

School inspection report

27 to 29 February 2024

Somerhill

Tudeley Road

Tonbridge

Kent

TN11 0NJ

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	4
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS.....	4
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	5
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	6
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	7
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	9
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	10
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	11
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	12
SAFEGUARDING	13
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	13
SCHOOL DETAILS	14
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	15
INSPECTION DETAILS	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders and governors work effectively together. They take into account the views of staff to produce and review a school development plan which reflects the school's values and aims. Governors exercise effective oversight of the school. They analyse the information and data presented to them to ensure that leaders continue to promote the wellbeing of pupils.
2. Leaders have clearly defined policies about teaching. These are effective in guiding teachers so that pupils learn and make good progress and understand what is expected of them. They experience familiar structures and procedures across lessons, and can therefore engage with the lesson quickly and maximise their learning opportunities. Teaching across the school is of a consistently high standard.
3. The focus on the importance of speaking and listening, reading, writing and numeracy by leaders is reflected in the aims of the school development plan. There is a clear goal to develop secure phonic awareness from a young age, enabling pupils to make rapid progress in learning to read independently. Enabling pupils to make effective use of technology is also a high priority both in the curriculum and in extra-curricular opportunities, and pupils develop secure technological skills as a result.
4. A broad physical education program, combined with the consistent encouragement of pupils to express their views and emotions, supports their physical and mental health. The personal, health and sex and relationships curriculum has been recently strengthened after a careful review so that pupils gain relevant understanding and age-appropriate knowledge in these areas. Pupils are self-aware, act responsibly and understand the importance of respecting all members of society irrespective of any difference.
5. Early years children experience a wide range of learning activities. Staff with a secure knowledge of individual children plan in line with their interests and existing skills, making effective use of the learning environments available. Children rapidly develop both effective communication skills and emotional awareness.
6. Leaders have defined an effective skills-based learning framework which is applicable not just in school but in pupils' later stages of education. Pupils are aware of these skills and their importance but not all teachers are consistent in reinforcing these habits in lessons.
7. Pupils develop an awareness of the world outside school through social and humanities topics and a focus on current affairs. Pupils understand the economic impact of choices people make. Pupils learn about a variety of world cultures from topics in art and humanities. However, pupils' knowledge of the diverse cultures in British society is more limited.
8. There is an effective safeguarding culture in the school, pupils are encouraged to speak about any concerns. Secure procedures to manage risk and health and safety are implemented. The welfare of pupils is given prime importance.

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:

- ensure pupils continue to develop their positive skills-based learning and social habits in line with the school's stated policy
- enable pupils to understand more fully the British values within modern society.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. The school leadership team work effectively together. They each have clearly defined roles and responsibilities and the appropriate knowledge and skills. Their clear school policies on teaching are effectively communicated, so there is a consistent approach which leads to high standards in teaching.
10. Governors and leaders have a well-defined policy outlining the school's rationale for teaching male and females in separate classes from Years 3 to 6. This is regularly reviewed both by the leadership team and by governors to ensure the model continues to benefit pupils. All pupils have equal access to teaching resources and the curriculum. Whilst lessons are in gender-based groups, the pupils are able to interact at play times and for co-curricular clubs and activities. Pupils of both genders interact and form positive social relationships outside of the classroom. Leaders both seek and consider pupils' views of these arrangements.
11. The school development plan is updated annually, with participation from staff working parties and the whole staff body, as well as the leaders and governors. This enables staff all to influence and understand any changes. Initiatives are linked to the aims and values of the school in defined areas. Each initiative is reviewed termly, and progress reported to governors.
12. After a review of practice, the leaders have recently introduced a new scheme of work to support pupils' personal and social development and the relationships and sex education curriculum. Governors effectively risk assess the implementation of initiatives to ensure that the resulting outcomes are as intended. Governors expect leaders to provide regular reports and supportive data to enable them to review previous initiatives, such as those introduced to further improve younger pupils' reading and writing skills.
13. Governors work through a committee structure which have senior leaders as members, to monitor school activity and report to the full board. All governors are appropriately trained. They ensure there is a broad range of skills in the governing body to enable suitably knowledgeable questioning and challenge of school practice. Governors, including the safeguarding governor, frequently visit the school and report back on their activities to the full board.
14. Leaders write policies which encapsulate the ethos and nature of the school as well as appropriately taking into account all relevant legislation or guidance. Their procedures always have the wellbeing of the pupils at the forefront.
15. Early years leaders effectively direct and oversee teachers' planning and provision across the prime areas of learning. The ongoing development of the outdoor learning areas has been effectively supported and resourced by governors and leaders in line with the recommendation from the previous inspection.
16. Governors' monitoring ensures that leaders fulfil their responsibilities with regard to health and safety in the school. There is a suitable risk assessment policy and supporting documents which give staff clear guidance on minimising risks, with individual risk assessments relating to areas of the school and activities such as trips and outings. The importance of safety in the school is made clear to the pupils. Specific aspects of the school grounds and facilities are individually and appropriately risk assessed.

