

School inspection report

18 to 20 February 2025

Casterton, Sedbergh Preparatory School

Casterton

Kirby Lonsdale

Carnforth

Cumbria

LA6 2SG

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. Knowledgeable, committed governors liaise closely with suitably trained leaders to ensure that the Standards are met. Leaders implement appropriate policies effectively so as to promote the academic and pastoral development of the pupils. Positive relations between staff and pupils create a happy, purposeful atmosphere in the school and the boarding houses.
2. Well-planned and typically skilled teaching of a wide ranging and interesting curriculum enables pupils to make good progress. From the start of their education in Reception, teachers help children to build knowledge and develop their intellectual, creative and physical abilities. Teachers provide appropriate opportunities for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) so that they can access their lessons alongside their peers successfully. Teachers' feedback guides the pupils in how to improve. Regular reports to parents keep them informed of their child's development.
3. Leaders ensure that pupils have a busy, purposeful life in the boarding houses. They provide opportunities for boarders to influence the organisation of their houses in a positive manner. If boarders have concerns, they are confident to contact a trusted adult and there are many organised recreational options available to them. Older boarders, however, do not have sufficient supported opportunities to take advantage of free time for relaxation and the pursuit of their own interests.
4. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, relationships, health and sex education (RSE), religious education lessons and carefully planned assemblies teach pupils about social diversity. They learn about different lifestyles and beliefs and the importance of respect for others. There is a well-considered approach to behaviour, which leads to a calm and harmonious school community. Poor behaviour and bullying are rare and dealt with appropriately and effectively.
5. Leaders establish suitable systems and practices to manage the pupils' welfare, health and safety successfully. Careful risk management enables the school to offer pupils a wide range of curricular and extra-curricular activities. During the inspection, there were some minor errors in the management of health and safety. Leaders responded promptly and effectively to rectify these errors before the inspection was completed.
6. Social and economic education prepares pupils for life in British society. They learn about the local community and play an active and valuable role in its development. PSHE education lessons, assemblies and extra-curricular activities teach them about democracy, the legal system and key values such as freedom of speech. Leaders provide a programme of financial education which begins in Reception, teaches them how to manage money and gives them direct experience of handling cash.
7. Leaders liaise closely, as required, with external agencies. Leaders ensure that all aspects of safeguarding are managed effectively. The statutory pre-employment checks are completed before any adult begins working in the school.

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 that older boarders are supported to pursue their own interests and develop greater independence in boarding, as part of their preparation for adulthood
- ensure staff consistently implement health and safety procedures as leaders intend, and in line with the school's procedures.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders and governors work collaboratively and effectively to promote pupil wellbeing. Governors bring a range of skills and experience to the school, including education, finance, property management and health and safety. Collectively, governance and leadership possess appropriate expertise and knowledge. This enables them to support staff in maintaining high standards of teaching and pastoral care.
9. The proprietor body's oversight is rigorous and highly effective. Governors implement a programme of frequent visits to the school so that they can meet staff and pupils and look at the impact of leaders' work through a range of activities. This enables them to understand what is happening in the school and ensure the requirements of the Standards are being consistently met. Leaders report regularly to governors' meetings so that areas for development can be identified and appropriate action taken to improve the pupils' education. For example, leaders use assessment to identify aspects of the curriculum which could be improved and ensure necessary changes are made.
10. Leaders focus consistently on maintaining the school's ethos and advancing its aims. To this end, they ensure that policies are implemented effectively and reviewed regularly. Ambition, collaboration and kindness characterise the school's culture. Staff know the pupils well and mutual respect creates a warm, family environment.
11. Boarding leaders are appropriately trained. They provide pupils with a helpful introduction to boarding life which enables boarders to settle in quickly. As a result, pupils understand the principles which underpin boarding life and value the positive, friendly atmosphere which prevails in the houses. Boarding staff ensure the premises are well maintained and they meet the pupils' physical and emotional needs effectively.
12. Leaders ensure that they provide information, as required, to parents and other relevant stakeholders. Parents have access to regular and relevant information. Leaders maintain an informative website and provide regular newsletters. They provide regular and detailed reports for parents about their child's academic and personal development. Staff also meet with parents informally at the beginning and end of each school day.
13. Leaders maintain suitable links with external agencies, including the local authority, children's services, educational psychologists, occupational therapists and the police. They make referrals to them, as required, in a timely manner. As a result, the pupils' needs are met effectively.
14. The complaints policy is in line with statutory requirements, appropriate and provides clear information about how to raise any concern about school provision. Leaders ensure that any complaints receive an appropriate and timely response. Records of complaints and the action taken by the school, whether formal or informal, are maintained as required.
15. Leaders ensure appropriate oversight of risk management. Leaders ensure suitable risk assessments and mitigations are produced for the school site, educational visits, specific activities and for pupils with welfare needs. They review and adapt these routinely.
16. Leaders ensure that the school meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010. They provide an appropriate accessibility plan which is regularly reviewed, adapted and updated. Leaders provide a curriculum which is matched to the needs of individual pupils. They draw up suitable individual

