

School inspection report

3 to 5 March 2026

Sunningdale School

Dry Arch Road

Sunningdale

SL5 9PZ

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 place the promotion of pupils' wellbeing at the heart of all they do. They know every pupil well as an individual. Leaders focus on ensuring that pupils' needs are met academically, physically, socially and emotionally. They have the knowledge and skills they need so that they are effective in their roles. They assess the quality of the school's provision regularly and make changes to improve it, where necessary. The proprietor ensures that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Boarding is a key part of school life. However, leaders are careful to ensure that day pupils have equal access to all that the school offers. Boarding provision is comfortable and well maintained, with suitable spaces for boarders to relax and socialise. It is well led and managed so that boarding requirements are met consistently. Positive relationships with staff help boarders to feel comfortable and supported.
3. The curriculum includes an appropriate breadth of subjects. It is well planned and effectively delivered. Teachers have in-depth knowledge of the subjects they teach. This enables them to answer questions confidently and present new learning clearly. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school and achieve well. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are given the support they need to be successful. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) also receive the support they need so that they make good progress.
4. Pupils behave well throughout the school, displaying courtesy and impeccable manners. They develop respectful and considerate attitudes to other people. Pupils learn about personal characteristics such as race and religion through the personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum, tutor time and daily chapel services. They develop positive attitudes towards the differences between people and celebrate the diversity in society.
5. Pupils learn about economic education through PSHE and mathematics. However, this is not as well developed as other aspects of the curriculum. As a result, pupils make less progress in learning about financial matters than they do in other subjects.
6. Physical education (PE) and games play a major role in school life. Pupils take part in sport throughout the week, both in curriculum time and extra-curricular activities. This helps them to develop positive attitudes to physical fitness. Pupils develop a healthy competitiveness alongside well-developed teamwork and sportsmanship skills.
7. Health and safety processes are robust. The school is clean and well maintained. Leaders identify and mitigate risks, and adequate records are kept. Leaders regularly review risks and make changes to the control measures in place, as necessary. However, at times, leaders do not update the written records of risk assessments, as the school's policy requires them to do. This means that risk assessments sometimes do not fully reflect the reviews that take place and the changes to practice that are made.
8. The school has an effective safeguarding culture both during the day and in boarding time. Staff are well trained and vigilant. They report any concerns about pupils promptly. Leaders take appropriate action in response to any concerns that are raised.

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 written records of risk assessments fully reflect the reviews that are carried out and the adjustments that are made to them, in line with the school's policy
- develop and extend economic education so that pupils make more progress in this area of the curriculum.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Leaders have a clear vision for how they want the school to be and what they want it to achieve. This is widely known and understood by the school community. Pupils understand that 'the Sunningdale way' means trying hard, being respectful to others and playing a full and active part in school life.
10. Leaders give the promotion of pupils' wellbeing a high priority. They know pupils well as individuals and pay close attention to their needs and interests. Leaders work with a range of outside agencies to benefit pupils. For example, they seek support and advice from specialists, such as occupational therapists and speech and language therapists, to help them to meet pupils' individual needs, where appropriate. As a result, the school is a nurturing and welcoming place where pupils achieve well.
11. The school's boarding provision is led and managed well. As with the school as a whole, leaders have a clear vision for boarding. They are successful in making boarding feel secure, supportive and comforting. Leaders have good knowledge and understanding of boarding requirements. They make sure these are met at all times. This means that boarders are provided with appropriate accommodation, are well supported and safeguarded effectively.
12. Leaders are knowledgeable and carry out their responsibilities diligently. They regularly and routinely check the quality of provision and make changes and improvements where necessary. The headteacher, as sole proprietor, uses the expertise of specialist contractors to gain an objective view of the school in order to evaluate it objectively. The proprietor ensures that the Standards are met consistently.
13. The school's complaints policy meets requirements and is available on its website. Leaders make themselves available to parents at the beginning and end of the day, at Saturday sporting fixtures and other events. Leaders encourage parents to speak to them informally about any minor questions or concerns to prevent them developing into bigger issues. When complaints are made, they are dealt with appropriately, following the school's policy, and suitable records are kept.
14. Leaders have a secure understanding of the assessment and management of risks. Staff undertake regular training so that they remain informed and confident in identifying and responding to potential risks. Leaders identify risks well, including those that are not immediately obvious. They put effective measures in place to mitigate the risks that they identify. Leaders review risks regularly and make changes to control measures, as necessary. However, such reviews are not always fully reflected in the written records of risk assessments, as the school's policy requires.
15. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. The school has a suitable accessibility plan in place. Leaders create an environment where everyone is welcome, regardless of their background or personal characteristics. They ensure that all pupils have full access to the curriculum and the school site.
16. The school's policies are kept up to date and follow statutory guidance, including those related to boarding. Leaders review policies regularly and make changes, as necessary. They share policies with pupils, staff and parents so that they are known and understood. Policies are implemented consistently throughout the school.
17. Leaders provide parents with termly written reports about their child's progress and attainment. Reports also include information about effort, attitudes to learning and extra-curricular activities.

