

School inspection report

17 to 19 October 2023

Highfield Priory School

Fulwood Row
Fulwood
Preston
Lancashire
PR2 5RW

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. Highfield Priory School is an academically successful school where pupils achieve consistently high attainment and 11+ placements in local grammar schools. Pupils are polite and fully engaged in their learning, benefiting from a well-planned curriculum and a dedicated team of staff. The school leadership team, together with a proactive and diligent governing body, promotes the wellbeing of pupils through their detailed evaluation, planning and implementation of the school curriculum.
2. Leaders ensure that pupils experience a challenging curriculum that comprehensively prepares them for the rigour and expectations of the next stage of their education. Leaders support their academic focus with a strong emphasis on wellbeing. However, it is not clear that leaders have made clear to pupils the purpose and importance of the relationships and sex education (RSE) provision.
3. The early years provision at the school reflects the experience and organisation of its leaders. Their detailed knowledge and expertise ensure that children thrive in a nurturing and creative environment where their individuality is celebrated, and their inquisitive minds are stimulated.
4. Governors have a thorough oversight of the school. They undertake detailed audits of safeguarding and health and safety provision, ensuring that pupils and staff feel safe and valued in their school environment. They monitor staff training and commit to extensive strategic planning through dedicated leadership team days and focused committees. There were some historical errors in attendance registers, which were rectified by the school at the start of this academic year.
5. Pupils have a strong understanding of right and wrong and take responsibility for their behaviour. They embrace the diversity of their school population and show a clear understanding of fundamental British values.
6. Pupils feel safe and valued. Leaders effectively manage risk assessment and work closely with external agencies to protect pupils from harm. Buildings are maintained to a high standard and all staff and volunteers are appropriately checked for their suitability to work with children.

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 and managers should ensure that pupils gain a secure understanding of the school's RSE curriculum by making sure that teaching in this area is of a consistently high quality.
- The school should ensure that there are robust procedures in place to maintain the accuracy and completeness of attendance registers.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders ensure that a challenging and age-appropriate curriculum, aligned with the school's aims, enables pupils to develop their full potential whilst stimulating their intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm and imagination. Pupils respond positively to the high expectations of their teachers, expressing their enjoyment of school life. Consequently, pupils are well prepared for their next steps. Staff are consistent in applying the behaviour policy, resulting in pupils who take responsibility for their actions and understand the impact their behaviour has on their peers and the school community.
8. Leaders analyse all aspects of risk comprehensively, including wellbeing risk assessments for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils with SEND make progress in line with their peers and benefit from well-planned teaching strategies and prompt additional support. Pupils expressed their appreciation of 'Wellbeing Wednesday' where they can share their thoughts and explore their emotions. The pupil voice box serves as an outlet for their worries and pupils are positive about how this protected time supports their positive relationships in and out of school. Leaders have the skills and experience to work closely with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils.
9. Leaders are committed to ensuring that all pupils are treated equally. They promote equal opportunities for all, celebrate differences and similarities and ensure that pupils are involved, valued and welcomed. Pupils appreciate that they are all treated equally and that they are developing their insight into different cultures through their shared experiences. This encompasses cultural celebrations, which are often led by parents, and the rich variety of literature they can access in their classrooms and library.
10. The curriculum is broad, balanced and well planned. Teachers have the skills and subject knowledge to ensure that pupils of all abilities are challenged through tasks that meet their needs, together with ongoing assessment, monitoring and feedback. Pupils respond to teachers' marking and use it effectively to improve their classwork and homework. Pupils who have SEND benefit from high levels of classroom support from trained teaching assistants and those with EAL receive appropriate individual support.
11. Leaders provide existing and prospective parents with the information they require to understand how the school is managed and pupils are kept safe. Parents and pupils receive an annual report which provides a detailed evaluation of every aspect of their curriculum experience, enabling pupils to evaluate their progress in all areas. Staff and leaders listen carefully to the concerns of parents and are quick to resolve matters, using clear communication channels and accurate record keeping.
12. Leaders in early years provide a safe and stimulating learning environment that is fully risk assessed and diligently supervised. Children benefit from a happy and engaging learning experience under the guidance of highly trained and caring staff. They are supported to follow their instinct and initiative as staff tailor children's teaching and learning to their individual interests and abilities. Consequently, children are engaged in their learning and build strong relationships based on mutual respect and kindness. Their language and number skills are highly developed, and they readily apply their understanding to the variety of stimulating activities provided by the staff.

