recommendations

3.3 In the context of the excellent outcomes, the school might wish to consider:

- Enable pupils to reflect on their learning more effectively through the provision of high quality and informative feedback throughout the school.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

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

3.5 Pupils achieve highly and exceed expectations across all areas, well above their commensurate ages. The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence from lesson observations, scrutiny of pupils' work, and the school's own assessment data, show attainment to be well above national age-related expectations, including in English and mathematics. Pupils who take part in the Buckinghamshire 11+ exams are extremely successful in gaining places at academically selective maintained schools. Children in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) make excellent progress from their starting points with a large majority exceeding expectations for their age.

Throughout the school, all groups of pupils achieve high standards across the curriculum, benefitting from leaders' regular monitoring of attainment and progress, where data is used extremely effectively to identify pupils' needs at any early stage and takes account of the individual pupils' learning requirements through personalised planning. Teachers' insistence on high expectations ensures that pupils strive for, and achieve, high standards in their learning and gain skills that enable them to make positive transitions within their school and to their senior schools. Pupils with SEND make significant progress so that their attainment meets their expected levels. The most able pupils respond confidently to the challenges provided with the result that their learning accelerates. They have been highly successful in attaining scholarships to senior schools where they can further develop their strengths and talents. Parents in the pre-inspection questionnaires agreed that their children's individual needs are met effectively.

- 3.6 Pupils demonstrate excellent subject specific knowledge in English, mathematics and science and they are highly effective in applying their skills across different subjects. Their creative and aesthetic skills are nurtured to an exceptional level and are extremely well-developed. This was seen in music activities, where pupils sang and played instruments with excellent tone and harmony, and in varied art works on display around the school. English, mathematics and science skills are outstanding; children in the EYFS use emerging language skills with confidence, understanding and using knowledge of single sounds and digraphs to support their word building attempts, whilst pre-prep pupils use nouns and adjectives successfully to add interest to their writing. Pupils in the middle school displayed an excellent aptitude, working at a high level and identifying inference and nuance when discussing extracts from the class book *Edward Tulane*. In science, older pupils are able to apply their learning, such as when one pupil acted in the role of teacher as peers listened attentively to an excellent, albeit gruesome and graphic account, of the meaning of taxidermy.
- 3.7 Pupils across the school are effective communicators and develop their language skills exceptionally well, communicating with each other and their teachers at a high level. Children in the EYFS, when completing a capacity task, confidently articulated their ideas, using relevant and descriptive vocabulary, discussing their reasoning clearly whilst reflecting on how the vessel size would define the filling time. In Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) lessons, older pupils took part in a sophisticated discussion regarding refugees, asylum seekers, migrants and their rights and responsibilities in law. Pupils openly share their views, displaying deep understanding of the subject matter, whilst being attentive and respectful of the views of their peers as the result of supportive, knowledgeable teaching and excellent use of open-ended questioning, encouraging pupils' critical thinking and reasoning. By the time they leave the EYFS, children have developed strong phonetic skills enabling them to read proficiently, and older pupils apply reading and comprehension skills extremely well. Pupils' written work is accurate and fluent with high level language being used to good effect. Younger pupils' work demonstrated confident application of punctuation, contextual language and use of capital letter sentences for effect while older pupils accurately used similes, metaphors, onomatopoeia, and alliteration to write poetry. Pupils exhibit excellent listening skills with both their peers and teachers. They listen extremely attentively in class and articulate discussions adeptly.
- 3.8 Pupils of all ages demonstrate excellent mathematic skills and understanding. Younger pupils used their strong understanding of inverse operations to check their calculations. Older pupils displayed their growing problem-solving expertise when learning about binary code and more able mathematicians' skills were extended by their being challenged to calculate their answers mentally. Pupils of all ages are confident to explore techniques and strategies, understanding that mistakes are an important learning tool. In interviews, pupils said that mathematics is in everything they do as it comes up everywhere, and that they relished the opportunities provided to complete extension activities and to take extra challenges home to extend their learning. Pupils are challenged effectively through problem-solving and enquiry-based learning, where high teacher expectations enable pupils of all ages and abilities to succeed.