education plans for pupils who have SEND. Information required by the local authority in respect of pupils who are in receipt of EHC plans is provided appropriately, including that related to funding.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders deliver a broad and rich curriculum supported by a diverse extra-curricular programme of activities and educational visits. Planning and schemes of work are well developed and appropriate across subjects and year groups, including for the youngest children in Reception. Leaders provide teachers with this clear guidance and high-quality resources to support pupils' learning and their development across linguistic, scientific, human, social, technological, physical and creative subjects.
19. Children in the Reception class access carefully planned activities and a range of play opportunities that help them to develop and learn effectively. Children develop early phonics and mathematics skills and understanding, such as the sounds which letters make or how to accurately apply terms such as shorter and longer when looking at the length of different items. Adults rigorously monitor what children know and can do, and support those who need any extra help. Staff use carefully structured questions and model appropriate language so that children successfully develop their communication skills. As a result, children are well prepared to move on to Year 1 by the end of the Reception year.
20. Teachers have a thorough understanding of their subject matter. They use a variety of effective teaching methods to ensure pupils extend their knowledge and understanding. Lessons are typically well planned, and teachers use an array of well-considered resources effectively. Teachers know the pupils well and respond thoughtfully to their individual needs. They give pupils support, when needed, and provide appropriate challenges for those ready to move on to the next stage of their learning. Teachers adapt lessons and resources to suit individual pupils' needs.
21. Pupils develop valuable study skills and take pride in their work. They have effective communication skills and demonstrate articulacy and confidence when speaking. They take risks in their learning, as was evident in a Year 7 computing lesson in which pupils worked together to programme traffic lights. They used their mistakes to work out how to attain a successful outcome.
22. Leaders employ an effective assessment framework which includes end of topic tests, more formal examinations and nationally benchmarked assessments. The information gathered is used to identify pupils who need extra support. These pupils receive suitable and timely support which enables them to make good progress in all areas of their learning. As a result, they are well prepared to move on to secondary school.
23. Teachers provide pupils with detailed written and verbal feedback which identifies their strengths and guides them in how to improve the standard of their work. This is valued by the pupils who take considerable pride in all aspects of their work.
24. Effective assessment enables leaders to identify pupils who have SEND early in their time at the school. Staff adapt their teaching and employ strategies which enable these pupils to access the full curriculum. As a result, they learn the same skills and knowledge as their classmates and make good progress.
25. Leaders ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are assessed thoroughly. The data gathered about the standard of their English enables teachers to adapt their lessons appropriately. Staff use a range of strategies such as word banks and individual tuition successfully to ensure the pupils who speak EAL can access the full curriculum and make good progress.

