

School inspection report

5 to 7 November 2024

Westholme School

Wilmar Lodge

Meins Road

Blackburn

BB2 6QU

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 and governors monitor and evaluate the school's provision regularly and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. Leaders have designed a curriculum that is well matched to the needs and aspirations of pupils. It is supported by an extensive co-curricular programme. This provides many opportunities for pupils to enrich and extend their knowledge, and develop their self-confidence, physical, creative and performance skills.
2. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons effectively, so that pupils develop the knowledge, skills and understanding needed. Pupils show high levels of engagement and typically make good progress. However, in some senior school lessons, the activities set by teachers, do not take full account of pupils' abilities, or of what pupils already know. This leads to the level of challenge occasionally not being appropriate for some pupils and this limits their progress.
3. Children in the early years follow a carefully planned curriculum designed to cover the required areas of learning. Well-planned activities and encouraging guidance from staff ensure that children's learning needs are met and that they make good progress.
4. Leaders promote tolerance, understanding and respect for others. Relationships between pupils, and between pupils and staff, are very positive and reflect the strong mutual respect which is a key component of the school's ethos. Leaders' clear expectations promote high standards of behaviour, both in lessons and around the school.
5. The carefully planned and effectively implemented personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum includes relationships and sex education (RSE). Through age-appropriate teaching, pupils become increasingly knowledgeable about key topics relating to their personal development and wellbeing.
6. Leaders ensure that pupils are well equipped for each stage of their education as they move through the school. Pupils make effective contributions to their school and to the wider community. Leaders ensure pupils are prepared for life in British society through an effective programme of social and economic education which includes personalised careers advice.
7. Leaders maintain appropriate policies and procedures to promote pupils' safeguarding. Procedures for the recruitment of staff are robust. Leaders consult external agencies promptly for safeguarding advice. Staff are suitably trained to implement policies and processes to protect pupils from harm. Pupils feel safe in school and are confident that there are adults to help them if they are worried about something.

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 in the senior school, teaching is planned to match pupils' individual needs and prior attainment so that they make consistently good progress in all subjects
- ensure the effective implementation of strategies designed to enable pupils to achieve as well as possible at A level.

