

School inspection report

28 to 30 January 2025

Copthill School

Barnack Rd

Uffington

Stamford

PE9 3AD

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. Leaders have rigorous and comprehensive systems of review and monitoring of policies and procedures and their effective implementation, which place pupils at the heart of the decision-making process. This incorporates all aspects of school life from an oversight of behaviour and anti-bullying arrangements to ensuring recruitment checks are carried out appropriately for all those working at the school.
2. Oversight of all arrangements by the directors, supported by the advisory panel, is comprehensive with a focus on appropriate challenge coupled with maintaining a supportive environment between school leaders and the proprietorship of the school.
3. Leaders, through their skills and knowledge, are effective at identifying and managing risks to ensure pupils' wellbeing.
4. The progression of pupils' technological and computing skills as they move through the school is less well developed than those in other areas of the curriculum. The development of these skills does not fully support pupils as they prepare for life beyond the school.
5. The feedback that pupils receive from their teachers about their work helps them understand their progress and identifies areas for improvement.
6. The bespoke assessment framework is effective in identifying pupils' skills and aptitudes throughout the range of subject areas, supporting the good progress that is made by pupils of all ages and abilities.
7. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their starting points because of the careful planning undertaken by teachers and the way teachers adapt their teaching to meet pupils' individual needs.
8. The decision by leaders to develop and tailor the curriculum to incorporate and make use of learning opportunities within the school setting is a significant strength. Conscious decisions are made to take both academic learning and the development of personal skills outside. This has a considerable impact on pupils' sense of wellbeing, particularly their self-esteem and self-confidence.
9. Leaders' proactive measures to promote health, safety and emotional wellbeing, along with effective communication and training, foster a supportive environment for the development of pupils' physical and mental health.
10. Leaders emphasise empathy, understanding others' needs and respect as key values when planning topics and themes for learning, aligning with the school's aims and ethos.
11. Safeguarding arrangements are secure. Leaders respond to any safeguarding concerns effectively and work efficiently with local safeguarding partners when required.

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:

- improve arrangements for pupils to develop their technological skills and knowledge, through focused oversight and monitoring, to support their preparedness for their future lives.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. Leaders, including those with governance responsibilities and those responsible for children in the early years, are thorough in the processes they adopt to monitor all aspects of school life. Rolling programmes of reviews are in place enabling leaders to evaluate the impact of their decisions. During the review process, leaders and governors give due attention to policies and procedures and how they are effectively implemented for the benefit of the pupils' wellbeing. To strengthen this self-evaluation process, leaders invite input from key stakeholders. For example, the views of pupils and a local psychologist were sought when evaluating the impact of the school's promoting positive behaviour policy. Parents and pupils are surveyed regularly, and their feedback is incorporated into the decision-making process of leaders, ensuring the views of all are duly considered.
13. Directors makes effective use of a committee of advisers to support the work of school governance. They provide feedback on school matters through their expertise and knowledge and through focused visits to the school, where they meet leaders, staff and pupils. Information gathered is then fed back to the directors through regular meetings during the school year.
14. Leaders possess the necessary skills, knowledge and understanding to effectively promote the wellbeing of pupils by identifying and managing risks across the school. This is achieved through the thorough completion of a wide range of risk assessments, each including a clear next steps section to ensure ongoing improvement and mitigation of potential hazards. By working with staff, leaders maintain a proactive approach to pupils' wellbeing, ensuring that potential risks are identified and addressed promptly.
15. Leaders make all required information available through either the school's website or by request to the school office. The annual account of income and expenditure for funded pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans ensures transparency and financial accountability to the local authority and parents.
16. There is a suitable complaints process in place which contains three clear stages: informal, formal and panel hearing. All required detail from the Standard relating to complaints is included in the policy. Leaders carefully maintain records relating to complaints at all levels and carry out detailed analysis to identify any patterns or trends. Leaders share these with the advisory panel and the directors for further oversight and analysis, as required.
17. Throughout the school, including in the early years, leaders and staff adapt the curriculum and teaching to be inclusive, ensuring the individual pupils' interests and needs are met. For example, the use of funding to purchase a baby doll with hearing aids and books featuring children with hearing aids in the early years promotes representation and inclusion to which the children respond sensitively.
18. Leaders ensure that the school meets its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. They successfully implement a suitable accessibility plan that ensures all pupils have the support they need to access the curriculum. Leaders successfully monitor and respond appropriately to considerations such as accessibility to extra-curricular activities, how any disabled pupils can be safely evacuated when required and how the physical spaces around the school can be used to promote positive wellbeing.

