

School inspection report

19 September 2023 to 21 September 2023

Colfe's School

Horn Park Lane
Lee
London
SE12 8AW

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	5
Recommended next steps	5
Material change request.....	5
Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance	6
Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation	8
Section 3: Pupils’ physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing	10
Section 4: Pupils’ social and economic education and contribution to society	12
Safeguarding	14
School details.....	15
Information about the school.....	16
Inspection details.....	16

Summary of inspection findings

1. Skilled leaders understand the importance of pupil wellbeing as key to pupils' success and work as a cohesive team to self-evaluate, assess risks and plan to successfully deliver the school's aims. Governors ensure they fulfil their responsibilities effectively, with commitment and professionalism. Leaders have implemented a wide range of initiatives focused on equity, diversity and inclusion. Leaders acknowledge, however, that this is work in progress.
2. Pupils receive education that is wide ranging, appropriately challenging and prepares them effectively for life beyond school. Carefully planned teaching throughout the school ensures pupils are motivated to learn. Pupils of different ages demonstrate well-developed learning skills across the curriculum. Pupils' attainment at GCSE and A level, including for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and those who speak English as an additional language (EAL), is well above national averages. Similarly, junior school pupils are achieving above national standards in both mathematics and reading.
3. Pupils make good progress throughout the school, including in the early years. Using detailed tracking systems leaders identify where there is any underperformance and measure the impact of any additional support. Pupils are usually well supported to achieve well. However, in some senior lessons support for pupils with SEND is less effective.
4. Leaders ensure that the school provides a varied and carefully developed programme of physical, personal and health education appropriate to pupils' needs. Consequently, pupils feel safe in school and value the care they receive through the effective pastoral system and the positive relationships with staff. Leaders ensure that high pupil participation levels in a wide range of physical activities and sport are carefully planned and monitored to promote the wellbeing of mind and body.
5. A well-planned curriculum and a wide range of different activities enable pupils to develop spiritual and moral understanding. To complement academic learning, pupils have extensive opportunities to develop their skills and interests through participation in the wide-ranging programme of extra-curricular activities. Leaders have supported the engagement of a broad group of welfare professionals to meet the physical, mental and emotional needs of pupils. There is an embedded culture of safe practice regarding health and safety throughout the school, which ensures that high standards are maintained for the wellbeing of the whole school community.
6. Pupils have a strong sense of right and wrong and understand the importance of respect and tolerance. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development is well planned by leaders and embedded in the curriculum. There is an extensive programme focused on inclusion where pupils can discuss and learn about each other, their cultures and the context of their communities outside school.
7. Leaders are aware that a small minority of pupils and parents feel that the issue of racist behaviour has not been dealt with effectively by the school. In response, leaders have put in place a range of strategies to deal with individual instances and to widen pupils' understanding. Leaders are also engaging with external agencies and the local community. Leaders ensure there are many opportunities available for pupils to be involved in the local community.

This is having a positive effect on pupils by enabling them to deepen their understanding of social issues and broaden pupils' perspective of their local and wider communities.

8. There are comprehensive systems in place to make sure pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education. Older pupils are ambitious for their future; they speak passionately about their goals and value the careers support they receive. There is diversity of choice and equality of provision between academic and vocational pathways for all pupils enabling them to choose appropriately.
9. Arrangements for safeguarding are effective and closely monitored, ensuring that the safeguarding of all pupils is given the highest priority.

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

- Strengthen further the monitoring and evaluation by leadership and governance of the impact of strategies focused on discrimination implemented by the school.
- Develop further teachers' knowledge, skills and understanding of the needs of pupils with SEND to support all pupils effectively within the classroom.
- Continue ongoing work in relation to inclusion by ensuring all members of the school community take responsibility for responding appropriately when words or actions challenge the inclusive culture of the school.