13. A proactive and engaged governing body maintains clear oversight of school provision. Governors use their extensive experience of teaching and learning, safeguarding, and health and safety when undertaking learning walks, observing teaching and learning and reviewing behaviour logs. Their attention to detail, through wide-ranging and regular auditing, ensures that pupils are protected from harm. Detailed reports are kept of checks made on the recruitment process, health and safety procedures and records, safeguarding incidents, and behaviour records. Governors effectively monitor staff training and the impact of initiatives on the welfare and safety of pupils. Governors and leaders meet the requirements of the Equality Act to improve access to the school and its curriculum for all groups of pupils.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

14. Highfields Priory is a high-achieving school across all year groups. Pupils in Year 6 enjoy considerable success in their 11+ entry and independent school entrance examinations. Lessons are carefully planned and resourced. Teachers demonstrate strong subject knowledge and classroom management skills. Pupils are engaged in their lessons and often self-motivated to take their learning to the next level without being prompted.
15. Pupils enjoy a total of forty activity sessions that are planned throughout the school week. These include pre-school bootcamp, Year 2 yoga and design club for years 3 to 6. The well-planned and engaging activities enable pupils to grow in confidence and develop their leadership and communication skills. They enhance pupils' ability to empathise with and support their peers.
16. Pupils benefit from a broad and balanced curriculum. There is age-appropriate curriculum planning, for the range of abilities, which supports the development of pupils' linguistic, literacy and numeracy skills. In science, the school promotes an investigational approach. In the early years, children learn through teacher and child led activities. For example, when making progressively bigger whirlpools using different sized receptacles. Activities in the early years focus on investigation or are play-based. Children often lead activities and ask pertinent questions during their learning. In Years 1 and 2, teaching encourages pupils to investigate fair testing, learning the impact of key changes and how to make valid conclusions. This is further developed throughout the later years as pupils plan their investigations and research outcomes using their computer tablets. The effective teaching of ICT skills enables pupils to research independently across the curriculum. Pupils learn to stay safe online and protect their personal information. Pupils benefit from effective teaching across all age ranges.
17. Through art, drama, and music pupils learn to express their individuality and grow in self-confidence, showing focus, attention to detail and a genuine enjoyment of collaboration.
18. In the early years setting, children make rapid progress from their starting points. Learning is personalised to the individual and a carefully planned and resourced provision ensures high levels of engagement. Children are supported to challenge themselves, to extend their vocabulary and develop critical thinking skills through a range of well-planned activities.
19. Pupils who have SEND benefit from the timely support of teachers and support staff. This includes scaffolding of tasks with additional support or resources, moving to open-ended questioning as pupils take control of their learning.
20. Highly trained staff model pronunciation and intonation of new vocabulary for pupils who have EAL. Staff adapt work and provide individual and group support. This accelerates pupils' progress and promotes their self-confidence. The more able pupils engage in extension activities and open-ended tasks that provide challenge and develop individual research and self-evaluation.
21. Achievements are celebrated through personal portfolios which record pupils' academic, creative and physical endeavours. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their portfolio of achievements which promote their self-esteem and self-worth, whilst acting as strong motivation to diversify their achievements both in and out of school.

22. A clear assessment framework aligns to the school's aim to promote excellence and stimulate intellectual curiosity. Pupils therefore know their next steps and are motivated to achieve them, together with success in national and senior school entrance tests. Lessons are generally well-planned, engaging, and challenging. Consequently, pupils recount their genuine enjoyment of learning, both in and outside the classroom.
23. Teaching promotes fundamental British values so that pupils understand their democratic rights and develop a mutual respect for others. The school ensures that pupils are not exposed to partisan views and has a rigorous policy for vetting external speakers and presentations.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

