

School inspection report

11 to 13 November 2025

Thorpe Hall School

Wakering Road
Southend-on-Sea
Essex
SS1 3RD

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 set high expectations. They promote a positive and purposeful culture rooted in the school's aims to nurture its pupils' character, aspirations and community spirit. Governors ensure that leaders discharge their responsibilities effectively so that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing. They are highly attuned to risks that may affect pupils' welfare and take well-considered steps to manage them. They review risk assessments regularly and adjust their strategies when circumstances change. Leaders maintain policies that reflect current statutory guidance and adapt systems and procedures appropriately when required.
3. The leadership of early years is purposeful and well informed. Leaders provide a suitable nurturing and stimulating environment that meets children's individual needs. Leaders in the early years prioritise speech and language development, ensure that staff identify additional needs promptly and guide teaching so that children learn confidently through play, exploration and well-judged challenge. Staff set clear expectations for behaviour, and children respond with calm, co-operative play and a growing understanding of how to respect other people's different characteristics.
4. The inclusive, well-sequenced curriculum, across all sectors of the school, develops pupils' knowledge and skills in a wide range of subjects. Teaching is purposeful and well planned. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly. However, pupils do not consistently receive feedback from teachers that enables them to reflect on their learning and gain clearer insight into how they might improve their work. The school provides a stimulating recreational programme that broadens pupils' interests and develops their physical and practical skills.
5. The school supports pupils' emotional and mental health effectively. The relationships education programme in the prep school and the relationships and sex education (RSE) programme in the senior school teach pupils how to build respectful friendships, develop their understanding of diversity and engage thoughtfully with sensitive topics. Staff apply the behaviour policy consistently, and pupils, in turn, behave well, take responsibility for their conduct and reflect thoughtfully when they make mistakes. The school's anti-bullying policy is effective. Leaders encourage high levels of attendance and act promptly on any concerns.
6. The curriculum promotes respect, tolerance and an appreciation of individuals' identities and backgrounds through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme, cultural events and trips. Leaders ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of British institutions and values. Across the curriculum, pupils examine ethical questions, learn to distinguish right from wrong and reflect on how to act responsibly.
7. The careers programme is effective in introducing pupils to a wide variety of professions through visiting speakers and digital resources. Older pupils gain a clear understanding of higher education options in the UK and abroad. Pupils receive an effective economic education. The school provides varied opportunities for pupils to contribute positively to the local community and support the lives of others.
8. Governors and leaders prioritise the safeguarding of pupils. Staff are well trained, vigilant about pupils' welfare, and report concerns promptly. Safeguarding leaders maintain detailed records, analyse emerging issues and work effectively with external agencies when needed. Pupils learn how

to stay safe through the curriculum, assemblies and visiting speakers. The school maintains rigorous safer recruitment procedures for staff.

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 teachers provide feedback that consistently enables pupils to reflect on their learning and understand how they might improve their work further.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders promote a positive and purposeful culture rooted in the school's core values. They hold high expectations for pupils and communicate a clear belief in what pupils can achieve. Leaders consistently model these values in their daily practice, and pupils respond by upholding high standards of conduct and forming relationships characterised by mutual respect and trust.
10. Pupils' wellbeing lies at the centre of leaders' vision for the school's continual development. Leaders effectively identify areas for improvement through rigorous self-evaluation, which includes consultation with staff at all levels. This has led leaders to review and reshape the curriculum, broaden the co-curricular offer and create purposeful opportunities for pupils to extend their leadership skills and influence school life.
11. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school. They undertake regular and relevant training, seek advice from external professionals to evaluate the quality of their oversight and help ensure that leaders display good knowledge and skills and meet their responsibilities effectively. Governors visit the school frequently to review the impact of leaders' decision-making. The governors' rigorous oversight ensures that the Standards are met consistently.
12. Leaders are highly attuned to risks to pupils' wellbeing, including contextual risk, and implement suitable measures to reduce them. They review the effectiveness of the schools' risk assessment strategies regularly and adjust them promptly when required. Leaders ensure that staff receive suitable training in evaluating and managing risk effectively.
13. Leaders are ambitious for the quality of teaching and for pupils to achieve their potential. Leaders provide high levels of support for teachers to develop their practice. This includes external training, structured opportunities for professional dialogue and weekly sessions for teachers to reflect on their work and consider feedback from pupils about their learning.
14. The leadership of early years in the school is purposeful and effective. Leaders set clear expectations and provide staff with well-informed guidance, ensuring nurturing and stimulating provision that meets individual children's needs. Their careful oversight of teaching, learning and pupils' welfare ensures that the youngest children make effective progress and feel settled and well supported.
15. Leaders meet pupils' health needs effectively at all levels of the school. Leaders have established a wide-ranging and inclusive programme of physical education (PE) to promote pupils' physical health. They ensure that pupils consistently receive high levels of support for their mental health and emotional wellbeing, which includes access to specialist professionals when pupils require it.
16. School policies reflect current statutory guidance. Leaders review them regularly to check their effectiveness. They ensure that staff and pupils understand the school's policies and procedures and alert staff promptly when requirements change.
17. Leaders ensure that all required policies and procedures are published on the school's website or made available to parents as appropriate. Parents regularly receive information and reports about their child's attainment, effort and conduct, and have suitable opportunities to discuss their child's progress with staff. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school outside the usual transition points. They provide the relevant local authorities with all required information relating to funded education, health and care plans (EHC plans).

18. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure and manage complaints in line with the published timescales. Leaders and governors review outcomes carefully and take appropriate action, if required, including when complaints are not upheld.
19. Leaders maintain effective relationships with external agencies, including safeguarding partners and the police, to promote the wellbeing of pupils.
20. Leaders maintain a well-considered accessibility plan that is updated promptly in response to any changing needs within the school community. Leaders ensure that the school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders have developed an inclusive and engaging curriculum that systematically sequences pupils' learning at every level. The curriculum develops pupils' skills and knowledge in a broad range of subjects and topics. For instance, younger pupils study French, Spanish, Italian and Mandarin. Pupils develop practical and aesthetic skills through subjects such as textiles, art, food technology and design and technology. Through the curriculum, leaders effectively promote a reading culture that begins in the nursery and continues into the senior school. For instance, pupils in the prep school engage with Shakespeare's works and develop their appreciation of his dramatic style, characters and themes. Leaders rigorously review the curriculum to ensure that it offers appropriate challenge and flexibility.
23. Leaders in the early years prioritise speech and language development. They support children effectively in linking sounds to the letters they read and write. Staff promptly identify children who need specialist help and provide suitably for their needs. Teachers encourage children to take appropriate risks in their play and learning and to remain undeterred when they make mistakes.
24. Leaders at all levels oversee a framework for assessment that staff, pupils and parents understand well. Teachers check pupils' understanding regularly and, in most cases, provide effective guidance on how pupils can improve their work. However, teachers do not consistently provide feedback to pupils that enables them to reflect on their learning and understand how they might improve their work further. Leaders systematically evaluate pupils' progress by analysing data that compares pupils' attainment with their targets. Pupils achieve well at GCSE in relation to their starting points.
25. Leaders monitor teaching regularly to check its effectiveness. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and consistently adopt a supportive, encouraging approach that helps pupils make good progress. Teachers ask precise questions that prompt pupils to extend, refine and clarify their thinking. Teachers plan lessons effectively and use well-chosen resources. For instance, in chemistry pupils create demonstration films on their devices to show practical applications of chromatography. Teaching at all levels promotes British values, such as mutual respect and tolerance, both through the topics taught and in the consistent way teachers model such values.
26. Pupils show high levels of interest in their work and participate eagerly in classroom activities. Children in the early years persevere well, such as when hollowing oranges to make bird feeders. Pupils across the school demonstrate highly developed collaborative skills, for example, when working together to create an architectural model of the Globe Theatre. In the early years, children confidently develop gross motor skills through activities such as digging to explore the earth to discover what lies within. This in turn supports the development of fine motor skills, such as in making bracelets for 'kindness week'.
27. The school provides tailored and well-resourced support for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), including those who have an EHC plan. Highly knowledgeable leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND liaise effectively with pastoral and academic staff and work productively with pupils and parents to shape individual learning plans (ILPs). This responsive provision meets the individual needs of pupils with conditions such as dyslexia and helps pupils grow in confidence and make secure progress.

28. Leaders ensure that the very few pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate support should this be required.
29. Leaders ensure that pupils engage purposefully in a wide range of recreational activities. Children in the early years play within well-resourced outdoor spaces, which staff use to help them develop a secure understanding of the natural environment. Pupils also participate in enrichment options such as robotics, ballet, sewing and the greenhouse club. These activities stimulate pupils' interests and help them develop creativity, physical aptitude and practical skills.