17. The school's website provides parents and prospective parents with all relevant information about school procedures and ethos, as well as the required information on safeguarding. Any parental complaints are appropriately dealt with in line with policy and suitably recorded. Detailed and informative reports give pupils appropriate information about their child's attainment and progress.
18. There is a suitable disability access plan. Leaders liaised effectively with parents of pupils to ensure that provision makes reasonable adjustments and meets the needs of the pupils.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The broad and well-designed curriculum covers all the required aspects and ensures equal provision for both male and female pupils. Leaders focus on teaching a range of foreign languages and on making links between science, mathematics, engineering, and technology (STEM) topics. The content balance and design of the curriculum is regularly reviewed to ensure it continues to meet the needs of all the pupils. The breadth of subjects enables pupils to explore and experience a wide range of potential interests and gain a breadth of subject skills, particularly in the areas of focus.
21. There is clear guidance to teachers to make links between subject areas. Teachers plan lessons to engage pupils with the subject matter so that new knowledge is acquired rapidly. Knowledgeable curriculum leaders have a well-developed structure for regularly monitoring the planning and delivery of lessons. They have recently introduced a trial with older pupils through interviews and discussion on their work to review teaching from the pupils' point of view so that they too have an influence on teaching strategies. Teachers have ambitious aims for pupils' achievement in lessons. Leaders provide pertinent advice and guidance so that teaching standards are high across the school. When pupils leave the school, most attain entry to local selective schools.
22. Pupils are highly numerate and literate and use these skills confidently across the curriculum. There is a focus in the early years on the sounds which make up words, developing early reading and writing skills. By Year 2, pupils use this knowledge effectively to decode complex multi-sound words. Pupils apply their skills to support confident free writing of both stories and to answering questions about a text.
23. In early years, teachers and teaching assistants effectively model language including the use of numbers, which embeds children's early counting skills. Structured planning and a range of practical visual resources in mathematics enable younger pupils to quickly develop new skills and make good progress in their understanding of number. Almost all children reach their developmental milestones by the end of Reception.
24. Curriculum leaders are highly effective in analysing assessment data and disseminating this information to teachers, giving guidance as to appropriate support and interventions. Teachers know their pupils' abilities and needs well and plan to ensure all are appropriately supported and challenged. Pupils of all abilities make good progress. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities make rapid progress so that they are able to attain in line with their peers.
25. Pupils who have English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress with this aspect of their learning because teachers' planning takes into account where they may need support with aspects such as subject-specific language.
26. Teachers are highly knowledgeable about their subjects. Leaders make a wide range of extensive technological resources available so that technological skills are practised and used in a broad context. This effectively models the world of work, preparing pupils for the future.
27. Teachers challenge pupils to think with well-chosen targeted questions, encouraging pupils to work things out for themselves. The classrooms are a positive learning environment. Displays both show pupils that their work is valued and also to model their current learning. This allows pupils to use the display as an effective resource and supports their independence.

28. Teachers are quick to give positive reinforcement and detailed written feedback to which the pupils are expected to respond. This ensures the pupils have a clear understanding of how to improve and supports them in making good progress. Behaviour in lessons is exemplary.
29. Pupils also make good progress in acquiring creative skills and knowledge. Knowledgeable subject specialists instil a love of their subject into the pupils. Pupil artists can extend drawing and painting skills to pottery and 3D design. An exhibition of work shows how pupils express their knowledge of science in artistic forms.
30. Leaders give a high priority to providing an extensive range of clubs and activities as part of the school co-curriculum. This covers activities from robotics to beekeeping and ensures that pupils have opportunities to both extend their skills and interests and also explore opportunities to find interest which suit and enthuse them.

