

# School inspection report

26 to 28 November 2024

## **Heatherton School**

10 Copperkins Lane

Amersham

Buckinghamshire

HP6 5QB

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 and leaders work in close partnership to ensure that effective measures are in place to promote pupils' wellbeing. The implementation of a clear strategic vision and regular reflection on the effectiveness of the provision leads to the school's continuous development. Leaders remain alert to any potential risks and mitigate these effectively.
2. Leaders review and thoughtfully adapt the curriculum so that teaching methods meet the learning needs of pupils in all year groups. Teachers communicate high expectations for pupils' learning outcomes. They draw on their in-depth subject knowledge and devise well-planned lessons to motivate pupils and extend their thinking. Pupils, including those in the early years, make good progress as a result.
3. Pupils of all ages are highly competent communicators. They display considerable vocabulary breadth and use mature sentence constructions during discussions. Further to recent staff training on oracy, subject leaders have reviewed planning, which has resulted in staff setting very high expectations for pupils' acquisition and understanding of subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers plan for discussion time in lessons, use questioning thoughtfully and regularly encourage pupils to reflect on the quality of their word choices and phrasing. They model advanced vocabulary effectively so that pupils quickly become familiar with its meaning and begin to apply the new terms independently. As a result, pupils ask insightful questions, explain their reasoning logically and make word selections based on their precision and clarity of meaning. The school's development of pupils' highly effective use of vocabulary is a significant strength which deepens their understanding across the curriculum.
4. Leaders use a range of assessment data, particularly in English and mathematics, to adapt planning when needed, and to inform older pupils' preparation for senior school. In other subject areas, leaders tailor the monitoring of pupils' progress over time to match the needs of their subject. However, leaders' strategic oversight of assessment across the wider curriculum is not as well developed as possible. This reduces opportunities for leaders to reflect comprehensively on further ways to maximise pupils' ongoing learning.
5. Leaders and staff communicate high expectations of behaviour and teach pupils how their actions can impact others. As a result, pupils are well behaved and respectful.
6. Leaders have revised the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme to provide greater flexibility in meeting pupils' learning needs. Careful choices of topics, such as managing one's own emotions and ways of keeping physically healthy, provide pupils with strategies to support their overall wellbeing.
7. Pupils are well prepared for senior school. The school enables pupils to develop financial awareness and promotes their sense of responsibility to others by enabling them to carry out leadership roles, such as school and eco-councillors. They show consideration for the needs of others and engage actively in the community, both locally and further afield.
8. Safeguarding leaders implement suitable arrangements to protect pupils from harm. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable in safeguarding matters.

## 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 strategic oversight of assessment across the wider curriculum in order to best support pupils' ongoing learning.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school and ensure that leaders utilise their skills and knowledge to carry out their responsibilities well. The various sub-committees meet regularly. Detailed reports from school leaders keep governors updated on the workings of the school, providing them with information on pertinent issues, such as pupils' attendance and behaviour, complaints and safeguarding. Governors scrutinise policies and procedures regularly to assure themselves that they reflect current statutory guidance.
10. Governors and leaders set out a clear vision for the school's ongoing development. They routinely reflect on its outcomes and readily adapt procedures, when needed. Leaders ensure that policies are implemented appropriately through careful day-to-day oversight and regular emails to staff outlining any updates to policies or procedures. A range of initiatives have recently been introduced to enhance the school's provision in teaching and learning. For example, a new curriculum in Years 1 and 2, a subject review of mathematics and the introduction of a new programme of study in PSHE have all been carefully researched to maximise pupils' learning outcomes.
11. In the early years, leaders provide regular opportunities for staff to pursue their training interests and to reflect on their own practice. This enables leaders to plan effectively for the children's needs.
12. The school's aims are widely understood by pupils. Pupils display compassion in their discussions and explain how resilience and collaboration support their ongoing learning. Leaders share the school's aims and values through assemblies as well as during planned events and learning points in lessons to enhance pupils' understanding.
13. Leaders provide helpful information to parents on the school's website, including ways of contacting the school and the required range of policies. They share information about pupils' performance from the previous year so that parents are kept updated. Parents receive regular reports about their children's progress and achievement.
14. Leaders form beneficial partnerships with a range of external agencies. They seek specialist advice, when necessary, to inform their ongoing practice, and work with external safeguarding partners to protect pupils' wellbeing.
15. Leaders remain vigilant to possible risks. Staff receive regular specialist training in risk assessment. There are detailed risk assessments for various activities, including educational visits, outdoor learning and the suitable use of teaching spaces. Risk assessments identify suitable control measures to minimise the potential risks identified.
16. An effective policy is in place to manage any complaints. Leaders step in to address concerns at the first opportunity, ensuring that complaints are kept to a minimum. They keep detailed records and take prompt action to address concerns if needed. Leaders utilise parental surveys to better understand parents' perspectives about the provision so that they can address any issues at an early stage.
17. Leaders and governors fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. A detailed accessibility plan is kept under ongoing review. The plan outlines the school's commitment to equal opportunities for all pupils. Adaptations, including ramps, specialist classroom resources and

arrangements for examinations, ensure that all pupils have equal access to the curriculum, school documentation and the physical environment. No pupils are discriminated against by the school.