- 3.9 Pupils are extremely confident when using Information Communication Technology (ICT) and make effective use of it to enhance their learning. Children in the EYFS programme mobile devices in the classrooms and use simple computer applications to support their learning. Younger pupils confidently use touch pad mice and demonstrate emerging skills on tablets. Prep school pupils use ICT to research, evaluate and as a presentation tool to support both class-based learning and project work, where they display high-level word processing skills. Pupils use their devices as an immediate solution to a problem by using search engines to find out answers independently. The development of pupils' competency in ICT is supported by leaders' and governors' investment in high-quality resources to develop skills, including the provision of individual devices for all pupils in Years 5 and 6, and a curriculum which encourages the use of ICT across a wide range of learning. For example, older pupils used their devices to explore the life of Carl Linnaeus and they displayed excellent research skills to find out new facts. In interviews, older pupils commented that they use their devices everywhere and that remote learning has played a big part in improving their ICT skills.
- 3.10 Pupils exhibit strong study skills from an early age, supported by high teacher expectations alongside a wide breath of opportunities across the curriculum. In the EYFS the youngest pupils were eager to share their knowledge of natural and manmade materials, identifying which are more suitable to use for their bug house; in middle school the pupils demonstrated strong analytical skills when reflecting on artefacts in Sikhism, asking pertinent questions and hypothesising as to the symbolic reference. Scrutiny of pupils' books demonstrated that pupils draw confidently on a wide range of sources including website research to analyse and synthesise information and then present it using ICT skills. Pupils of all ages concentrate, focus and behave extremely well and this creates an excellent learning environment where pupils can practice and develop their study skills in a positive and nurturing environment.
- 3.11 Pupils achieve highly in a wide range of social, cultural, technical, sporting and creative pursuits, supported by the school's diverse programme of activities, as well as a willingness to celebrate achievement and participation by pupils in external provision and events. Pupils are successful in areas such as regional mathematics competitions, the local art festival, and local and county sports fixtures, and a number of pupils are district swimmers. Pupils take examinations in practical and theoretical music, and speech and drama examinations. Pupils achieve high standards with numerous challenging productions where all pupils are given a speaking part, whatever their age or ability, as well as older pupils performing in the school orchestra.
- 3.12 Pupils' attitudes to learning are exceptional, their great desire to give of their best, succeed and maximise their ability being evident throughout the school. Pupils showed a willingness to have a go, confident in the knowledge that making a mistake is a learning opportunity rather than something to be feared. The exemplary behaviour in the classroom enables pupils to develop teamwork and leadership and their desire to do as well as they can is a significant strength and contributor to their positive learning outcomes, demonstrating that the school fully meets its aims in this regard.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils show excellent levels of self-understanding. Their self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence, including an understanding of how to improve their own learning and performance through their own determination, is extremely high. Children in the EYFS are confident in their environment, working together both indoors and outdoors, verbalising and sharing their ideas and developing perseverance. They are at ease with each other and the adults in the community. Pupils understand how different types of friendships may affect relationships, and consequently their self-esteem, valuing the school's restorative justice approach as a positive tool to reflect, to listen, and ultimately to resolve issues. Pupils are well prepared for the next step of their educational journey, and they speak confidently about what they gain from opportunities they are given to improve as

learners. Pupils' highly developed personal skills are promoted by the warm relationships provided by staff who know each individual exceptionally well and carefully monitor their welfare. From an early age, a strong emphasis on resilience, resourcefulness and perseverance helps pupils to develop mature levels of self-understanding and self-discipline. However, pupils' self-reflection is not always as strong as it could be as it is not always informed by high-quality written feedback in all areas.