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

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

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

31. The school meets pupils' pastoral needs effectively. Through the curriculum, assemblies and visiting speakers, leaders ensure that pupils understand the importance of managing their mental health and regulating their emotions, which helps them build self-esteem and confidence. Pupils at all levels know how to seek timely support from trusted adults. In the early years, children make effective use of 'how are you feeling' areas when they need a quiet moment for reflection. When required, pupils have access to specialist support from the counselling service and, where appropriate, an external psychologist.
32. Leaders foster pupils' spiritual awareness effectively. Staff provide well-structured opportunities for pupils to explore the natural beauty of the local beach and woods, helping them understand their connection to nature, and children in the early years use art thoughtfully to express ideas and feelings. Across the prep and senior schools, the religious education (RE) content of the PSHE programme enables pupils to learn about the spiritual practices of different faiths, to discuss moral issues and to develop their own spiritual reflection.
33. The relationships education programme enables pupils in the prep school to learn how to build and sustain friendships, explore what makes people similar to and different from each another and understand why it is important to respect and value diversity. The senior school's RSE programme develops these themes in an age-appropriate way, sensitively engaging pupils with topics such as consent, different types of healthy relationships and varied family dynamics. Teachers consider the sensitivities of individual pupils in their planning so that potential difficulties are anticipated and addressed in advance.
34. Pupils receive effective health education. Children in the early years learn about oral health from a dental practitioner and develop their physical health through regular outdoor play. The PSHE programme teaches pupils how to make healthy choices. Pupils develop their fitness and understanding of their bodies through an effective and inclusive physical education (PE) programme that methodically develops pupils' physical skills through exercise routines and a broad range of sports, including football, rugby, basketball and athletics. Knowledgeable staff support pupils in achieving success at borough, county and national levels.
35. Staff apply the behaviour policy fairly and consistently. Pupils behave well as a result. Pupils take responsibility for their conduct and understand the consequences of their actions. Leaders provide purposeful opportunities for pupils to reflect on any inappropriate behaviour and learn from their actions.
36. The school's anti-bullying policy is effective. Through the curriculum, pupils learn about different types of bullying and how to report any concerns. On the rare occasions bullying occurs, staff respond promptly, support pupils well and take appropriate action to resolve the issue.
37. Early years staff set clear expectations for behaviour, and children respond by playing calmly and co-operatively. Children show consideration for others and respect each other's space during activities. Teachers introduce children to people's different characteristics through carefully guided discussions that build their understanding of respect and diversity.

38. The school maintains high standards of health and safety. Leaders ensure that routine checks and maintenance are carried out systematically and documented clearly. Leaders schedule regular fire evacuation practices and take appropriate measures to reduce fire risks. Staff understand how to report any health and safety issues, and leaders respond promptly when concerns arise. The school site is suitable and well maintained.
39. An appropriate number of staff hold appropriate first aid qualifications, including in paediatric first aid in the early years, and leaders deploy them suitably. Medicines are stored securely and administered effectively, in line with school procedures. Pupils know how to access support should they get injured or feel unwell.
40. Leaders ensure that pupils are supervised well. Staff are deployed effectively at breaktimes, during transitions and at lunch to promote pupils' safety and wellbeing. Appropriate staff-to-child ratios are maintained at all times in the early years.
41. The school's systems for promoting and monitoring attendance are robust. Leaders review attendance data regularly and act promptly when any concerns emerge. Admission and attendance procedures meet requirements, and registers are completed accurately. The school encourages high levels of attendance through initiatives such as year-group competitions that recognise and celebrate high levels of attendance.

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

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

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

43. The curriculum encourages pupils to understand, respect and value individual people's backgrounds and identities. The PSHE programme provides structured opportunities for pupils to consider issues related to gender and race. Leaders broaden pupils' understanding of diversity through 'cultural days' that celebrate a range of national identities, cultures and backgrounds, commemorating national events such as Black History Month and Windrush Day, and acquainting pupils with food from around the world. Pupils learn about the festivals and practices of different religions in assemblies and through visits to places of worship such as mosques and churches.
44. Leaders stimulate pupils' cultural and social awareness effectively. School productions promote pupils' collaborative skills and creativity. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils at all levels to take part in musical activity. Pupils broaden their perspectives further through visits to galleries and theatres. Across the curriculum, leaders systematically programme opportunities for pupils to deepen their appreciation of culture, art, music and literature.
45. Pupils develop a secure understanding of British institutions and values. They deepen their knowledge of democratic processes by visiting the Houses of Parliament, engaging with the local mayor and MP, and visiting the civic offices in Southend-on-Sea. The curriculum develops pupils' understanding of national and international political issues. For instance, pupils engage thoughtfully with topics such as the difference between nationalism and patriotism. In the early years, children begin to appreciate the sacrifices made for the nation by past generations, by creating poppy wreaths with their parents in the school grounds.
46. Pupils develop a clear understanding of right and wrong. The curriculum provides meaningful opportunities for them to explore ethical questions and consider the consequences of choices. For example, pupils examine the moral and ethical issues that arise in various myths and legends and use these stories to reflect on the nature of responsibility and decision-making.
47. In the early years, teachers promote children's social development by creating a warm and structured environment in which children learn to take turns, share and play co-operatively, for example by sharing dressing-up clothes and taking responsibility for tidying after activities. Staff consistently model positive social behaviours in their interactions with children.
48. The careers programme enables pupils to explore their future choices effectively. Pupils at all levels learn about a broad range of professions through talks by visiting speakers who represent a range of sectors, including the police, fire service and local businesses. The school provides high-quality digital resources that pupils use well to investigate a broad range of career pathways, the qualifications required and the demands of specific jobs. In the senior school, the careers programme gives pupils a clear understanding of their sixth-form and higher education options, including opportunities at international universities.
49. The school provides an effective and age-appropriate economic education for pupils. In the early years, children are introduced to the concept of money through practical, real-life experiences. Children visit a local supermarket to buy their own snacks, helping them understand the link between money and the items they purchase. Through the PSHE programme, pupils in the senior