### **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 designed a well-structured curriculum so that pupils acquire new skills and knowledge across a broad range of subjects. Regular subject reviews and detailed planning ensure that pupils' subject knowledge is developed methodically. Leaders plan, review and adapt programmes of learning thoughtfully so that teaching methods and environments cater for the needs of the different age groups.
20. Based upon their attainment by the end of Year 6, pupils typically achieve at or above national age-related expectations in mathematics and English. Teachers' expert subject knowledge, well-planned lessons and high expectations inspire pupils and challenge their thinking. Pupils make good progress as a result. Learning assistants are effectively deployed to offer targeted support. Well-run and challenging discussions enable pupils to vocalise their thinking and hear the views of others. This strengthens their reasoning skills.
21. Leaders provide extensive opportunities for staff to carry out research into effective teaching, and their findings are shared with colleagues across the school group. As a result, well-chosen teaching methods enable pupils to learn well, be ambitious for their own outcomes and feel confident when meeting challenge.
22. In Years 1 and 2, leaders have recently introduced a curriculum designed to build on pupils' earlier learning experiences. The combination of teacher-led instruction alongside an emphasis upon targeted activities for pupils to explore supports pupils' independence and problem-solving skills. In mathematics, pupils reason confidently when discussing the properties of different shapes. Resources are used creatively. Construction materials and electronic devices, for example, allow pupils to participate in scenarios relevant for their future lives. For example, pupils take photographs of what they build during construction activities so that they can reflect on the effectiveness of their designs during discussions with peers. Well-structured lessons, stimulating activities and focused questioning heighten pupils' engagement and foster understanding.
23. Following on from recent whole-staff training, subject leaders have adapted planning to prioritise the effective and precise use of subject-specific vocabulary. Teachers model vocabulary effectively and set high expectations for pupils' understanding. They use well-chosen questions to draw pupils into using clear expression and encourage pupils to reflect on whether rephrasing an idea would add interest or clarify meaning. Consequently, pupils of all ages flourish in their levels of understanding, communication and quality of expression. Pupils' highly effective use of vocabulary deepens their understanding across the curriculum. This further extends to the way in which pupils ask insightful questions and engage in purposeful dialogue with their peers and teachers. Older pupils typically self-correct their comments, setting their own high expectations for word choice, precision and clarity.
24. Leaders utilise a thorough assessment programme to monitor pupils' attainment in English and mathematics over time. Leaders analyse assessment data for these subjects rigorously to inform pupils' preparation for future senior schools. In other subject areas, subject leaders adapt ways of monitoring pupils' progress to suit individual subjects. However, leaders' strategic oversight of assessment data across the wider curriculum is less well developed. This reduces opportunities for leaders to utilise such data to support pupils' learning as effectively as possible.

25. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their starting points. Leaders identify pupils' needs early and meet regularly with teachers to identify where additional learning or emotional support may be required. Specialist classroom resources, adaptations to examination arrangements and targeted teaching methods ensure that pupils increase in skills and confidence.
26. Staff are well trained to meet the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL), when additional support is required. Leaders assess pupils' language fluency on entry to the school and provide effective individual support for their English should this be required. As a result, pupils who speak EAL make good progress in their English.
27. Children in the early years are confident communicators. They respond positively to their teachers' high expectations by sharing their ideas and experimenting with their use of language. For example, children incorporate new vocabulary in conversations with adults and peers, use phrases from different languages and perform sign-language actions. Daily storytelling opportunities enhance children's understanding. For example, children identify two-dimensional shapes in a story and discuss their different properties with confidence. Adults make effective use of repetition and modelling sentences so that children quickly become familiar with new language structures.
28. Leaders regularly share information in meetings, and ensure that parents are kept updated with regular reports about pupils' performance.
29. Leaders encourage pupils to practise and broaden their skills by providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities. For example, in gymnastics club, pupils strengthen their physical agility by learning how to perform cartwheel vaults and beam dismounts, and in chess club, players exercise their thinking and analytical skills.