1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders promote pupils' wellbeing through the carefully planned curriculum, the wide range of co-curricular activities and the extensive pastoral support available. Leaders support pupils in the practical implementation of the school motto, which highlights the importance of a healthy mind in a healthy body.
9. Leaders in the early years have the skills and knowledge they need to lead the setting well, and to ensure that the development needs of the children are met. Leaders plan opportunities in the curriculum to use the wide array of outdoor resources to develop children's creativity, physical and social skills and independence. Parents are given appropriate information about progress against the early learning goals, and guidance on their child's next steps.
10. Governors challenge leaders appropriately and require them to report regularly regarding their areas of responsibility. They check, through governors' committee structures, that policies are reviewed and implemented, as required. Leaders monitor the implementation of policies in practice and provide training for staff on policy changes when they arise. Leaders and governors demonstrate the relevant knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively.
11. Leaders use appropriate and ongoing analysis of the effectiveness of the school's work to identify priorities for improvement, taking the views of pupils, parents and staff into account. For example, feedback from the student council on the school's 21st century essential skills project has led to more explicit and co-ordinated teaching of these across the curriculum. As a result, pupils take greater responsibility for their learning.
12. Leaders and staff are readily accessible to parents and deal with any concerns promptly. Complaints are recorded and responded to appropriately and within the published timeframes. Leaders systematically review the causes of complaints to identify any repeated issues.
13. Leaders take a strategic approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing. Leaders regularly review risks, are alert to new risks that may arise and take appropriate action. Suitable policies cover a wide range of potential risks related to pupils' welfare and safety. These give staff clear direction about how to minimise risks and are followed in practice. Leaders carry out thorough checks for aspects such as the safety of the premises, educational trips, recruitment and potentially hazardous activities.
14. Reports to parents on pupils' progress and attainment are regular, detailed and informative. Information about school policies and procedures is made available on the school website or sent directly to parents. The school provides the local authority with the required information, including reporting on the use of funds, relating to pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
15. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The education provided by the school does not discriminate, and reasonable adjustments are made for those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A suitable accessibility plan is in place, which is reviewed regularly.
16. Leaders work with external agencies effectively to support the educational and welfare needs of the pupils. They develop open and productive relationships with organisations, including liaison with appropriate agencies for concerns related to pupils' attendance.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders provide a well-planned curriculum so that pupils' aptitudes and needs are met. They regularly review and adapt arrangements, for example in the senior school, the recent move to a two-week timetable has allocated more time to core subjects whilst still maintaining the wide range of subjects offered. This ensures breadth and balance, and as a result, pupils gain knowledge and develop skills across an appropriate range of curriculum areas. Further curriculum developments include the introduction of a digital literacy lesson in Year 7 which, alongside a weekly computer science lesson, equips pupils with key digital skills to support their learning.
19. At GCSE, pupils attain grades in line with, or above expectations based on their prior attainment. At A level, some pupils attain grades below those expected. Leaders have recently introduced a range of strategies to address this. These include changes to the curriculum, the greater use of assessment to identify the needs of individuals and personalised support. The impact of these changes has not yet been measured.
20. In the early years, activities are well matched to children's needs and interests so that they make good progress in their learning and development. Leaders promote high expectations of behaviour, which children understand. This helps children to be engaged in their learning and to develop their concentration. Teachers model vocabulary and conversation skills to encourage children to listen carefully and to put forward their ideas. As a result, children communicate confidently. Teachers' consistent interaction with children and immediate feedback supports their development of early reading and writing skills. Children develop their physical, mathematical and creative skills through play and discovery. Staff ensure children are actively engaged in activities to further their progress. Adults develop positive relationships with children and use effective questioning to promote learning. The curriculum in early years is enriched by activities such as ballet, woodwork, and speech and performance.
21. Throughout the school, teachers use their specialist subject knowledge to plan and deliver lessons which actively engage pupils with their learning. Teachers create a purposeful learning environment by managing pupil behaviour well, and by ensuring lessons are suitably paced, and make effective use of resources. Well-chosen teaching strategies, coupled with individual support, enable pupils to make good progress.
22. Teachers provide helpful and precise feedback so pupils understand what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve their work. Pupils act upon their teachers' comments and are proactive in seeking additional support when they need it.
23. In many lessons, teachers use well-targeted questions and activities which are highly effective in challenging pupils to recall knowledge, develop their understanding, and to be creative and critical thinkers. However, in some lessons in the senior school, planning is not sufficiently focused on individual pupils' needs. As a result, the progress made by some pupils is inconsistent.
24. Leaders have introduced improved systems for analysing the results of assessment to check on the progress pupils make. This has increased the use of assessment data by leaders and staff to identify pupils' needs and develop appropriate strategies, where needed, to enable pupils to raise their attainment. This is not yet fully embedded across all subjects in the senior school.

25. Leaders have established a systematic approach to considering the provision for pupils who have SEND so their individual needs are met effectively. Specialist staff provide tailored support which is reviewed regularly to identify any adjustments required. Individual learning plans and pupils' profiles provide teachers with information about strategies to help pupils learn and these are implemented effectively. As a result, pupils make good progress from their start points.
26. Teachers understand the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Appropriate adjustments and structured support, provided both verbally and in written resources, ensure that pupils who speak EAL develop their confidence and fluency in English.
27. Leaders have set up a co-curricular programme which provides a wide range of opportunities for pupils to pursue new and existing interests. Pupils collaborate with others, develop new skills and gain self-confidence through activities such as ceramics, chess, public speaking, and taking part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. Through an extensive array of performance opportunities, pupils gain experience of developing and honing their talents in drama, dance and music in the school's theatre. Pupils also work behind the scenes for school productions on the lighting and sound decks, which enables them to acquire new technical skills.
28. The sixth-form curriculum has recently been revised to offer pupils a wider range of enrichment activities such as the extended project qualification, sign language, the sports leader award and cooking on a budget course. As a result, pupils develop useful skills for the next stage of their lives.