Parents are provided with a range of other information, mainly through the school's website. Leaders report to the local authority, as required, when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. The school has appropriate arrangements to provide the relevant local authorities with all required information relating to the use of any funding that might be received to support pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The school's curriculum is suitable and meets pupils' needs well. The curriculum gives appropriate focus to English, mathematics and science so that pupils receive an effective grounding in these key areas. It also provides pupils with a breadth of learning across a range of subjects including geography, history, French, Latin, music, design technology, drama and art.
20. In Year 8, the curriculum is focused on preparation for entrance examinations for selective schools. This temporarily narrows the curriculum, with pupils no longer studying subjects such as drama and music, but continuing to experience a suitable range of subjects. However, leaders mitigate this by providing opportunities for pupils to continue to learn about and enjoy such creative subjects through extra-curricular provision.
21. Pupils make good progress during their time at the school and achieve well. Pupils typically achieve very well in the entrance examinations for selective schools, gaining places at highly selective senior schools. Every year, a proportion of pupils gain scholarships to such schools. Since the previous inspection, scholarships have been awarded for academic ability, music, drama and sports.
22. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of the subjects they teach. This enables them to explain new learning and to answer pupils' questions clearly and confidently. Teachers plan learning effectively and use a range of teaching methods and resources. Sometimes, learning is formal and directed by the teacher and, at other times, pupils are engaged in discussion and practical activities. Teachers match the methods they use to the content of lessons and to pupils' needs. Teachers have high expectations of pupils and provide them with appropriate challenge so that they achieve well.
23. Effective provision is in place for pupils who have SEND. Pupils' needs are identified promptly by teachers. Leaders respond appropriately when additional needs are raised. Leaders use assessments to identify pupils' precise needs. They put suitable support in place, within the classroom and in individual or small-group sessions, to enable pupils to be successful. Each pupil who has SEND has a 'passport' that identifies their needs and personalised strategies to address them. These documents help non-specialist staff to support pupils effectively. Pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
24. The needs of pupils who speak EAL are also identified quickly, usually as part of the admission process. Pupils receive support that is well matched to their individual needs. For example, some pupils receive individual support in advance of lessons to help them to understand the content and vocabulary that will be presented. International pupils are given support to help them mix socially with other pupils, so that they avoid the risk of becoming isolated by socialising only with others who speak the same language. Pupils who speak EAL make good progress in learning English and across the full range of other subjects.
25. The school's approach to assessment is well developed and carefully thought through. Teachers routinely check the quality of pupils' work as part of their day-to-day teaching. Pupils receive frequent feedback from their teachers that helps them to improve their work. Every few weeks, pupils are formally assessed to check how well they have remembered and understood what has been taught. Leaders use the information from these assessments to identify gaps in pupils' knowledge and understanding. They put appropriate measures in place to address the gaps identified, so that pupils do not fall behind in their learning.

26. Pupils respond well to the school's high expectations of them. They listen carefully and behave well so that classrooms are orderly and productive. Pupils are motivated by the possibility of being named in the published 'orders', that is, a list of the five highest performing pupils in assessments in each subject. Pupils try hard and do their best. Leaders encourage this by recognising and rewarding effort as well as attainment.
27. Boarders are well supported academically. Supervised prep takes place daily after lunch for all pupils. This is a deliberate choice by leaders, so that boarders' after-school time is used for them to take part in activities, socialise and enjoy their free time. The oldest boarders have an additional supervised evening prep session in order to help them prepare for senior school.
28. The school provides an extensive extra-curricular programme of activities for both boarders and day pupils. Pupils are offered a wide range of sports including fencing, shooting, swimming and fives. They can also choose to take part in music, drama and art activities, as well as playing board games, cooking and gardening. These opportunities enable them to follow their interests, develop their skills and enhance their ability to work as part of a team. The school-devised 'Prince Michael of Kent Award' recognises pupils' achievements in areas such as academia, adventure, character, public speaking and contribution to the community.