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

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

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

32. Leaders create policies which effectively support the welfare of pupils and are rigorously enacted. There is a positive culture of good behaviour and anti-bullying practice. Poor behaviour and bullying are rare and promptly challenged. There are clear strategies to support behaviour management where it is needed, and pupils are supported and encouraged to reflect upon their actions. Presentations in assemblies cover aspects such as safe movement around school and appropriate behaviour in communal areas to help pupils understand leaders' expectations.
33. The core values of the school are embedded in everyday life and are understood by the pupils. In the pre-prep school soft toy pets embody each of the different values and are a focus for reflection and conversation in lessons. Pupils gain stamps in 'passports' when they enact the values of one of the pets. In the prep school, values awards are celebrated in assemblies, and pupils can also be nominated by their peers when they enact a core value. Pupils are kind and understand the importance of treating one another and all in society with respect. They take responsibility for actions and know to be resilient in the face of challenge.
34. Leaders have recently introduced a scheme of work which has enhanced the teaching of British values and relationships and sex education. Pupils learn about world faiths in philosophy, religion and ethics lessons. Faith stories on moral issues form the basis of philosophical discussions and debate in these lessons. Through discussions, pupils develop clear respect for those with different views, values and beliefs and learn to be tolerant and respectful of all types and groups of people. They understand the features of healthy relationships and the importance of consent.
35. From an early age pupils have a common framework used by the pre-prep staff to give the children the language to express their emotions. Topics in their schemes of work help prep pupils to develop the emotional intelligence. Pupils are taught various strategies to support positive mental health, which is given high priority. Staff are trained in drawing therapy to help those who need emotional support. The many opportunities to perform in front of an audience in music soirees, orchestras, concerts and plays help pupils to build their self-confidence and self-esteem.
36. Leaders provide an extensive physical education programme both within the curriculum and in extra-curricular activities. This enables pupils to explore their varying interests as well as encourage a healthy lifestyle. Carefully designed school lunches encourage healthy eating habits. Teachers' daily promotion of topics such as oral hygiene and healthy eating promote physical health in the early years.
37. Early years children have well-developed gross motor skills, balance and spatial awareness. Activities are planned to enable frequent use of the extensive outdoor space and resources for climbing, cycling and physical play so children can explore and develop their understanding and interests in a wide range of settings.
38. Pupils are encouraged to apply their physical and sporting skills in a range of activities from karate and gymnastics to gaining 'rooky lifeguarding awards'. Team sports are part of the curriculum which helps pupils to be physically and mentally healthy.

39. The school grounds are extensive, but pupils have a clear understanding of the boundaries of their play areas and are suitably supervised in school where needed, appropriate to age, as well as when outside at play times.
40. The school premises and grounds are well maintained. Leaders and governors are proactive in monitoring all aspects of health and safety. They ensure actions and changes are appropriately considered so that, in so far as possible to foresee, the school is a safe place. If incidents occur, they are reviewed with care and any recommendations are implemented. All recordkeeping is well ordered, detailed and shows maintenance actions and suitable responses to the fire risk assessment and fire evacuation procedures. Governors review health and safety practices and records to ensure procedures are in line with requirements and any actions required are undertaken.
41. The schools' admissions and attendance registers are appropriately monitored to show any patterns of absence and pupils who leave or join outside of normal time are appropriately reported to the local authority.
42. There are suitable numbers of staff trained in first aid, with paediatric trained first aiders available at all times. Staff act promptly to support pupils' health needs and in response to accidents, including completing reports to external bodies if needed. There are comfortable facilities for pupils who are not feeling well. Any medicine needed is appropriately stored and correctly administered. Suitably detailed records are kept of all actions and parents are informed if medical treatment is needed.

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 have a well-developed understanding of wider world events through the weekly publication of the school newspaper, which is compiled in conjunction with pupils. Teachers give pupils time to facilitate discussion on current affairs and so form their own opinions. Highly prized 'newsround rewards' are contested by classes in the weekly quiz to check pupils' understanding and knowledge of wider social issues.
45. However, pupils have a limited understanding of the breadth of cultural influences in wider British society. Their understanding of world cultures is developed through art and humanities topics. When looking at the arctic environment, pupils in the pre-prep learn about the Inuit creation story and research Inuit lifestyle. Pupils appreciate the different life experiences of characters in stories and build tolerance and respect for different traditions. There are some opportunities for pupils to celebrate cultures and faiths within their own community through assembly themes and parental visits which introduce pupils to the food, festivals and cultures of the parents' birth country.
46. Pupils learn about issues such as climate change and colonisation. This enables them to be reflective of their role in society and of the impact one can have on others. Pupils understand the impact of human activity on the environment and reflect on the importance on acting sustainably in our choices of energy.
47. Elements in the newly introduced personal, social and health education (PSHE) scheme of work, introduce pupils to concepts such as the Equality Act and understanding the difference between prejudice and discrimination and the importance of avoiding stereotyping. Teachers introduce topics ensuring an effective understanding of British values. Thoughtful written reflections from older pupils identify how the school enables pupils of all ages to enact these values in everyday school life.
48. Leaders develop a curriculum that includes many opportunities for pupils to develop their economic understanding. Teachers link class learning to future job skills enabling pupils to reflect on their relevance for future careers. Older pupils learn about income tax and budgeting. Teachers plan activities as part of PSHE to look at the economics of running theme parks based on revenue and these skills are put into practice when pupils run their own charity events. At the request of the pre-prep school council, teachers and pupils organised a film night and pupils understand they have to plan for snacks costing less than a pound, in order to create maximum revenue for their chosen charity.
49. Leaders have recently focused on an approach to skills-based learning as part of the teaching style they wish to promote at Somerhill. Teachers are encouraged to build skills such as collaboration, self-reflection and communication into lesson planning. The intent is that pupils are used to working collaboratively in groups, learning skills important to their future lives. These skills are not embedded into all lessons so that the pupils do not consistently benefit from this approach.
50. An effective program of activities, events and visiting speakers, such as female footballers and nutritionists, enables older pupils to reflect on potential future aspirations and careers. They learn how to write job applications and compare different professional salaries. Extra-curricular activities give them insight into opportunities in the world of engineering, and curriculum science technology