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 have drawn up a wide-ranging PSHE programme which is age-appropriate and adapted to meet pupils' needs. Teachers plan lessons well, including a range of activities which enable pupils to develop self-awareness, and recognise the importance of making appropriate choices in life.
31. The PSHE curriculum includes effective coverage of RSE. The programme develops pupils' understanding of the nature and diversity of relationships. For example, younger pupils recognise what makes a good friend and older pupils can identify the features of appropriate and inappropriate relationships.
32. Through PSHE lessons and assemblies, pupils learn a variety of strategies to support and develop their self-esteem and mental wellbeing, including how to be mindful and how to develop resilience. Pupils in the prep school enjoy the opportunity to learn outdoors and recognise the positive impact that learning in the natural environment has on their physical and mental health. Pupils of all ages learn about the importance of a healthy lifestyle through lessons which highlight the benefits of quality sleep and eating a balanced diet. Staff know the pupils well and this enables them to monitor pupils' wellbeing and, when necessary, to offer additional support.
33. Pupils, including children in the early years, have extensive opportunities to participate in physical activities, both within the well-planned physical education programme and through wider co-curricular sporting activities at lunchtime and after school. As a result, pupils develop their physical fitness and their skills in a range of different sports.
34. Assemblies, activities led by the inter-faith group, and ethics, philosophy and religion (EPR) lessons are highly effective in enabling pupils to learn about different religious beliefs and examine ethical and social issues. As a result, pupils develop moral understanding. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to develop their spirituality and appreciation for the world around them through assembly themes and activities such as meditation club.
35. Pupils learn to challenge themselves and develop new skills through participating in a wide programme of co-curricular activities, house events and leadership roles. Many pupils hold positions of responsibility, such as house captains and school council representatives, which furthers the growth of their self-confidence and self-esteem.
36. Staff in the early years setting provide a rich array of experiences to promote children's personal, emotional and physical development. The caring and nurturing atmosphere created by staff encourages children to gain self-confidence and to initiate self-chosen activities. The sensitive teaching of topics such as fun and fears enables children to start to understand their emotions. Children eagerly develop their physical skills through activities such as swimming and yoga.
37. Pupils throughout the school are appropriately supervised. Leaders' clear expectations of behaviour and positive relationships between staff and pupils support pupils in sustaining positive behaviour. Pupils take responsibility for their own behaviour and are highly considerate and respectful of others. Leaders have established an appropriate anti-bullying strategy which includes effective procedures for responding to any incidents of bullying. When concerns arise, staff encourage pupils to reflect on their actions and how their behaviour needs to change. Leaders support both alleged

bullies and victims, including through discussion and counselling, within a supportive structure that enables pupils to learn from their mistakes.

38. Leaders maintain effective health and safety arrangements which comply with relevant legal requirements. Premises and accommodation are maintained to a high standard. Suitable precautions are taken to reduce the risk from fire. Staff receive appropriate health and safety and risk management training. Leaders review any incidents and make effective use of evaluation forms after visits, amending safety practices and making improvements as required.
39. Suitable arrangements are in place to care for pupils who become unwell. Staff are appropriately trained to deliver first aid, including for children in the early years. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with regulations. Staff monitor attendance effectively and promptly follow up any unexplained absence. The local authority is notified of any pupils joining or leaving the school at non-standard times.

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

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

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

41. Pupils show high levels of respect for others and are accepting and tolerant of the diverse cultures and faiths which make up the school and the wider community. This is as a consequence of the high expectations set by leaders and staff, coupled with the effective teaching of PSHE. Assemblies, EPR lessons, pupil faith ambassadors, and events such as the annual multicultural day enhance pupils' cultural awareness.
42. Leaders include content in PSHE lessons, assemblies and the wider curriculum to teach pupils about British society and the world beyond school. This enables pupils to develop an understanding of the criminal justice system, how democracy works and public services and institutions in England. Pupils learn to consider different viewpoints in response to leaders' emphasis on critical and reflective thinking, and opportunities to participate in discussions and mock elections. Leaders and staff ensure that a balanced and unbiased perspective is presented to pupils on political matters.
43. Pupils are encouraged to collaborate with their peers throughout the curriculum and in co-curricular activities. As a result, pupils have well-developed team working skills. They are comfortable in working with others to solve problems and recognise the importance of discussing ideas in a sensitive way. Pupils show respect for others' views, are considerate in their responses and are supportive of each other.
44. Leaders help children in the early years to develop their social skills through a range of activities that involve learning to work and play well together. Children understand the importance of sharing with others and readily help to tidy things away at the end of an activity, modelling their positive behaviour on the caring example set by staff. Visits from speakers such as the local police, outdoor learning and trips, promote children's curiosity of the world around them and further aid their social development.
45. Leaders provide a variety of opportunities for pupils to contribute to the lives of others both within the school and in the wider community. The opportunities and responsibilities available for pupils increase as they move through the school, and they are encouraged to reflect on the way in which a community works and their obligations to others. As a result, pupils have a mature sense of right and wrong, accept responsibility for their actions and readily take on a wide range of responsibilities which they fulfil to good effect. These include prep school playground ambassadors and senior school peer mentors. Older pupils contribute to the school community through initiating and leading activities such as the photography club, organised by senior pupils for those in the prep school. The house system promotes interactions between pupils of different ages. The collaborative activities and earning of house points helps pupils to understand collective responsibility.
46. The pupil-led charity team and human rights group organise events to raise awareness of, and funds for, a variety of causes. Pupils organise activities such as preparing food parcels, donating of toys and letter writing campaigns and petitions relating to human rights abuses. As a result, pupils develop a social conscience, have a clear understanding of human rights, and show compassion for others.
47. Leaders provide an extensive programme of careers-related events and links with past pupils. These complement the PSHE careers content and activities, ensuring that pupils receive information about