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. The promotion of mutual respect is embedded throughout the school's culture. Leaders expect all members of the school's community to be respectful of other people and considerate to everyone. Leaders and staff make these expectations clear through their own behaviour and in the messages they give pupils in chapel, tutor time and PSHE lessons. As a result, pupils know exactly what is expected of them and respond accordingly.
31. Pupils learn about the similarities and differences between people, mainly through the PSHE curriculum. For example, they learn about characteristics such as race, religion and disabilities. Pupils learn about a range of cultures and beliefs. They learn to respect and celebrate the diversity in society.
32. The school has a Church of England ethos. Spirituality plays a key role in the life of the school. The whole school joins together in a daily act of collective worship. This provides all pupils with an opportunity to pray or to quietly reflect on their own thoughts. Non-Christian pupils are welcomed and accommodated during chapel time. Pupils learn about the world's major religions. They develop an understanding that other people's beliefs may differ from their own.
33. The PSHE curriculum is appropriate and delivered effectively. Pupils learn about personal characteristics and attributes, which helps them to develop resilience, self-confidence and perseverance. They learn about physical and mental health, including the importance of exercise and personal hygiene. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles and the risks associated with behaviours such as smoking. Relationships and sex education (RSE) forms part of the PSHE curriculum. It is matched to pupils' ages and stage of development and meets the requirements of current statutory guidance. Pupils learn about indicators of healthy and unhealthy relationships and how to be a good friend. Older pupils learn about issues such as bodily changes during puberty.
34. The PE curriculum is extensive and taught well. Pupils participate and develop their skills in a wide range of sporting activities including rugby, cricket, athletics, tennis and swimming, in some cases achieving success at local and national level. Pupils benefit from regular activity, which supports their physical development and promotes positive attitudes towards health and wellbeing. During PE lessons, teachers emphasise the importance of maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Pupils take part in regular fixtures, which helps them to develop their sportsmanship and teamwork skills.
35. Pupils behave very well throughout the school, both in lessons and during less structured parts of the day. Pupils display impeccable manners, routinely holding doors open for adults and their peers, saying 'please' and 'thank you' and engaging in polite conversation. The behaviour policy is implemented consistently and fairly.
36. Pupils learn about bullying and the forms it can take, mainly through the PSHE curriculum. They learn what to do if bullying ever happens to them or if they are concerned about someone else. Leaders regularly use an online survey tool to check whether pupils feel happy at school. They use this to help them identify where they might need to take action or make changes. There are very few bullying incidents, but those that do occur are dealt with quickly and effectively.

37. Pupils are well supervised throughout the day, including during after-school activities and breaktimes. Sufficient boarding staff are always available to supervise and to provide support. Boarders know how to summon an adult if they need help during the night. The positive relationships with staff help pupils to feel safe and well cared for.
38. The school and its grounds are well maintained. Suitable health and safety procedures mean that all necessary checks are carried out in a timely manner. Fire safety arrangements are effective, with evacuation drills carried out regularly, including during boarding time. Leaders use the services of external contractors to monitor and maintain aspects of health and safety provision, such as the fire alarm and extinguishers.
39. The boarding accommodation is appropriate and well maintained. Boarders each have their own well-defined space, which they personalise as they choose. They have spaces to store their clothes and possessions, with lockable storage available if needed. Boarders have ready access to two private, free-to-use telephone booths so that they can keep in contact with their families.
40. Suitable first aid arrangements are in place. A large proportion of staff have first aid qualifications. Healthcare arrangements for boarders are robust. Alternative accommodation and close monitoring are available if boarders become unwell. All boarders are registered with a local GP practice whose doctors visit regularly.
41. The school's admission and attendance registers are well maintained and meet current statutory requirements. Rates of attendance are high, including among day pupils. Leaders monitor attendance closely and take effective action in response to absence, if necessary.