19. Leaders liaise effectively with relevant external agencies, particularly in relation to safeguarding. Leaders act swiftly whenever safeguarding concerns are raised and readily seek and follow advice and guidance supplied by safeguarding partners.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The well-crafted curriculum is planned to reflect the needs, ages and aptitudes of pupils. Curriculum provision is regularly reviewed by leaders to identify any areas that can be strengthened. A highly successful feature of this review process has been the initiative to 'go outside and learn'. This initiative is securely embedded in planning and the regular timetable. This is highly effective in providing scope and opportunity for pupils to explore links to the wider world and nature and encourages teachers to plan imaginatively for outdoor opportunities. As a result, pupils engage readily with the learning process and demonstrate high levels of self-confidence. This high level of engagement impacts substantially on their attitudes towards learning and in the acquisition of their knowledge, skills and understanding.
22. The curriculum features highly appropriate schemes of work linked to themes, with a particular focus on humanities and science. Thematic topics run through the school from Nursery to Year 6. These aim to develop a global view of the world, using real life examples and developing the complexity over each year. A theme is planned to develop over time so that, for example, the history and origins of slavery around the world and modern-day slavery might be explored in one year group, while another may look at rights to education through studying recent people who have campaigned for the right to female education across the world.
23. The curriculum is supported by a range of additional activities that take place before and after school, including looking after the farm animals, karate and woodwork. Such opportunities enable pupils to engage meaningfully in a range of different contexts, strengthening their skills and knowledge base and increasing their depth of understanding.
24. Leaders give considerable focus to the development of pupils' aesthetic and creative education. Music, drama and art feature highly across the school with pupils being accomplished singers, instrumentalists and creators. The establishment of choirs, orchestras and string groups enables pupils to display their prowess in this area. The development of the pupils' technological skills across all age groups is less well developed. This has been recognised by leaders and forms part of the school's development planning. Pupils have identified, through feedback, the importance of sufficient computing and technology skills as they move on to their secondary schools and ultimately into the workplace.
25. Pupils of all abilities make good progress from their starting points. Leaders monitor national assessment data, comparing pupils' performance to national figures to ensure its practices align with broader educational expectations. The needs of pupils who have SEND are well met through personalised learning plans, the content of which are shared with teachers and key staff. Leaders ensure that regular monitoring check-ups are held for pupils who have SEND and these include specific 'voice of the child' activities, allowing pupils to share their experiences and feelings. Similarly, the needs of any pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are supported through focused planning and by teaching that is suitably adapted.
26. Leaders provide enrichment programmes to help pupils who have higher prior attainment make good progress. Teachers are aware of their needs and aptitudes, identifying their skills and capabilities, and devising suitable programmes for them in which to participate, such as mathematics challenges and writing competitions. Leaders carefully monitor pupils' responses to

planned activities though key performance indicator grids which identify skills that might not be revealed in assessment data.

27. Teachers across the school understand both the academic and pastoral needs of pupils. Consequently, because of a rigorous assessment programme, they readily adapt their teaching to maximise learning. This enables pupils to build up a wide bank of knowledge and skills as they move through the school. Children in the pre-school class are stimulated by a range of well-thought-out activities that support their emotional and physical needs. There is a focus on the development of fine and gross motor skills for the younger children by playing with both larger and smaller apparatus and resources. Children in the early years classes strengthen their letter recognition and writing skills through a programme of activities that are both teacher-led and child-initiated. Through play, the youngest children successfully develop their understanding of number. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to build on these foundations for older pupils. As a result, pupils become accomplished writers and readers and show a high level of mathematical understanding.
28. Being respectful and reflective and taking responsibility are key values that thread through teachers' planning and delivery. Pupils understand the importance of these three aspects in building positive relationships.