engineering and mathematics (STEM) activities, help pupils to develop an interest in the world of medicine and science.

51. School structures such as vertical groupings in the house system and the prefect system, enable the development of positive social skills between age groups and genders. Teachers enable many 'buddy systems' so that in supporting younger pupils in shared reading schemes and curriculum activities, older pupils learn to contribute and support their own community.
52. Leaders enable pupils to contribute to their own and the wider local community through fundraising activities and collections for the local food bank. Play leaders from older year groups encourage positive play in pre-prep. Year 2 pupils take a lead in supporting the younger children in carousels of craft activities.
53. Teachers focus on developing skills such as independence and confidence. Support for all pupils on 'move up day' and appropriate interview and education on exam techniques for older pupils, ensure that the pupils are well prepared for transition to the next stage in their education.

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

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

Safeguarding

55. Thorough and detailed safeguarding arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of all pupils, including those in the early years. The school has an open, positive safeguarding culture.
56. Pupils feel listened to when they express concerns and there is a range of adults they can go to. Pupils know how to use other school systems such as worry boxes and worry monsters to alert staff to their concerns. Teachers act quickly in response. The school technology curriculum and lessons in personal and social education, teach children how to be safe when online.
57. Those leaders with particular safeguarding responsibilities have appropriate experience and expertise. They receive up to date training and understand local procedures. They work in partnership with external agencies in a timely manner when needed. Effective actions are taken to manage any incidents which occur, acting in their best interests of pupils. The safeguarding team meet regularly to share information and discuss any pastoral concerns. Detailed records enable the swift monitoring of patterns and action.
58. Staff and volunteers receive appropriate training when joining the school. Their knowledge is tested in quizzes and regular updates ensure their training remains current. Staff are ready to act when needed. They have thorough knowledge of the school's safeguarding policies, including those relating to child-on-child abuse and radicalisation. These policies give staff a clear understanding of correct reporting and whistleblowing procedures, as well as those for reporting low-level concerns about adults. There is clear guidance to staff in the detailed code of conduct. Staff respond to concerns raised and are alert to any changes in pupils' behaviour which may indicate a concern.
59. The safeguarding arrangements and policy are regularly reviewed with the designated safeguarding lead by the safeguarding governor. These arrangements are reported to the full governing body, all of whom are suitably trained and aware of their responsibilities. Safeguarding is a priority area for discussion at all meetings, where governors offer suitable challenge as they review actions and procedures. There is appropriate oversight of online filtering and monitoring arrangements and of safer recruitment practices. A suitable record of appointments of all staff and governors is kept.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Somerhill
Department for Education number	886/6021
Registered charity number	1002212
Address	Somerhill Tudeley Road Tonbridge Kent TN11 0NJ
Phone number	01732 352124
Email address	office@somerhill.org
Website	www.somerhill.org
Proprietor	Somerhill Charitable Trust Limited
Chair	Mr Mark Jiskoot
Headmaster	Mr Duncan Sinclair
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	596
Date of previous inspection	19 to 21 November 2019

Information about the school

61. Somerhill School is based in a Jacobean house and comprises of three sections. Somerhill pre-prep is co-educational for pupils aged 3 to 7 including the early years. From the age of seven, male and female pupils are separated by gender in lessons. Female pupils are educated in Derwent Lodge up to the age of 11 and male pupils are educated in Yardley Court up to the age of 13.
62. The school is part of a charitable trust, overseen by one board of governors.
63. Somerhill has 99 children in seven early years classes. There are 14 children in Nursery, 40 in kindergarten and 45 in reception.
64. The school has identified 49 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). There are no pupils in the school who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
65. English is an additional language (EAL) for 7 pupils.
66. The school states its aims are: to help pupils to achieve the greatest all-round development and success of which they are capable in a caring and happy community. This includes promoting their academic, personal, spiritual, social, and moral growth. They seek to give each child self-esteem, resilience and a determination to make their lives as fulfilling as possible and to encourage pupils to work hard and take pride in their achievement whilst showing concern for others and the environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

27 to 29 February 2024

67. A team of 5 inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

68. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, 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.

69. 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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