24. School leaders provide an extensive programme of physical education and games for all year groups throughout the academic year. This includes team and individual sports. Nursery and pre-school children benefit from a weekly music and movement session as well as an optional ballet activity, and children in Reception follow a suitable physical education and games programme. As a result, pupils understand how to stay healthy through exercise and diet.
25. School leaders, through the implementation of a comprehensive equal opportunities policy, ensure that no pupil is excluded from an activity. Staff monitor the fitness levels of pupils during the health and fitness programme from the beginning of Year 3. Sport provision across the school is of high quality, diverse and inclusive, culminating in all Year 5 and 6 pupils representing their school in sporting fixtures. This is an immense source of pride for the pupils and a significant boost to their self-esteem and self-confidence.
26. Leaders place a great emphasis on the importance of pupils participating in enrichment activities. They encourage pupils to consider carefully which activities they will enjoy and to reflect upon how they can build their self-knowledge and acquire new skills. As a result of this planning and monitoring, most pupils participate in at least one activity, developing their creativity, co-ordination and collaboration. Leaders have formed strong links with local organisations and sports clubs, which enables their gifted and talented pupils to further develop their skills in a suitably challenging environment.
27. As part of the school's personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) programme, there is a comprehensive RSE programme across Years 1 to 6. However, because staff are less confident in this area of the curriculum, pupils struggle to recall the content and explain their understanding. Pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is effectively developed through the religious education (RE) and PSHE curriculum, supported by assemblies and charity work. Pupils display a very strong understanding of right and wrong and use their own faith and that of others to explore personal values.
28. Staff use the behaviour policy in a consistent and transparent manner, ensuring that pupils are clear about the school's expectations, and that sanctions are administered fairly and appropriately. As a result, pupils speak and listen respectfully, show consideration for their peers and conduct themselves in a polite and engaging manner. Pupils feel safe and are supervised closely in all areas of the school grounds. Prefects are trained and guided by experienced staff and, consequently, they are thoughtful and caring in their monitoring roles.
29. Pupils strongly adhere to the principles of right and wrong and understand the need for rewards and sanctions. They feel respected by staff and are passionate in their affirmation that everyone is treated equally at their school.
30. Children in early years are supported by experienced and attentive staff who enable children to build resilience and develop the skills to build friendships. Children quickly adapt to the rules of using good manners and are both patient and kind with their peers. Mutual respect is at the centre

activities and the children understand how to collaborate and share. Leaders ensure that staff design a variety of activities to develop fine motor skills and creativity. Teaching is underpinned by the strong bonds between the children and staff. The children benefit from a genuine sense of calm that permeates the setting, enabling them to move freely between activities without causing concern for their peers.

31. Pupils value their weekly student council meetings with the headteacher. They feel listened to and understand that not all requests can be met. Having input on such matters as dining room and playground rotas, food provision, and as art ambassadors, helps pupils to appreciate what is made available to them. Pupils speak enthusiastically about their ability to vote for the adopted school charity, stating that it gives them a deeper understanding and connection to the work they do.
32. Resulting from the robust oversight of school premises and accommodation, by both leaders and governors, the school is maintained to a high standard and pupils benefit from a safe environment. Any defects are prioritised accordingly and acted upon quickly. Staff are trained in fire safety and conduct termly evacuations. Pupils can clearly explain the fire drill and highlighted the importance of remaining quiet and listening for further instructions. Staff model, and sensitively explain, the details of the lockdown procedures. Pupils understand this procedure and know how to stay safe and support each other in the classroom.
33. Appropriate procedures are in place to assist pupils if they become unwell. Staff are trained in first aid and ensure that resources are on hand to administer first aid when required. There is a fully resourced medical room to support pupils if needed. In addition, pupils benefit from access to a school counsellor and a designated wellbeing room.
34. Leaders and managers mitigate the risk of children missing or being absent from education. A new system for recording attendance was introduced at the beginning of the academic year. The new system is effective and is being further developed by the school. On inspection, there were a small number of historical errors which leaders recognised and have addressed.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