26. Leaders ensure the pupils can pursue a broad range of extra-curricular activities. Pupils can play many sports, including football, cricket, rugby, hockey, netball and rounders, and there are opportunities for drama, music and the creative arts. They derive considerable satisfaction from these activities, work collaboratively with their teachers and peers and learn lessons which will help them as they move to senior school and the adult world beyond.
27. Leaders provide boarders with a variety of activities in the evenings and at weekends. These include informal sports competitions, film nights, fashion shows, spa evenings and trips to places of interest. Pupils appreciate these but older boarders expressed frustration regarding a lack of free time. There are very few opportunities for older boarders to pursue their own interests and develop greater independence and self-sufficiency.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. A calm, friendly atmosphere prevails throughout the school. Staff model the behaviours that they want from pupils. Staff and pupil interactions are respectful and kind. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught to understand the importance of showing respect for each other and their teachers. Leaders achieve this through a well-planned assembly programme, the weekly chapel services, form periods and informal discussion in the boarding houses.
30. Leaders' thoughtful, sensitive and effective management of behaviour results in constructive pupil conduct. This behaviour is seen throughout the school and in the boarding houses. Leaders use behavioural records to monitor trends carefully and ensure that staff supervision is suitable and meets pupils' needs. Poor behaviour, especially any kind of discriminatory conduct, is rare and dealt with appropriately. Leaders ensure that support is provided for all pupils involved. If sanctions are required, leaders support pupils to amend such behaviour in the future.
31. Through PSHE education and religious studies, pupils develop greater understanding of themselves and the beliefs of others. They learn about the principal world religions, the significance of their festivals and their different perceptions of spirituality. Leaders ensure that the RSE programme teaches pupils, in ways appropriate to their age, about key topics such as physical growth and change, relationships, how to manage peer pressure, different sexualities and consent. Leaders ensure that parents are consulted about the RSE programme.
32. Pupils experience a rich and challenging programme of physical education which builds endurance and develops their physical skills, resilience and teamwork. Through exercise and sport, leaders teach pupils to understand how physical fitness contributes to better mental health. Pupils enjoy games and physical education and recognise the wider benefits of exercise for their health.
33. Reception staff devise appropriate activities to promote children's personal, physical and emotional development. The curriculum provides them with a range of physical activities and exercise. These activities, which include swimming twice a week and extra-curricular dance, enhance children's creativity and develop their physical skills. Teachers also provide activities that develop children's fine motor skills, such as painting and use of counters and beads in mathematics. Teachers use every opportunity to teach children how to work together successfully.
34. Boarding leaders ensure that there is effective wellbeing support for boarders. There is a thorough induction process for new boarders, including trial sleepovers, information packs and support from current boarders. Leaders use a range of formal and informal ways to gather boarders' views and concerns such as 'pupil voice' boxes. Boarders are confident that they can express their views and secure appropriate changes. Boarders know how to seek staff help during boarding time, including through the night, if they are unwell or have concerns. Boarders know about their independent adults who they can speak to if they have concerns about their welfare or that of others. Boarders also have times each day when they can contact their parents by phone or email.
35. Boarding premises are well maintained and provide a comfortable, homely environment for the pupils. Pupils can personalise their rooms and they have lockable cupboards in which to secure their possessions. They have appropriate areas for laundry and preparing food. They can gather in the

well-equipped common rooms in the evenings and at weekends to watch the television, play board games, read and socialise.

36. Leaders promote good attendance and monitor records carefully. Leaders ensure that admission and attendance registers are properly maintained. Local authorities are informed about pupils who join and leave the school at non-standard transition times in accordance with statutory requirements.
37. There is suitable medical accommodation and provision for first aid. There are a suitable number of first aid trained staff, including all early years staff who are qualified paediatric first aiders. Staff maintain suitable records of the administration of first aid or medication. Accidents are recorded and remedial action is taken, as required.
38. Leaders are knowledgeable about their responsibilities related to the premises. They ensure that they maintain appropriate arrangements related to health and safety, including those related to fire risk and pupil supervision. Leaders maintain the premises through a programme of frequent checks and prompt action. Staff teach pupils, including boarders, how to respond to different types of emergencies, including in the boarding houses. Leaders use a range of information to review and amend risk assessments. Most staff are well trained. However, there were a very small number of errors in how staff were maintaining the requirements of health and safety during the on-site inspection. These were rectified before the end of the inspection.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

40. Leaders use PSHE lessons effectively to teach pupils about important values. Displays in classrooms, corridors and boarding houses actively promote the school's ethos and celebrate its internationally diverse pupil body. Pupils learn about the values which underpin democratic society and the importance of respect and tolerance for those of different faiths, beliefs and lifestyles. Pupils discuss moral issues such as racial discrimination confidently and appropriately.
41. For early years children, staff prioritise their social development. Consistent behaviour management and the establishment of routines ensure that children learn to listen, take turns and show kindness to each other.
42. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities for aspects of school life. Older pupils serve as prefects and heads of house, looking after younger pupils and communicating their views to members of staff. There are form and sports captains and many positions as monitors which enable younger pupils to play an active part in school activities and acquire experience of leadership.
43. Pupils learn how they can play a valuable role in the local community. Specialist French language teaching and participation in a variety of house charity fund-raising activities enable early years children to learn about the wider world and the lives of others. A programme of 'giving back days' involves pupils in activities such as cleaning the local church, weeding the church grounds and visiting a specialist education centre for pupils with SEND and working with them on grounds maintenance. Younger pupils go on a trip to a beach and pick up litter to help keep it clean. Staff also take pupils to the Lake District National Park where they create new footpaths for public use.
44. Pupils learn about finance and the role of money in society. Staff introduce younger pupils to money through practical numeracy lessons and role-play areas, such as the farm shop. Assemblies on financial literacy are supported through subsequent mathematics lessons. Staff also give pupils real life experience of managing money. Pupils run stalls at the spring fair. They handle all the cash, count the money and provide funds to support the charities chosen by each house. All pupils take part in a fund-raising day and use the money to purchase Christmas presents for residents at a care home.
45. Pupils learn about key values such as mutual respect, the rule of law, individual liberty and democracy through PSHE lessons. They elect members of the school council and, through the Model United Nations club, they take part in debates which deepen their understanding of contemporary international events. Their understanding of democracy is strengthened by assemblies on the parliamentary system.
46. Leaders also ensure pupils are taught about British institutions. Pupils experience a wealth of visiting speakers who help them to understand important public roles. For example, a barrister spoke to pupils about the legal system and a local member of parliament led an assembly during democracy week and answered pupils' questions. Year 6 pupils take part in a residential trip to London where they visit the Palace of Westminster and learn about the women's suffrage movement and the establishment of a fully democratic society.

