

# School inspection report

25 to 27 June 2024

## **Old Buckenham Hall School**

Brettenham Park

Ipswich

Suffolk

IP7 7PH

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 work effectively to plan the school's strategic improvement and to monitor and evaluate the impact of current school practice on outcomes for pupils. Leaders' continual commitment to providing the best possible education and care for pupils results in a dynamic and forward-thinking school.
2. Governors provide rigorous challenge to senior leaders and appropriate support. As a result, leaders consistently address any issues quickly and effectively. The current priorities for improvement include enhancing the evaluation of information regarding curriculum impact, the extension of pupil roles of responsibility across all age-phases and updating the boarding accommodation.
3. Leaders promote a culture of trust, respect and aspiration within the school community. They recognise pupils' endeavours and ensure that British values are promoted in all aspects of school life. Consequently, pupils learn what is important in developing their relationships with others and how to contribute to wider society.
4. The school provides an effective education for pupils at each stage of their learning, including in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS). Pupils make good progress from their starting points and leavers typically gain places at their preferred senior school. Pupils' positive outcomes are enhanced by a wide range of extra-curricular activities. By the time pupils leave the school, they are well prepared for their next steps in education. For pupils who board on a full-time or part-time flexible basis, this experience supports their readiness for life in their next schools.
5. Leaders ensure that pupils' mental and physical health and wellbeing are prioritised and are alert to individual pupils' needs, as part of their arrangements and procedures to promote care of pupils in school. Health and safety and fire safety are given appropriate attention. As a result, pupils are happy and feel secure in school and know that leaders and staff will support them if any concerns arise.
6. Pupils receive suitable social and economic education and understand the importance of, and make, a contribution to the community and broader society. Pupils have a clear sense of the part they can play in serving others in a wide range of ways. They learn the importance of self-responsibility and gain helpful insights into their future opportunities and career options through the advice and guidance provided by the school.
7. Leaders are conscientious in their identification of potential risks to pupil wellbeing and ensure the safeguarding policy is effectively implemented. Staff understand what is required of them in order to safeguard pupils and safeguarding leaders fulfil their responsibilities. Any required actions are taken quickly and effectively.

## 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 information regarding how well different groups of pupils are performing and how effectively each subject is taught is analysed thoroughly so that the impact of curriculum implementation can be evaluated accurately in order to support the best outcomes for pupils
- ensure that pupils of all ages develop their sense of responsibility through taking on designated roles in school
- ensure planned improvements to boarding premises and accommodation are completed as quickly as possible to enable boarders to benefit from an updated residential environment.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. The senior leadership team provide clear and effective guidance to staff and pupils. As a result, the school community is cohesive, shares common core values and is committed to achieving the school's aims. Senior leaders ensure that communication with parents is clear and informative. Pupils find school leaders and staff approachable and supportive and feel valued both individually and as a body. Leaders' current emphasis on enhancing pupils' opportunities to express their views about school life is recognised and valued.
9. Leaders make the best use of the resources, both human and environmental, to facilitate the experiences and outcomes for pupils. They take advantage of the school's rural setting but ensure that pupils are not isolated from the wider community and are well prepared for the next steps in their education. The role of boarding in supporting pupils' personal development is an effective element in the school's provision. Leaders are seeking to improve the residential premises and accommodation and the breadth of experiences available to boarders.
10. The board of governors comprises experienced and suitably knowledgeable members, who monitor leaders' effectiveness closely through committee and governing body meetings. Together with leaders, they consider the strategic development of the school, evaluate how well the school's aims are fulfilled and accurately identify next steps in the school's continual improvement. Governors have a clear focus on the school's safeguarding procedures, including an annual review of the implementation of the safeguarding policy. Governors support leaders' initiative to develop links and promote pupils' joint activities with a range of other schools and demonstrate a readiness to share the school's resources with others.
11. Leaders actively promote British values, trust and respect, including respect for all groups within society. A suitable and effectively implemented accessibility plan is in place. The school is able to meet the needs of pupils who have a range of special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. The school reports to the local authority regarding the required financial information in relation to funding for pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans.
12. Leaders and managers produce a comprehensive range of risk assessments covering areas of school life which are monitored effectively by governors. Any risks arising are dealt with quickly and responsibly. Effective arrangements are in place regarding health and safety and fire safety, including the use of specialist consultancy services where required. Governors and leaders ensure that policies are kept up to date, are implemented effectively and comply with relevant requirements.
13. Leaders check that the required information is made available to parents and other interested parties. This includes the school's up-to-date safeguarding policy and relationships and sex education policies. Complaints are dealt with in a timely manner and in line with the school's published policy. Links with other agencies to promote and benefit the wellbeing of pupils, including boarders, are effective and are routinely evaluated by leaders.