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

35. School leaders provide pupils with a curriculum that broadens their general understanding of the world through the teaching of humanities and the promotion of general knowledge acquisition and discussion skills. This is further enhanced by the RE curriculum that informs pupils about other cultures by introducing them to different celebrations.
36. Staff instil in their pupils the importance of hard work, respect, and challenge. Consequently, pupils demonstrate resilience and persistence, a willingness to work independently and respect for their peers. Pupils can confidently articulate their understanding of diversity and equality. This prepares pupils well for their lives beyond school.
37. Pupils appreciate the opportunity to co-write their classroom charter. They feel this helps them to include their personal values and meet their expectations for the year ahead. Staff provide pupils with the opportunity to determine the school's adopted charity. As a result, pupils research which charities to support and evaluate the various presentations facilitated by the school. After careful consideration and reflection, pupils exercise their democratic right to vote. They develop their economic understanding including through their fundraising efforts.
38. The curriculum has a strong emphasis on personal responsibility within society and this is especially promoted through PSHE and RE. It is further supported in school assemblies and through the pupil voice box. As a result, pupils appreciate the need for rules and laws to help maintain a peaceful society and to protect the rights of individuals. Leaders encourage pupils to be aware of their social responsibilities in school and older pupils fully engage with the prefect roles assigned to them. They speak of enjoying 'giving back to the school' and state the importance of being fair, good listeners and good friends.
39. Leaders encourage and inspire pupils to aim high in all that they do, not only in terms of academic success but also their behaviour, self-respect, self-discipline and good manners. Pupils are confident about how the school helps them to achieve academic success and prepares them for their next school, but equally they reflect upon how happy their time is at school and the importance of looking after each other. Pupils in Year 6, reflect upon their successful entry to senior schools, are proud of their success and grateful for the challenge provided by the school.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

Safeguarding

40. The school's arrangements for safeguarding and the promotion of pupils' wellbeing are robust. Leaders are fully aware that incidents could happen in their school and therefore ensure that policies and procedures are in place to minimise risks. The safeguarding policy reflects the latest guidance and is overseen methodically by the governing body.
41. School leaders have the knowledge and experience to refer matters to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police, where appropriate. Such referrals are instigated at the earliest opportunity and detailed records are kept. School governors undertake a comprehensive audit of arrangements for safeguarding. They keep detailed records of their monitoring and report back to the full governing body.
42. All staff and governors receive annual safeguarding training together with regular updates including to share any information included in recent and updated guidance. There is a detailed induction programme for staff and volunteers that enables them to act effectively in accordance with school policy. Staff are clear about their responsibilities and can articulate the necessary actions to deal with concerns and disclosures. They speak confidently regarding online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and children missing from education.
43. Staff with designated lead responsibilities are experienced, highly trained and very knowledgeable about their roles. Staff feel reassured by the level of expertise of senior leaders and the governing body.
44. Through a rigorous safer-recruitment process, the school ensures that all staff, volunteers, and members of the governing body are checked in line with government guidance prior to undertaking their duties. A comprehensive record of checks is maintained in the school and overseen by governors.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

All the relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Highfield Priory School
Department for Education number	888/6009
Registered charity number	532262
Address	Fulwood Row Preston PR2 5RW
Website	http://www.highfieldpriory.co.uk
Proprietor	Highfield Priory School Ltd
Chair	Mr Darren Whitman
Headteacher	Mr Jeremy Duke
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	195
Date of previous inspection	25 to 27 June 2019

Information about the school

45. Highfield Priory School is an independent co-educational day school. It was founded in 1938 and moved to its current site, on the outskirts of Preston, in 1979. It is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in September 2019.
46. There are 54 children in the early years comprising the Nursery, Pre-School and Reception classes. Since the previous inspection the school has increased the starting age for Nursery from 6 months to 2 years, thereby relinquishing its registered early years setting.
47. The school has identified ten pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
48. English is an additional language for 34 pupils.
49. The school states that its aims are:
- To encourage all pupils to develop their full potential by stimulating their intellectual curiosity, enthusiasm and imagination.
 - To promote excellence in academic, creative and sporting endeavours.
 - To teach the value of integrity and a concern for others.
 - To enhance pupils' appreciation of their own and other cultures.
 - To develop self-confidence and independence so that pupils are well equipped to play an active role in society.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 17 to 19 October 2023

50. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.
51. The following inspection activities were undertaken:
- A health and safety tour of the school
 - Examination of curriculum and other documentation
 - Observations of lessons and extra-curricular activities
 - Observation of pupils during their play and lunch times
 - Joint learning walks with staff
 - Discussions with pupils, including sampling of their work
 - Discussions with staff, including sampling and discussion of pupils' work
 - Discussion with school governors and the senior leadership team
 - Attendance at class registration periods
 - Visits to the facilities for early years
 - Visit to the learning support facilities

- Meetings with the headteacher.

52. 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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