47. Staff teach pupils to appreciate the importance of public roles. For example, children in Reception learn about people who help us through visits from the police, firefighters, a vet, a doctor and a nurse. As they get older, leaders provide appropriate information about careers through the curriculum. Heads of departments also link their subjects to specific careers. For example, pupils learn how art is related to becoming an architect, a book illustrator and a printmaker. Engineers, doctors and physiotherapists visit to speak to pupils about how their scientific studies led to their careers.
48. The school prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education. As younger pupils move through the school, they benefit from 'moving-up' sessions in the summer term so they can manage the transition to the next year confidently. Leaders give older pupils greater freedom and responsibility in preparation for the move to the senior school.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. Leaders prioritise the safeguarding of pupils. They create a culture where the safety and wellbeing of pupils are paramount. Leaders align their work closely to the school's safeguarding policy which reflects current statutory guidance and is available to parents on the school website.
51. Safeguarding leaders are suitably trained and knowledgeable. Leaders ensure that members of staff receive the required training, including at induction, and regular updates on safeguarding matters. Staff are vigilant to pupils' needs and behaviours. They manage pupil disclosures and report any concerns, including those related to adults, appropriately and in a timely way.
52. Safeguarding leaders liaise with external agencies, including local authorities and children's services. They make referrals to external agencies promptly, when required. They maintain rigorous records of the actions that they take.
53. Governors maintain careful oversight of safeguarding. A programme of regular visits enables them to speak to staff and pupils, check safeguarding documentation and satisfy themselves that staff follow procedures appropriately. Safeguarding leaders report formally to the governing body each term and there is an annual review of safeguarding procedures. Governors give formal approval to the safeguarding policy which is reviewed and revised in line with statutory guidance.
54. Leaders and governors fulfil the school's statutory responsibilities regarding filtering and monitoring of internet use. They ensure that online activity in school and on school devices is appropriate. Staff teach pupils about how to stay safe, including online. They do this through the well-planned curriculum, assemblies and using appropriate external specialist visitors to support pupils' education.
55. Safer recruitment practices are implemented appropriately. All mandatory checks on adults who work with pupils are completed in line with statutory guidance. Leaders maintain an accurate single central record of appointments and this is checked frequently by senior leaders and governors.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Casterton, Sedbergh Preparatory School
Department for Education number	943/6005
Registered charity number	1080672
Address	Casterton, Sedbergh Preparatory School Casterton Kirby Lonsdale Carnforth Cumbria LA6 2SG
Phone number	01524 279200
Email address	prepoffice@sedberghprep.org
Website	http://www.sedberghschool.org
Proprietor	Sedbergh School
Chair	Mr Richard Gledhill
Headteacher	Mrs Kate Martin
Age range	4 to 13
Number of pupils	188
Number of boarding pupils	69
Date of previous inspection	8 to 11 March 2022

Information about the school

57. Casterton, Sedbergh Preparatory School is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged four to thirteen. It is located in Casterton, a village in Cumbria. The current headteacher took up her post in January 2025. The school is overseen by a board of governors.
58. There is one boarding house on the same site as the school for female pupils and one boarding house for male pupils. There is boarding provision on a full time, weekly or flexi boarding arrangement for boarders aged seven to thirteen.
59. There are six pupils in the early years comprising one Reception class.
60. The school has identified 46 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
61. English is an additional language for seven pupils.
62. The school states its aims are to build in the pupils the core values of ambition, collaboration, courage, creativity, kindness and responsibility.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

18 to 20 February 2025

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

64. 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
- 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. 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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