- 3.15 Pupils display assurance and confidence in their decision-making abilities in the knowledge that they will be guided in the right direction by their teachers. Children in the EYFS exhibit strong levels of independence, where decision making opportunities are included from a very early age. They confidently give feedback using thumbs up or down and are prepared to discuss their reasoning in the knowledge that their opinion matters, whether right or wrong. Older pupils are able to consider options evaluatively and are willing to take risks in their learning. This was reflected in pupil discussions, where older pupils said that they felt that decision making impacts on their success, as they wouldn't get better if they didn't challenge themselves and recognised that making the right decision can help them in the future. Pupils understand that decisions are an opportunity to effect change and value the opportunity to influence school provision through the school council. Pupils' resilient approach leads to a robust sense of wellbeing and positive attitudes in accordance with the school's aim to instil in every pupil the confidence to face challenges and a readiness to take on the next steps of their educational journey.
- 3.16 Pupils develop a meaningful appreciation of the spiritual aspects of life, based on a strong understanding of different faiths. Pupils value opportunities to be quiet and reflective throughout the school day, when moments of contemplation allow them time to come together and think of others. These include assemblies, lessons and activities where they meditate or perform deep breathing and playtimes where there are areas available to sit quietly. Pupils' empathy toward others is promoted through creative activities, such as in the library display of paintings in the style of Van Gogh where pupils discussed and responded to their artwork, agreeing that he was a great artist and wishing he had enjoyed more success during his lifetime.
- 3.17 Pupils' moral understanding is of a high level. Pupils display an excellent understanding of behaviour expectations, benefiting from the school's golden rules, which create a whole school framework in which clear boundaries are set and followed. Pupils listen carefully to one another and respect and value the ideas of their peers. Older pupils displayed a mature empathetic approach when analysing the accessibility of education and work in Ghana, where children are kept away from school to work on the farm. One pupil observed that she would now no longer feel the same when she eats her favourite chocolate bar.
- 3.18 Pupils display excellent social skills and awareness of others, and they make outstanding contributions to the lives of others within the school. Co-operation between the pupils is excellent. For example, children in the EYFS were seen congratulating their friends at all times when they were successful, be it during music in Nursery or hands-on activities in Reception. In discussions, older pupils were positive about the success of collaboration, and this is supported by the buddy system, a restorative justice approach to behaviour and the school's expectation that they will resolve problems by talking together to find a solution, identifying this as a key skill for future life. This is supported by the strong sense of community where pupils demonstrate teamwork and close working relationships with each other, supported by the positive role modelling of the staff.
- 3.19 Pupils make outstanding contributions to the lives of others within the school. They care for each other and provide support and encouragement in abundance. Pupils are exceptional in their ability to work together and to support the needs of others, both inside and outside their community. Pupils take their positions of responsibility very seriously and they fulfil these roles with great pride and conscientiousness. This was witnessed on inspection where in the dining room they were diligently cleaning and clearing ready for the next sitting. Older pupils provide excellent role models for the younger pupils. A particular strength is the role of buddies to support the younger members of the school community in a variety of activities such as reading and spending time with children in the EYFS,

talking with them and in Nursery, older pupils have decorated stones with vibrant patterns, adding atmosphere to the Nursery enchanted fairy garden. Pupils understand the circumstances of those less fortunate than themselves and they are keen to help where they can. In discussions pupils said they do quite a lot of charity work, they understand why it is happening and find it satisfying as the money they raise is going to help someone who needs it. Pupils undertake a wide range of charitable work based on their own research into local needs, including donating food for their local food bank as part of their Harvest Festival celebration. These initiatives continued in lockdown when a pupil ran a second-hand sale to raise money for McMillan Cancer Charity, inspiring others in the school to do the same and following a virtual presentation, a sponsored bike ride was undertaken around the Isle of Wight to raise funds to help someone buy a wheelchair.

- 3.20 Pupils show enormous respect and value for different faiths and a deep understanding and appreciation of their own and other cultures, displaying a willingness to share their diverse experiences. They fully embrace the celebration of diversity which is a natural part of the school, enabled and affirmed by its approach and values. Pupils are respectful and tolerant and welcoming across all age groups, developing a strong understanding and tolerance of all faiths through regular opportunities through assemblies, religious education (RE), and PSHE lessons. In discussions, pupils stated that many of their friends belong to different faiths, and they felt it was good to learn about different beliefs and cultures to help them to understand about each other. Their positive attitudes are enriched by visits to places of worship as well as pupils and parents of those faiths sharing their customs and beliefs in the Nursery and whole school assemblies. This is reflected in their work where pupils demonstrate understanding of the importance of these traditions to the religious beliefs to the families associated within the school. In pupil discussions, pupils confirmed they don't notice if someone has a different skin colour, it doesn't make them better or worse, they will not tolerate any kind of racism and they just want everyone to be happy. This very much endorses the school's aim to develop pupils' moral awareness and strong appreciation of their own traditions and compassion and respect for others. This was reinforced in parental questionnaires in which almost all felt that the school strongly promoted values of respect and tolerance.
- 3.21 Pupils exhibit a strong sense of consideration for personal safety, fostered by the school's wellbeing programme which allows them to develop strategies and reflective thinking to maintain their mental health and wellbeing. They understand the need for a healthy lifestyle and make active choices in their daily life by successfully adopting healthy practices. Provision of healthy meal choices, as well as a culture of personal and online safety is found throughout the school and pupils are readily able to explain how to stay safe and well. Pupils feel safe at school and have a well-developed understanding of what they need to do in order to achieve a healthy body and mind. Pupils are able to articulate clearly how they are feeling and make the most of opportunities to develop excellent habits for life where they develop strategies that enhance their mental wellbeing. Pupils know where to seek help and embrace a resilient approach to challenges which they may face so they have a robust sense of wellbeing and a positive attitude to life.

4. Inspection Evidence

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

Inspectors

Mrs Julie Lowe	Reporting inspector
Mr Richard Metcalfe	Compliance team inspector (retired bursar, HMC school)
Miss Penelope Kirk	Team inspector (retired headmistress, IAPS school)