Material change request

10. Inspectors considered the school request for a change to the details of its registration to include a further increase in the number of pupils in the school from the current 1300 to a maximum of 1400.
11. Leadership and governance have carefully prepared plans for the proposed increase in pupil numbers from 1300 to 1400. Documentation is clear and detailed, showing how all the required provision has been accounted for to meet the demand. In view of this, and given the school complies with all the standards, it is likely that the standards will remain met.
12. It is recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. School leaders in both junior and senior schools demonstrate the necessary skills and knowledge to ensure they fulfil their responsibilities effectively. This is reflected in high achievement across the school. There is a strong focus on safeguarding where effective application and resourcing by leaders and governors enable the needs of pupils to be met. Policies are regularly updated and effectively implemented to ensure regulatory standards are consistently met.
14. Leadership throughout the school, including in the early years, actively promotes principles which help pupils to respect others. Pupils acquire an appreciation of equality, inclusion and respect for their own and other cultures, which deepens understanding of cultural traditions throughout the school and the community. The Leathersellers' scholarship programme upholds the aims of the founder in its support of the local community and helps a wide range of pupils to attend the school.
15. Leaders work effectively as a cohesive team. Pupils speak with appreciation of the kindness, understanding and compassion demonstrated by staff throughout the school. They state that leaders are visible, easily approachable and take time to get to know them – a view endorsed by inspectors.
16. Governors know the school well. They bring a range of skills and expertise and are committed to the wellbeing of all pupils. Governors provide effective support and appropriate levels of challenge to leaders, including by asking them to explain examination results and outcomes for pupils. They monitor leaders' work systematically and effectively through focused committees, including reports from the leadership team, regular meetings and visits to the school. Governors ensure recruitment procedures are checked diligently, including regular scrutiny of the single central register of appointments to ensure safe practices are implemented consistently. Safer recruitment training provides strong support, enabling governors and leaders to gain knowledge and understanding of processes.
17. Leaders play a significant part in enabling the school to provide an age appropriate and extensive curriculum, with a very clear focus on teaching and learning. There is broad, varied provision for pupils to further develop their understanding of equality, diversity and inclusion promoted through societies, activities and pupil-led whole school assemblies. Evaluation of these strategies and their impact on pupils is effective and ongoing.
18. Leaders ensure that pupils' education and experiences result from teachers' effective implementation of academic planning and a varied programme of activities. Strong, well-co-ordinated leadership of departments, placing pupils' needs at the centre of planning, enhanced by the proficient use of technology, enables pupils to make highly effective academic progress and develop personally.
19. Safeguarding is given the highest of priorities with a large and highly skilled team at senior level. There is an honest ethos from leaders and governors that is outward looking and has identified the contextual risks of the school and their implications for the school. Consequently, pupils say they feel safe in school.

20. A recent initiative by leaders invited pupils to comment freely and anonymously on school policies, including the safeguarding policy. This enhancement of pupil voice has provided leaders with valuable insight into pupils' thoughts and how these can help to shape policy making and effective implementation. This has enabled the school to consider the views of pupils when writing and updating its policies.
21. Senior leaders readily work with others outside of the school and the wider community. The school regularly hosts meetings for local safeguarding partnerships. This supports effective working with safeguarding partners. Through the curriculum and pastoral system, leaders consider carefully how to implement strategies to promote pupils' wellbeing both in and out of school and to equip them for life in the future.
22. Leaders ensure that all the necessary information is available and accessible to parents and prospective parents, and actively promote the requirements of the Equality Act. Complaints are taken seriously and managed in a timely manner following the school's policy.