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. Pupils are taught effectively about fundamental British values, such as democracy and tolerance. The school's emphasis on courtesy, manners and respect for others enhances pupils' understanding in this area. Through the PSHE curriculum, chapel services and tutor time, pupils learn about why such values matter and the positive impact they have on society.
44. The school provides a range of opportunities for pupils to take on responsibilities and develop leadership skills. Pupils who would like to take on the role of monitor follow a robust application process, including an interview with leaders. Pupils are given training and ongoing support in their roles. A range of other positions are also available, including chapel wardens and sports captains. These roles help pupils to develop confidence, accountability and a sense of service to others.
45. The idea of service and giving something back to society is reinforced throughout the school. Pupils take part in charity work, including fundraising for both local and national charities. The school's choir visits a local care home to entertain the residents. Pupils take part in litter picking sessions in the local area. These activities help pupils to understand that they are part of a wider community and the positive impact they can have on it.
46. 'Dorm monitors' play a key role in the smooth running of the boarding houses. Pupils are carefully selected and take their roles seriously. They have clear roles and responsibilities and are appreciated and respected by other pupils. Boarders all undertake tasks such as making their bed, putting their dirty clothes in the right place and putting their clean laundry away properly. This helps them to develop independence and a sense of responsibility.
47. From the time they join the school, pupils learn about rules and the importance of following them. They learn about the difference between right and wrong through the messages they are routinely given by leaders and staff, as well as through the PSHE curriculum. As pupils grow older, they start to learn about laws and the consequences of breaking them. This gives pupils the beginnings of an understanding of the criminal justice system.
48. Pupils in Years 7 and 8 receive appropriate careers education. It is delivered through the PSHE curriculum effectively. The school hosts an annual careers fair in the summer term. This is supplemented by visitors from a range of professions, who provide insight into their careers and experiences. This encourages pupils to start to think about their longer-term goals and ambitions. Pupils and their parents are supported through the process of selecting and applying for senior schools. This helps pupils to be successful, with pupils typically securing a place at the senior school of their choice.
49. Pupils learn about money and spending in a variety of ways. For example, pupils learn to budget as they spend their allowance at the school shop. Pupils learn about economic education through mathematics and PSHE. However, economic education is less well developed than other subjects. This means that pupils do not make as much progress in learning about financial matters as they do elsewhere in the curriculum.

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

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

51. Leaders prioritise safeguarding. They focus on ensuring that all staff recognise that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Leaders understand the school's context. This enables them to identify potential safeguarding risks and put suitable measures in place to mitigate them.
52. Staff receive thorough and detailed safeguarding training as part of their induction when they join the school. They receive regular ongoing training, both face to face and through an online provider. Leaders use quizzes regularly to check that staff know and understand the content of safeguarding training. They provide additional training for individual members of staff to address any gaps in knowledge that are identified. As a result, staff have secure knowledge and understanding about the school's procedures and current statutory guidance. They are vigilant and report concerns promptly when they arise.
53. Safeguarding procedures in boarding are robust. Access to the boarding house is strictly controlled. Staff are always available during boarding time, including during the night. Boarders know that there is an independent person available for them to speak to if they have any worries or concerns. They know who the independent person is and how to contact them.
54. Safeguarding leaders are knowledgeable and well trained. They respond appropriately to concerns that are raised, taking effective action to protect pupils, where necessary. Suitable records are kept of the concerns raised and the actions taken in response. Leaders work with local safeguarding partners, such as children's social care, to safeguard pupils and promote their wellbeing.
55. Leaders know and understand current safeguarding guidance and requirements. Safer recruitment processes are robust, including in boarding. All necessary checks are carried out before anyone is allowed to start work at the school. The school's single central record of pre-appointment checks meets requirements.
56. Staff know how to report allegations and low-level concerns about adults. This includes the procedures for self-reporting and reporting any concerns about the headteacher. Staff report concerns using the school's systems, when necessary. Leaders respond appropriately to any concerns that are raised.
57. A suitable internet filtering and monitoring system controls what pupils can access online and checks their internet use. Leaders receive alerts and notifications about internet use, which they respond to promptly. They are highly aware of the risks posed by unsupervised internet access. For this reason, pupils do not have access to the internet, including via mobile phones, during the school day or in boarding time. Instead, boarders can contact their families by using the free, private telephone kiosks that the school provides.
58. Pupils learn about ways to keep themselves safe, including when online, mainly through PSHE. Pupils are taught how to seek help if they need it.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Sunningdale School
Department for Education number	868/6007
Address	Sunningdale School Dry Arch Road Sunningdale Ascot Berkshire SL5 9PZ
Phone number	01344 620159
Email address	headmaster@sunningdaleschool.co.uk
Website	www.sunningdaleschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Mr Thomas Dawson
Headteacher	Mr Thomas Dawson
Age range	7 to 13
Number of pupils	99
Number of boarding pupils	71
Date of previous inspection	22 to 23 March 2023

Information about the school

60. Sunningdale School is a boarding and day school for male pupils in Sunningdale, Berkshire. The school has a Church of England ethos. It is led and managed by a sole proprietor who is also the school's headteacher. The school operates on a single site.
61. Boarders are accommodated on the upper floors of the school's main building. Separate dormitories accommodate younger and older boarders.
62. The school has identified 14 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
63. The school has identified 12 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
64. The school states its aims are to provide a supportive and structured environment in which boys can develop confidence, resilience and independence, and to prepare them effectively for the next stage of their education while promoting strong pastoral care and personal development.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 March 2026

65. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The first day of the on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

66. 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 headteacher, also the proprietor, school leaders and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- 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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For more information, please visit isi.net