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

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



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

31. A programme of PSHE education, including relationships education, is appropriate for the ages and needs of the pupils. Topics such as how to keep healthy both physically and mentally help pupils to grow in self-understanding. Leaders have recently introduced a new programme of study to offer teachers greater flexibility to adapt the length of time spent on specific topics to respond fully to pupils' questions and needs. Leaders explained the new scheme to parents and shared a range of resources.
32. Leaders focus on topics in PSHE designed to enhance pupils' confidence and self-understanding. Younger pupils start the year by learning strategies for adjusting to the routines of a new year group. In the higher years, pupils receive guidance on managing emotions, such as asking for help or regulating their breathing. In this way, pupils become familiar with ways to navigate personal challenges.
33. Leaders prioritise pupils' emotional wellbeing by encouraging skills in independence and resilience, stepping in to provide individual support when needed. Leaders plan activities that enable pupils to experiment with new challenges in the classroom, during extra-curricular activities and in pupil-led fund-raising events. Pupils benefit from the calm surroundings and regular access to the library to talk through any worries with a trusted adult.
34. Pupils keep physically fit and active through weekly physical education (PE) and games lessons and swimming. Well-planned lessons and teachers' specialist subject knowledge enable pupils to develop agility and improve technique. Regular participation in fixtures and sporting competitions, including netball and cross-country, builds pupils' skills and knowledge around ball control, positional play and stamina.
35. Leaders have created a clear code of conduct which is understood by pupils. Leaders and staff use rewards effectively to promote positive behaviour. They use sanctions, including verbal reminders and warnings, appropriately when required. Leaders routinely analyse records of pupils' behaviour for any trends arising. Pupils recognise the various consequences of behaviour that falls below the school's high standards. Trusting relationships between pupils and teachers result in close collaboration so that pupils' concerns are shared and quickly addressed. Pupils are well behaved, respectful and courteous as a result.
36. The anti-bullying strategy is effectively implemented. Incidents of bullying seldom occur, and leaders respond promptly and sensitively to support all pupils affected when they do. Leaders reflect on any incidents arising so that patterns can be identified and adjustments made to procedures, where needed.
37. Supervision is effective. Teachers supervise breaktimes closely and the appropriate staff-to-child ratios are consistently maintained for children in the early years. Staff remain vigilant and ready to support pupils, if required.
38. Leaders create a positive culture around pupil attendance and explain to pupils about the potential impact of regular absence on their education. Leaders review absence data weekly to identify any

patterns and communicate closely with parents and pupils to offer support. The local authority is informed when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points.

39. Leaders promote pupils' welfare through a comprehensive approach to health and safety. The school buildings are well maintained and suitable safety checks are routinely carried out. Health and safety documentation is routinely monitored by leaders and governors. Fire evacuation procedures and signage are clearly displayed, and regular fire evacuation drills ensure that potential risks from fire to pupils are reduced.
40. Appropriate facilities and arrangements are in place so that pupils' medical needs are catered for. Medicine is securely stored and detailed records are kept when first aid is administered. Staff receive regular training in first aid and a suitably trained paediatric first aider is available when early years children are in school and during visits off-site.
41. Children in the early years enhance their physical development through weekly PE lessons and regular access to outdoor learning. Use of climbing equipment and construction materials increases their co-ordination and strength. Opportunities during indoor lessons, for example through actions in song performance, improve children's balance and positional awareness. Adults form nurturing and purposeful relationships with children. They understand when to step in to support children and when to encourage their independence so that children gain confidence in their own abilities.