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

23. Pupils experience a broad curriculum that includes the study of French, Latin, German, Spanish and media and an additional qualification in Year 12, (GCiE), developed in partnership with a local university. In addition, there is a wide-ranging programme of activities in areas such as art, music, sport and outdoor education which ensures provision for all, including pupils with SEND. Those pupils with EAL are supported well: a group of recently enrolled pupils with little English is making rapid progress in English, enabling them to gain confidence in other subjects and strongly promoting their personal development.
24. Effective teaching enables many pupils to make rapid progress. Pupils benefit from the good subject knowledge of their teachers. Leaders monitor the progress of individuals and groups. Effective additional support is provided for pupils when necessary and teachers carefully monitor pupils' progress to ensure it is having the necessary impact.
25. Departmental schemes of work ensure key areas are well developed across the curriculum. There are clear links to SMSC, personal, social and health education (PSHE) and relationship and sex education (RSE) which complement academic content and support pupils' wider development. Academic and pastoral teams work together and over time this has had a positive impact on pupils' learning and progress, with a range of staff able to support pupils' needs, both academic and pastoral.
26. Pupils attain very well at GCSE and A level, including those pupils who have SEND and those with EAL. Consequently, almost all pupils gain higher education or degree apprenticeship places of their first choice. Most pupils achieve above their predicted grades.
27. Assessment at all stages is systematic, supporting pupils in understanding their progress and in setting challenging targets. In the early years there is thoughtful recording of learning and staff build on children's previous learning to meet their individual needs. Pupils of different ages feel able to ask for help to progress in their work. Pupils readily respond to their teachers' feedback, taking ownership and responsibility to further improve their work.
28. Leaders' focus on pupils at the centre of learning enables pupils to develop confidence in a range of skills. From an early age teachers encourage pupils to read for enjoyment, to be competent users of ICT and to use the extensive library facilities to enhance their learning. Pupils listen carefully and are not afraid to ask questions both of pupils and teachers. Pupils are quick to act upon advice from teachers.
29. Well-planned teaching which sets high expectations for pupils, and good classroom management enable pupils to work effectively both independently and collaboratively throughout the school. Therefore, pupils are well behaved and highly motivated to learn. However, in some senior lessons the strategies used by teachers to support pupils with additional needs are not always closely targeted to the specific needs of pupils.
30. Leaders prioritise the development of high-quality relationships between staff and pupils and among pupils themselves in lessons. This enables pupils to feel at ease and want to learn. The warm relationships in the early years enable pupils to gain trust from a young age. As a result, children

engage confidently in a wide range of indoor and outdoor activities which particularly enhance their communication, language and physical skills, as observed when children worked effectively together to build a railway track. Similarly, senior pupils work together co-operatively, clearly articulating their views, as exemplified during a discussion regarding the influence of Aristotle and Plato on later theologies.

31. Leaders' strong ethos of inclusion enables pupils of different ages and abilities to achieve highly through the school's extensive and well thought out extra-curricular programme. As expressed by pupils themselves when talking about their achievements beyond the classroom: 'there is something for everyone'. Leaders plan and monitor carefully to ensure that pupils from an early age become well-balanced, rounded individuals.

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

32. Leaders ensure that a carefully developed programme of physical, personal and health education activities is in place, which is varied, relevant and appropriate to pupils' needs. As a result, pupils are purposeful and friendly. They feel safe in school and are well supported through a strong, effective pastoral care system.
33. Teachers take care of and are patient with their pupils, for example when guiding younger pupils undertaking research work in the outdoor areas. Pupils value this, and enjoy the happy atmosphere which surrounds them, and as a result feel positive about their work and their school.
34. Leaders ensure that pupils are supervised appropriately. Pupils throughout the school behave well both in lessons and informal contexts. This was echoed by pupils in discussion, saying the presence of staff enables pupils to feel safe and focus on their work. Pupils in the early years show kindness towards others in their free-play activities.
35. The insightful management of the main library with its calm, welcoming atmosphere promotes this space as a daily focal point for many pupils, including before and after the school day. Staff support pupils, who benefit from the extensive, up-to-date resources available for independent research and quiet reading. As a result, pupils engage positively with each other, reflecting on all aspects of school life, as well as their studies.
36. Leaders plan a wide range of physical activities and sport in which pupils participate. Teachers ensure pupils know the importance of developing a healthy lifestyle. PSHE and RSE programmes are carefully planned to support the personal development of pupils. Visiting speakers give regular presentations on topics such as the misuse of drugs and positive relationships. Their expertise helps pupils develop a deeper understanding of a range of issues.
37. Teachers' guidance supports pupils' progress, giving confidence to pupils as they move from the early years through the juniors and into seniors. This enables pupils to be well prepared academically and mentally to perform at a high level in public examinations.
38. Teachers encourage pupils to develop their spiritual and moral understanding including by performing in music, drama and dance events. Teachers show sensitivity and thought by linking the curriculum to real life issues, as observed in pupils' deep understanding of a set text focusing on the mental anguish experienced by the writer.
39. As a result of the support they receive, pupils show resilience to improve, as reflected in their work, and can explain with precision how they overcome any difficulty to achieve their goals. Leaders ensure that there is additional professional support readily available through the expertise of nurses, regularly trained first aiders, counsellors, physiotherapists, and a school doctor. This support is focused on meeting the physical, mental and emotional needs of pupils.
40. Pupils of different ages have a developed understanding of the importance of positive relationships and what is meant by bullying and cyberbullying. Pupils say that staff usually respond quickly should