a wide variety of possible directions. Careers staff tailor advice to individuals and pupils are therefore well equipped to make decisions about their future. Sixth-form pupils go on to study a diverse range of courses at a variety of institutions and through degree apprenticeships.

48. Pupils develop their financial awareness through the study of topics such as budgeting, taxes and mortgages in PSHE lessons and enterprise initiatives. Pupils in Year 6 explore how to raise money for charity from an initial investment of £50. Sixth-form business and economics students are involved in running the school shop. Pupils gain experience of managing stock, placing and collecting orders, promoting the business and ensuring that it is an effectively functioning part of the school.

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

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

Safeguarding

50. Leaders have put in place suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils. Leaders promote a culture of openness and the need for all adults in the school to be alert to potential concerns. Designated safeguarding leaders work effectively with external agencies when concerns arise, making referrals to children’s services, the local authority designated officer and the police in a timely manner.
51. Leaders have drawn up a suitable safeguarding policy which is in line with statutory guidance and which is implemented effectively. It is published on the school’s website and reviewed at least annually. The most recent review of the school’s safeguarding policy did not identify inaccuracies relating to references to statutory guidance. These inaccuracies were rectified during the inspection. Regular governor oversight offers effective challenge and helpful advice for the safeguarding team.
52. Leaders provide all staff, governors and volunteers with appropriate safeguarding training when they join the school and with regular updates. Designated safeguarding leaders receive appropriate training and record, monitor and assess safeguarding concerns effectively. Reviews of safeguarding are used to identify training priorities and any actions required to raise awareness.
53. Leaders ensure that effective measures are taken to manage identified risks associated with pupils’ safeguarding needs. Staff understand child protection procedures, including those for online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. They understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern, including potential child-on-child abuse. Leaders take prompt and appropriate action when safeguarding concerns are reported. Detailed safeguarding records are kept securely and shared only when it is appropriate to do so.
54. Leaders help pupils to develop an awareness of risks and a thorough understanding of how to stay safe, including online, through the PSHE and computer science curriculums. Leaders ensure that there are suitable monitoring and filtering processes in place and that these are tested regularly.
55. Leaders have established clear safer recruitment procedures for appointing new staff which are implemented robustly. They complete the required pre-appointment checks on staff, governors and volunteers and record these appropriately on the single central record. There are suitable arrangements for handling allegations against staff and potential misconduct.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Westholme School
Department for Education number	889/6000
Registered charity number	526615
Address	Westholme School Wilmar Lodge Meins Road Blackburn Lancashire BB2 6QU
Phone number	01254 506070
Email address	secretary@westholmeschool.com
Website	www.westholmeschool.com
Proprietor	Westholme School Limited
Chair	Mr Brian Marsden
Principal	Mr Paul Taylor
Age range	4 - 18
Number of pupils	738
Date of previous inspection	13 to 15 October 2021

Information about the school

57. Westholme School is a co-educational day school located in Blackburn, Lancashire. It was founded in 1923 as a preparatory school, and became a charitable trust in 1968. The trustees form the governing body with proprietorial responsibility. Since the previous inspection, the school appointed a new principal in September 2024.
58. The school is organised into: the prep school for pupils aged four to eleven, which includes the early years; the senior school for those aged eleven to sixteen; and a sixth form.
59. There are 17 children in the early years part of the school which comprises one Reception class.
60. The school has identified 65 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
61. English is an additional language for 11 pupils.
62. The school aims to be a warm family community where pupils are happy and love coming to school. It seeks to offer an education that enables pupils to become the very best, well-rounded version of themselves and to provide inspirational teaching that fosters a life-long love of learning and ensures every pupil exceeds their academic potential. The school aspires to equip its pupils with a 21st century skillset that fully prepares them for life beyond Westholme.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

5 to 7 November 2024

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

64. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

65. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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