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

**14. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. Governors and leaders ensure that pupils benefit from a well-planned, broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of all ages and abilities and promotes British values. Pupils approach their work positively, guided by the principles of *The Old Buckenham Hall Way*. Parents are well informed regarding how well their children are achieving. This enables parents to engage closely with their children's education and support the work of the school.
16. There is effective support for pupils who have SEND, provided by the 'Learning Success' department which assists individual pupils and also advises teachers how to meet their needs in lessons. As a result, pupils are supported to overcome any barriers to learning and are enabled to make good progress from their starting points. Working one-to-one with a specialist teacher, pupils were observed gaining confidence and skills in learning and applying new vocabulary. In lessons, teachers adjusted their questioning to ensure that pupils who have SEND fully understood the class activity. Those who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive targeted support for this aspect of their learning. Pupils welcome the supportive manner in which this help is provided.
17. Leaders and staff in the early years implement a suitable curriculum and almost all children achieve all early learning goals by the end of Reception. Early years children progress quickly because they experience learning through fun, exciting and adventurous activities. Staff ensure children undertake a wide range of engaging activities indoors and in the school grounds and allow them to pursue their individual interests and investigations. Children enthusiastically identified letter sounds when saying words out loud and cheerfully engaged in developing their writing skills. They played with physical vigour outdoors and calmly helped to tidy their classroom when a session drew to a close.
18. Leaders ensure that the school fulfils its primary aim of preparing pupils for entry to the next phase of their education from Year 9, enabling them to perform well in Common Entrance examinations and thereby gain places at their preferred senior schools. Leaders have put in place effective assessment and progress tracking procedures to check that individual pupils are on course to achieve well at each stage of their education from early years onwards. This informs teaching so that pupils receive personalised help with their learning and reach the outcomes they are aiming for. Leaders are currently improving the analysis of information regarding how well different groups of pupils are performing and how effectively each subject is taught.
19. Teachers are thorough in their lesson planning, marking and feedback. Pupils feel their individual efforts are valued and that they are clear about next steps in their learning. Leaders' emphasis on developing pupils' personal communication skills results in pupils who are articulate speakers, careful listeners, competent and creative writers. Pupils apply their numerical and digital skills effectively across the full range of subjects. Younger pupils competently sang their times tables and then applied their multiplication skills effectively in written tasks. Older pupils wrote persuasively in a letter writing activity and displayed imaginative engagement with robotics in creative technology.
20. Physical education is matched to all abilities, offers suitable opportunities for competitive participation and meets pupils' physical development needs effectively. A wide range of expressive arts enables pupils to develop their skills and fosters extended school community activities, such as the inter-house singing competitions. Pupils showed dedication to achieving good results when involved in a drawing and sculpture activity, a characteristic feature of their conscientious approach across their full range of studies.

21. The positive rapport between staff and pupils, and stimulating lessons, mean that pupils work hard and make good progress. The curriculum for pupils of all ages is enriched by a wide range of educational visits and clubs which allow pupils to explore new interests and develop new skills.

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

**22. All the relevant Standards are met.**



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

23. There are positive and respectful relationships between leaders, staff and pupils. Children in the early years respond positively to the nurturing approach of the adults who are attentive to their needs, but who also give them opportunities to explore and find things out for themselves. Pupils feel they are treated fairly by adults in the school. Leaders ensure that good behaviour is rewarded through explicit approval, house points and awards. Pupils respond well, are typically courteous, kind and considerate. On the infrequent occasions when sanctions are required for inappropriate behaviour, they are applied consistently. Pupils are encouraged to consider and learn from their mistakes and move on positively. Rare cases of more serious misbehaviour and bullying are dealt with effectively by leaders, in line with school policy. Pupils receive appropriate support should they experience unkindness or bullying.
24. Pupils understand the importance of appropriate relationships, exploring these themes in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) lessons which are taught effectively. Pupils are well prepared for transfer to senior school and later life.
25. Boarding premises are of a suitable standard. Although washing, toileting facilities and bedrooms are adequate, leaders plan to improve the premises and accommodation, and an appropriate programme of refurbishment is being implemented. Boarders' possessions can be secured and their medical and welfare needs are met by suitably trained staff. Boarders gain from the companionship and shared experiences of boarding life, learning about the importance of positive relationships, self-organisation and independence. The current development of the role of boarding prefects allows pupils to take on additional responsibilities in their community, supporting their self-esteem.
26. Pupils' health and safety is priority for leaders, and pupils have access to suitable first aid and medical care, nursing and counselling. Health and safety checks, fire safety procedures, including fire drills for boarders, and site maintenance are all undertaken as required. Supervision of pupils is effective in both day and boarding settings.
27. Leaders pay due attention to registering and monitoring pupil attendance. Admission registers are well maintained. The school reports appropriately to the local authority when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition times. Boarding staff and tutors play an effective role in caring for pupils' wellbeing and mental health in liaison with the broader pastoral team.
28. Pupils have suitable access to a wide range of physical education activities, including swimming, and understand the importance of maintaining fitness. The bright and welcoming dining facility offers a healthy menu of nutritious meals, and staff encourage positive eating habits.
29. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils know they will always be listened to. Staff trained specifically in emotional support provide additional help for pupils including the 'Nest' provision. The house system is arranged so that each house includes pupils of all age groups so that older pupils are able to mix with and offer informal support to younger ones.
30. The school grounds engage pupils with the natural environment and foster their spiritual awareness. The 'Well-being Wood' is a place of retreat, where pupils experience the pleasures of being in the open-air, practise the skills of outdoors living and relax and reflect on nature. Pupils' appreciation of

the spiritual and non-material aspects of life is also engendered through the school's extensive provision for creative and expressive arts.