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

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

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

30. Leaders craft and implement comprehensive policies and schemes of work for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE). They diligently ensure a balance between addressing age-appropriate subjects and responding to pupils' enquiries to facilitate effective discussions and understanding. In RSE sessions, skilled leaders conduct mixed-gender classes when appropriate, fostering understanding and empathy among pupils. Staff use effective grouping strategies to support discussions around sensitive topics and respectful relationships. Leaders effectively utilise a published scheme of work as a foundation for planning PSHE themes across the school, adapting or enhancing it as needed. For instance, in response to certain relational challenges in one cohort of pupils, they introduced an additional unit on friendship.
31. Leaders employ various methods effectively to assess understanding of themes, including a highlighter pen colour code system. Each colour represents pupils' level of willingness to discuss specific subjects, supporting leaders' nuanced assessment of comprehension on sensitive topics such as substance abuse and smoking. The PSHE curriculum is designed to accommodate individual needs, allowing teachers to tailor their response accordingly. For example, pupils with higher prior attainment explored how scientists study insect populations and their impact on the spread of tropical diseases. Pupils understand the harmful effects of stereotypical ideas in scientific roles and the importance of challenging them.
32. The outdoor curriculum is highly effective in developing pupils' emotional wellbeing as it provides a considerable range of opportunities to develop self-confidence, self-awareness and self-esteem. The range of activities in the woods and the farm and in the school grounds means that there is always somewhere that pupils can feel valued and enjoy. Learning and playing in the fort, Saxon village, Andersen shelter or on the river helps pupils to develop their independence, creativity and collaborative skills. Pupils take on responsibilities for animal welfare and take these responsibilities seriously, becoming knowledgeable on animals' upkeep as a result. Leaders on the wellbeing committee consult pupils about the areas of the school where they feel they are most comfortable, and act to ensure that pupils' sense of security is effectively promoted in all areas, including, with considerable success, the outdoor environment, including the woods and other facilities within the grounds.
33. Activities in the school grounds and the physical education (PE) opportunities enable pupils of all ages to develop a range of skills such as balance, ball control and developing core strength. The PE curriculum, both indoors and outdoors, is supported by a range of activities and games fixtures that develop pupils' sports-specific skills effectively.
34. School leaders have a structured approach to managing behaviour and bullying. They carefully review the school's procedures and consult with partners, such as local medical experts, when necessary. Clear oversight and monitoring by school leaders help create an environment where pupils understand their behaviours and collaborate with leaders should their behaviour not meet expected levels. This environment, supported by trusted adults and wellbeing ambassadors from the pupil body, facilitates discussions about issues such as anxiety and other aspects of mental health.

35. The school's comprehensive approach to health and safety, including fire safety precautions, regularly reinforced through drills and training, ensures that staff and pupils are prepared for emergencies. Staff regularly undertake essential safety checks, such as on electrical installations, and keep detailed records of these. The first aid provision, managed by suitably trained leaders, provides appropriate resources which can be readily accessed. Regular monitoring of accident books allows for proactive solutions to maintain a suitable environment. Early years arrangements for health, medication, food allergies, supervision and accidents are comprehensive and support children's wellbeing. Clear communication with parents and a pronounced emphasis on staff training promote a culture of providing care to which everyone contributes. The maintenance of both indoor and outdoor areas is of a high standard, providing a suitable and functional environment for pupils. Pupils are appropriately supervised at all times of the school day through suitable deployment of staff.
36. Leaders promote high attendance effectively. They systematically monitor attendance data to determine when remedial action is necessary. Staff maintain suitable admission and attendance registers and notify the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition points.

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

37. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

38. The school's core values support pupils' understanding of concepts such as respect and democracy. The learning experiences teach pupils about the democratic process and the functions of Parliament, supported by pupils' interactions with various visiting speakers, including the local Member of Parliament. Leaders promote and cultivate values and behaviours such as kindness, consideration and fairness among pupils, aiding their development of positive interpersonal relationships. This in turn, fosters a supportive and inclusive community, thereby reducing conflicts and promoting mental wellbeing. Leaders ensure that pupils have a voice in decisions and elected school council representatives make suggestions as to improvements around the school, such as in relation to portion sizes at lunchtime and helping to develop the school's positive behaviour policy.
39. Leaders place emphasis on the effective development of pupils' social skills and the development of their morality. In the early years, children learn to share, take turns, understand what is right and wrong and to build meaningful relationships. Pupils of all ages play together at break times and enjoy one another's company. Older pupils understand the importance of contributing to the social fabric of the school community, which they do by readily taking on additional roles and responsibilities. They act as positive role models for those younger.
40. Teachers take opportunities to reinforce the importance of equality, diversity and inclusion. As a result, older pupils know about people's protected characteristics, such as race, religion and sexual orientation, and can confidently discuss them. Through subject matter such as learning about different faiths in religious education lessons and learning traditional South African folk songs in music, pupils increase their understanding of different cultures and religions. Leaders place a high emphasis on the importance of non-discriminatory behaviours, often by sharing stories about people who stood up against injustice.
41. Leaders encourage contribution to wider society by developing programmes such as the 'Copthill Challenge Scheme', a whole school initiative where pupils independently take on pursuits such as volunteering, participation, personal skills development, public performing and researching. Staff and pupils discuss progress in form times and tutor group sessions and pupils respond by sharing their efforts as they move from a bronze to gold award. Leaders effectively provide opportunities for post-examination Year 6 pupils to maintain a sense of focus and involvement by scheduling events such as the drama production, the residential trip to France and the day on the river. The latter develops pupils' skills in areas such as kayaking, canoe building and cooking their own lunches.
42. Leaders provide effective preparation for next stages of life in society. They plan the curriculum to enable older pupils to expand understanding and develop confidence in dealing with difficult life scenarios. The PSHE schemes prepare them for scenarios such as recognising imbalances in respectful relationships and learning to say no in the face of peer pressure. Leaders make use of activities such as shoe cleaning, window cleaning and tea making to support pupils' development of such life skills.
43. Established links with local societies and institutions, such as the church and a care home, provide opportunities for the pupils to perform and socialise with members of the local community. Pupils readily participate in charity fundraising through activities such as the '*Waterproof and Wellies Ramble*' and triathlon. Funds raised support a range of local and international charities such as