any issue arise. Clearly documented records corroborate this. Pupils know how to keep themselves safe, including when online.

41. Leaders ensure that the school's premises are maintained to a high standard. Suitable arrangements and accommodation are in place to effectively care for pupils who become unwell or have a specific medical need. There are regular and effective fire evacuation drills and comprehensive staff training. Leaders have a pro-active approach towards health and safety with a swift response should anything require attention.
42. Staff are vigilant regarding any pupil absence and keep admissions and attendance records appropriately.

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

43. Teachers skilfully use opportunities through the curriculum to relate moral issues to real life, enabling pupils to question, make connections and reflect upon moral issues. Pupils develop a strong sense of right and wrong and clearly articulate their opinions about life at school. For example, pupils reflected on the true value of friendship when considering Brutus' betrayal of Julius Caesar.
44. The vast majority of pupils value respect for both themselves and others and recognise the importance of tolerant and inclusive attitudes in the school community. This is central to the vertical house system, which is strongly supported by staff and which enables pupils of different ages to interact and share positive experiences. Pupils in the sixth form enthuse about their role in the peer mentoring of Year 7 pupils, recognising its value to both parties in their development.
45. Careful planning by leaders ensures that SMSC is embedded throughout the curriculum, enabling pupils to learn about fundamental British values and the law. Pupils' personal development is extended through *Eudaimonia* – the school's unique programme which focuses on wellbeing and the teaching of Aristotle.
46. The understanding of racial and cultural diversity is a key focus in the school. Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) are recurrent themes in the PSHE programme and school assemblies through which diversity is celebrated. A small minority of pupils and parents feel that the issue of racism has not been sufficiently addressed by the school. Staff are aware of this and are working to address any issues raised through the implementation of the school's anti-racism policy. The school uses regular pupil surveys to monitor the impact of this work.
47. Leaders have formed positive relationships with outside agencies. Leaders work closely with parents who are invited to school to understand the content of PSHE and RSE, particularly about how the school deals with sensitive and complex pastoral issues such as e-safety, substance abuse and sex and relationships. Contextual risks and mitigations are analysed to reduce risks to pupils travelling to and from school. Some adjustments have been made in consultation with parents – a recent example being the approach to the wearing of uniform.
48. Pupils learn that by considering what is just and fair, actions can lead to positive change which impacts on society – for example how a recent visiting speaker's efforts have led to changes in government legislation and cultural bias. Pupils' work reflects deep awareness of the importance of equality and the need to question, as in written assignments on female objectification and lack of diversity in 1950s patriarchal society.
49. Pupils and staff work together to organise charity and fundraising events and undertake project work with a partner school in The Gambia. Pupils benefit from the many opportunities for involvement in the local community, including in local primary schools and hospitals. The Leathersellers' Scholarship programme enriches the social dynamic of the school and pupils from a range of local schools attend school lectures, societies, choir and join the orchestra. In turn, Leatherseller scholars return to their previous schools to mentor younger pupils.