school develop a well-grounded understanding of personal finance, including budgeting and managing bank accounts.

50. The school encourages pupils to contribute responsibly to the local community. Staff arrange for younger pupils to visit a local care home to sing to residents. Prep school pupils collect, pack and deliver food to a nearby foodbank as part of the Harvest Festival. Older pupils support an initiative that supports local families in need. Pupils sew poppies for display on the local pier as part of Remembrance Day commemorations. Through these activities, pupils develop their appreciation of how they can enhance and support the lives of others.

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

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

Safeguarding

52. Governors place safeguarding at the centre of their oversight. They scrutinise and challenge safeguarding practice effectively through regular discussions with leaders, careful review of leaders' reports and consideration of relevant data, and they check that procedures remain effective in practice. Governors receive regular training and updates to ensure their knowledge of safeguarding remains current and relevant.
53. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained for their role. They work effectively together to co-ordinate their work and share information appropriately. Safeguarding leaders have a deep understanding of the contextual and individual risks pupils may face and take suitable measures to reduce these.
54. Staff receive comprehensive and regular safeguarding training, and safeguarding leaders provide additional training when new issues emerge or there are any changes to statutory guidance. Staff at all levels remain vigilant about pupils' welfare and recognise signs that a pupil may be at risk of harm. They report concerns promptly and accurately in line with the school's safeguarding policy, which reflects the most recent statutory guidance.
55. Safeguarding leaders maintain clear and detailed records that include well-reasoned rationales for decisions. They review these records carefully to identify any emerging trends or wider issues that require attention. Safeguarding leaders put appropriate strategies in place to support any pupils affected by safeguarding concerns. When needed, they liaise promptly and effectively with external agencies, including children's services and the police.
56. Leaders respond appropriately to any allegations or low-level concerns about the behaviour of adults who work with the pupils. They maintain detailed records of concerns and review these carefully to identify and address any emerging patterns. Staff understand their responsibility to report any concerns about the conduct of adults and do so in line with established procedures.
57. Through the PSHE programme, assemblies and visiting speakers, pupils throughout the school learn how to keep themselves safe. They learn how to manage online risks, such as to inform a trusted adult if an unfamiliar person tries to contact them online. Safeguarding leaders ensure that suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems are in place and check their effectiveness regularly. They respond promptly to any concerns identified through these systems.
58. The school implements robust safer recruitment procedures which meet requirements, including for the early years. All necessary pre-employment checks are completed before staff begin work. The single central record of appointments (SCR) is precisely and diligently maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Thorpe Hall School
Department for Education number	882/6001
Registered charity number	298155
Address	Thorpe Hall School Waking Road Southend-on-Sea Essex SS1 3RD
Phone number	01702 582340
Email address	sec@thorpehallschool.co.uk
Website	www.thorpehall.southend.sch.uk
Proprietor	Thorpe Hall School Trust
Chair	Mr Jonathan Gorridge
Headteacher	Mr Stephen Duckitt
Age range	2 to 16
Number of pupils	595
Date of previous inspection	26 to 29 April 2022

Information about the school

60. Thorpe Hall School is an independent co-educational day school located in Southend-on-Sea, Essex. It was founded in 1925. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors.
61. There are 90 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
62. The school has identified 112 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
63. The school has identified a very small number of pupils as speaking English as an additional language (EAL).
64. The school states its aims are to nurture its pupils' character, aspirations and community spirit so that they may fulfil their ambitions and contribute positively to the wider world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

11 to 13 November 2025

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

66. Inspection activities included:

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

67. 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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