providing spectacles for areas in Africa and donating to a local foodbank. Other links with the community support pupils' knowledge of public institutions, such as when the local police visited during the topic about rules. As a result, pupils strengthen their understanding of crime prevention and the respect for rules. Older pupils undertake a first aid course and all ages experience the visit of an ambulance crew. Such links develop a more secure understanding of institutions, public servants and the rule of law.

44. Working in the herb garden helps develop pupils' sense of environmental responsibility and an understanding of food production, animal care and sustainability. These activities also introduce early insights into agriculture and economic systems, including the sale of collected eggs. Further economic awareness is developed by looking at the most effective ways to save money, the banking systems, how to use a cashpoint and making payments with mobile devices to ensure transactions are safe. Pupils devise shopping lists and decide where the best place is to buy the products, considering value for money and quality of the product.

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

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

Safeguarding

46. The school's safeguarding arrangements prioritise the pupils in the decision-making process. There is a culture where ensuring that pupils are listened to is seen as vital. Pupils have a system of listing the trusted adults to whom they can talk should they encounter any worries. They have confidence that their worries, no matter how small, will be listened to and acted upon when necessary.
47. Leaders implement a suitable training framework, that incorporates both face to face and online modules, to ensure staff, whether teaching or other, understand their safeguarding roles and the school's procedures. Those with designated safeguarding responsibilities have additional training that reflects locally agreed safeguarding arrangements. There is a thorough induction to safeguarding for any new members of staff. Staff understand the school's whistleblowing arrangements and understand that the staff code of conduct is in place to protect both themselves and the pupils in their care.
48. Leaders emphasise the importance of reporting any allegations or low-level concerns about staff that might arise. Staff understand how to report and record these, along with any other safeguarding concerns, including through the school's online system. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities have an effective system of reviewing and monitoring any safeguarding concerns. They work effectively with their local safeguarding partners such as the police, children's services and health care professionals when the need arises.
49. Directors maintains effective oversight of safeguarding, supported by the school advisers, all of whom have received suitable training to undertake their roles effectively. Reviews are also undertaken, on a termly basis, of policies and procedures that are linked to safeguarding such as for safer recruitment and behaviour and bullying.
50. Staff carry out all required pre-employment checks. They keep a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR) and associated records of checks carried out on all persons working at the school.
51. In both PSHE and computing lessons, pupils learn how to stay safe when working online. Suitable filters are in place to prevent pupils from accessing unwanted materials, and their internet use is monitored for additional security.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

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| School | Copthill School |
| Department for Education number | 925/6035 |
| Address | Copthill School Barnack Rd Uffington Stamford Lincolnshire PE9 3AD |
| Phone number | 01780 757506 |
| Email address | mail@copthill.com |
| Website | http://www.copthill.com |
| Proprietor | Copthill School Ltd |
| Principal | Mr Jonathan Teesdale |
| Headteacher | Mrs Helen Schofield |
| Age range | 2 to 11 |
| Number of pupils | 299 |
| Date of previous inspection | 2 to 4 March 2022 |

Information about the school

53. Copthill School is an independent co-educational day school. It is owned by Copthill School Ltd, whose board of directors are members of the family that founded and continue to run the school, working closely with a small advisory panel.
54. Children in the early years are taught in four classes: two Nursery classes, for children aged 2 to 3 years and 3 to 4 years respectively, and two Reception classes.
55. The school has identified 21 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Two pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
56. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small proportion of pupils.
57. The school states its aims are to provide a welcoming, stimulating and happy environment which encourages and motivates every pupil to succeed. It seeks to provide pupils with a broad curriculum designed to develop lifelong knowledge, skills and attitudes that help them to become responsible citizens, independent explorers, creative thinkers, problem solvers, team players and reflective learners. The school intends to place an emphasis on using the outdoor environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

28 to 30 January 2025

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

59. 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 principal and a member of the advisory panel
- 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.

60. 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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