50. The expertise of staff enables many pupils to participate in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) and outdoor pursuits from an early age. These activities develop pupils' understanding of leadership and teamwork.
51. The school promotes a comprehensive and inclusive careers programme which includes former pupils speaking about their career pathways and decision-making. Pupils are ambitious for their futures and speak confidently about their goals. Older pupils particularly value the advice and support they receive from teachers and the wide range of online resources available. Pupils appreciate the support on offer to those who do not wish to go on to university – apprenticeships and vocational routes are equally valued 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

52. Leaders and governors place the highest priority on the safeguarding and wellbeing of all pupils. There are regular reports, discussions and reviews, training and updates, including about the risks related to radicalisation and extremism. These enable leaders to have a comprehensive overview of safeguarding and to identify if any actions are required. There is a strong culture of safeguarding throughout the school.
53. The safeguarding team is pro-active, knowledgeable and highly trained. The school is outward looking and keen to learn from, and work with, other schools. The safeguarding team look to continuously improve their knowledge and enhance their work with outside agencies.
54. Induction for new staff is comprehensive and carefully planned, covering the key areas of safeguarding. This enables new staff to have a thorough understanding of the expectations of the school and their responsibilities in keeping children safe.
55. Staff are knowledgeable with up-to-date training and know what to do if they have concerns about pupils. Referrals to children's services, local authority or the police are made in a timely manner. The school's safeguarding policy is fully up to date and reflects the latest requirements.
56. There are robust safer recruitment procedures in place and suitable records are kept of the pre-employment checks the school makes.

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

All the relevant Standards are met

School details

School	Colfe's School
Department for Education number	203/6293
Registered charity number	1109650
Address	Horn Park Lane Lee London SE12 8AW
Website	www.colfes.com
Proprietor	Colfe's School Limited
Chair	Mr Mathew Pellereau
Headteacher	Mr Richard Russell
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	1314
Date of previous inspection	23 to 24 January 2019

Information about the school

57. Colfe's School is an independent co-educational day school. The school is a registered charity which is overseen by a governing body. The Leathersellers' Company appoints members. The senior and junior schools share the same site. Since the previous inspection, the school has expanded, particularly in the senior school. A new building comprising four full size classrooms has been added to the site and a new bursar and new head of the junior school have been appointed.
58. There is an early years setting comprising Nursery and Reception located on the same site as the junior school.
59. The school has identified 263 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Seven pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
60. English is an additional language for 118 pupils.
61. The school states that its aims are:
- to promote excellence in all areas of school life and to develop each pupil's abilities and character to the full, whilst ensuring that each child is happy and developing their unique potential
 - to provide innovative academic teaching which adds value and fosters learning and scholarship of the highest quality, together with a wide range of cultural, sporting and co-curricular activities
 - to nurture an awareness of spiritual and moral values amongst its pupils in accordance with the principles of the Founder, Abraham Colfe
 - to maintain a balanced and diverse community of children from varied backgrounds within the context of an academically selective school
 - to promote a purposeful, disciplined, supportive and respectful atmosphere in which all pupils are encouraged to achieve their full potential, staff find vocational fulfilment in their careers and all can use their talents for the greater good of the community and society as a whole
 - to be the co-educational independent school of choice in south-east London.

Inspection details

Inspection dates 19 to 21 September 2023

62. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for three days. The onsite inspection was quality assured by a monitor.
63. Inspectors:
- conducted lesson observations, including joint lesson walks with school leaders
 - held discussions with pupils
 - scrutinised samples of pupils' work, including talking with pupils about their work
 - met with senior leaders and a range of staff
 - held a meeting with a group of governors, including the chair and safeguarding governor

- observed a sample of extra-curricular activities
- attended assemblies
- observed pupil registration
- visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas
- scrutinised curriculum and other school documentation.

64. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate 2023

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