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

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

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

43. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their financial awareness effectively. Pupils learn about the role of money in everyday life across a range of subjects and activities, such as problem-solving scenarios in mathematics and learning about profit in fundraising events. In history, teachers explain the value of money by considering changes to wages over time, and in PSHE, pupils are challenged to purchase groceries on a limited budget. In this way, pupils learn strategies to inform their decision-making as adults.
44. Staff engage pupils with themes relating to inclusion and diversity so that pupils learn to appreciate the importance of mutual respect. For example, they challenge gender stereotypes and explain misconceptions relating to careers. Pupils are introduced to well-chosen female role models, including notable scientists. They explore topical issues faced by different groups of people in the world, such as those impacted by conflict, and reflect on these thoughtfully and empathetically. Through their daily interactions, pupils display consideration and sensitivity towards others.
45. Leaders regularly schedule speakers to introduce pupils to possible future career options. Experiences such as those shared by a former Olympian, an architect and a speaker from the United Nations offer pupils insight and practical advice about preparing for possible careers.
46. Effective transition arrangements ensure that children in the early years proceed smoothly into the next stage of their schooling. Older pupils are well prepared for senior school. For example, by taking responsibility for personal electronic devices and using a range of facilities at other settings within the group, pupils become familiar with the expectations and routines of senior school.
47. Leaders prioritise children's awareness of using 'kind hands' from Nursery onwards and communicate a clear set of 'golden rules' outlining a moral code. Leaders encourage pupils to voice their ideas, including about ethical issues, in class discussions and during debating club, where pupils prepare their arguments and challenge each other's views. These measures help pupils to confidently distinguish between right and wrong and understand the impact of their actions on others.
48. Pupils develop their empathy and recognition of their responsibilities towards others as a result of the leadership opportunities entrusted to them. Eco-councillors are vigilant in switching off classroom lights and closing windows to save energy. The active school council represents the views of peers. School councillors have influenced a range of initiatives, including variations to lunch menus, the planting of flowerbeds and the introduction of a school pet tortoise.
49. Pupils engage purposefully with local and wider communities. They participate in activities such as tree planting, litter picking, carol singing and regular cross-country events with local schools. This enables them to grow as responsible citizens. Fund-raising events, such as for lifeboat and animal charities, encourage pupils to understand their responsibilities to wider society. For example, a project to support an elephant orphanage in Zambia develops pupils' understanding of cultures, laws and customs different from their own.
50. Pupils learn the significance of fair processes and understand that a system of rules supports a safe society. Leaders plan opportunities for pupils to be introduced to various democratic systems and

laws. For example, pupils discuss the recent elections in the United States and learn the importance of following rules in competitive sport when playing netball matches.

51. Adults in the early years act as positive role models for children so that children learn to form successful friendships. They provide opportunities for children to interact with other adults in school in order to foster confidence with wider social interactions. Through imaginary play and discussion during storytelling, children practise different roles and relationships. This is further explored in the higher years where a focus upon speaking and listening provides pupils with the tools to communicate effectively with a range of different audiences.

### **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. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. They use regular meetings with school leaders and visits to the school to check that an effective safeguarding policy is implemented which reflects current statutory guidance, and that rigorous and suitable measures are in place to protect pupils from harm. The perspectives of staff are considered in the annual review of the safeguarding policy and procedures.
54. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained to carry out their roles. They seek specialist advice from relevant external agencies and make referrals when required, ensuring that any concerns are followed up. Leaders keep in contact with external safeguarding partners and attend forums to inform their ongoing practice. Record-keeping is detailed when incidents arise.
55. Staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding procedures. They reflect on recent and regular training to support their daily roles. A detailed induction programme introduces safeguarding protocols to new staff. Consequently, staff are confident in identifying any potential safeguarding issues and follow suitable procedures for reporting concerns, including any that might arise about child-on-child abuse or the conduct of staff.
56. Pupils are taught how to keep themselves safe online, both at home and in school. They speak confidently about the need for security around passwords and protecting sensitive data. Leaders oversee meticulous systems for filtering and monitoring internet use. They carry out regular checks of devices and review any breaches thoroughly.
57. Effective arrangements enable pupils' concerns to be addressed. Staff use their detailed knowledge of pupils to remain vigilant to any changes in their behaviour. Pupils' access to trusted adults and worry boxes, as well as opportunities to speak to a counsellor and the school chaplain, provide different ways in which they can voice any concerns.
58. All required safer recruitment checks are carried out before any person starts work at the school and are recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Heatherton School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	825/6021
<b>Registered charity number</b>	310630
<b>Address</b>	Heatherton School 10 Copperkins Lane Amersham Buckinghamshire HP6 5QB
<b>Phone number</b>	01494 726433
<b>Email address</b>	office@heatherton.com
<b>Website</b>	<a href="https://www.berkhamsted.com/heatherton">https://www.berkhamsted.com/heatherton</a>
<b>Proprietor</b>	Berkhamsted Schools Group
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Carol Copland
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Nicola Nicoll
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11
<b>Number of pupils</b>	164
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	12 to 15 October 2021

## Information about the school

60. Heatherton School is an independent day school located in Buckinghamshire. It caters for female pupils from Reception upwards. The Nursery, for children aged two to four years, is co-educational. The school is part of the Berkhamsted Schools Group, which is a registered charity. The school is overseen by a board of governors. The current chair of governors took up her role in September 2023.
61. There are 39 children in the early years comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
62. The school has identified 15 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. Very few pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL).
64. The school states its aims are for pupils to aim high with integrity, to be adventurous and to serve others.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

26 to 28 November 2024

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

66. 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
- a discussion with the principal of the Berkhamsted Schools Group
- discussions with the headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. 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)**.

#### Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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