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

**31. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

32. Leaders actively promote British values through well-planned assemblies, tutorials, displays and the PSHE programme. Pupils demonstrate their understanding in their good behaviour and attitudes. They understand the need to respect individual diversity. The curriculum ensures that pupils gain knowledge of and respect for public services in England. Due care is taken to avoid any political bias in discussions or presentations. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern British society.
33. This preparation begins when children in early years learn to be sensitive to each other's needs, to tolerate other's differences and accept guidance and advice. They display respect for their environment and develop responsibility for tasks such as tidying up, often without prompting. By the time pupils move to their senior schools they are confident and responsible young people.
34. Pupils actively engage in the democratic process when electing members to the pupils' school council. The school council works diligently to encourage a positive house spirit and engagement in the school community. Pupils in the upper school demonstrate suitable responsibility when fulfilling roles such as prefects for encouraging tidiness and giving out snacks, acting as sports captains, and peer mentors to help younger pupils. Pupils of all ages, including in boarding, are keen to take on more roles of responsibility. Leaders have identified there is additional scope to provide such opportunities and plan to address this aspect of school life.
35. Pupils understand what is and what is not acceptable behaviour in school. They go on to successfully apply this understanding when learning about the principle of the rule of law in society. Leaders and staff ensure that pupils learn about mutual respect for others' differences and an appreciation of different cultures, including through the PSHE programme, assembly topics and the broad, taught curriculum. As a result, pupils develop appropriate respect for others' personal characteristics and cultural diversity.
36. There is due emphasis on pupils' self-reliance and independence, and this results in pupils who are well prepared for the next stage in their education. Pupils and their parents receive appropriate guidance regarding senior school choices and longer-term career opportunities. Leaders ensure that pupils learn more about the world of work from presentations by representatives from different sectors of the business and other employment communities. This includes the qualifications, interpersonal and technical skills that will be required in a range of careers. Pupils gain useful guidance and knowledge about managing their personal finances in preparation for later life through topics in PSHE and other activities.
37. Boarding provision is effective in further supporting pupils' social development. The small number of full-time boarders is supplemented by a larger number of pupils boarding on a flexible basis for a proportion of nights each week. This provision is popular and enables many pupils to extend their social experience, enjoy and learn more about living alongside others, and prepares them well for their senior school.
38. Leaders ensure that pupils learn the importance of contributing to the local and wider community. Pupils engage in charitable fundraising and engage in community projects such as looking after local beaches and entertaining elderly people. Pupils understand that such activities are valuable in their own right but also reflect ethical and broader social issues. Their consideration of the plight of

refugees in an assembly led to thoughtful and empathic suggestions regarding how to provide support and resolution of such situations.

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

**39. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

40. Arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of day pupils and boarders are effective. Leaders tailor the school's safeguarding and related policies to the school's day and boarding provision and identify, assess and address any associated safeguarding risks.
41. Leaders ensure that staff are knowledgeable in child protection procedures, including those for online safety and the risks posed by radicalisation and extremism. Staff understand how to recognise and report a safeguarding concern. Any such concerns are investigated immediately and acted on appropriately. They understand the whistleblowing procedure and the need to self-refer to safeguarding leaders if they have any concern about the way their own interactions with pupils might be perceived as inappropriate. Leaders provide regular safeguarding and child protection training, including the prevention of extremism and child-on-child abuse. They assess staff understanding of safeguarding requirements to ensure effective practice.
42. Leaders work effectively with external agencies when concerns arise. Any referrals to children's services, the local authority designated officer and the police are made promptly and incidents are managed well. Low-level concerns about adults working in the school and allegations against staff are managed appropriately. Filtering and monitoring systems support pupils to have safe access to technology and all pupils receive suitable education in online safety.
43. Appropriate guardianship arrangements are in place for boarders from overseas. An independent listener attends the school regularly and pupils are confident to share concerns if necessary. The school monitors these arrangements effectively.
44. Safer recruitment checks are completed appropriately and a central accurate record of checks is kept. The governing body maintains a robust and suitably challenging oversight of leaders' safeguarding practice. Leaders review the implementation of the safeguarding policy in a thorough manner and continually strengthen safeguarding practice in light of any lessons learned.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Old Buckenham Hall School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	935/6019
<b>Registered charity number</b>	310490
<b>Address</b>	Old Buckenham Hall School Brettenham Park Ipswich Suffolk IP7 7PH
<b>Phone number</b>	01449 740252
<b>Email address</b>	admissions@obh.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.obh.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Old Buckenham Hall Brettenham
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Andrew McGregor
<b>Headmaster</b>	Mr James Large
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	220
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	72
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	12 to 14 May 2021

## Information about the school

46. Old Buckenham Hall School is an independent, co-educational day and boarding school. Since 1968, the school has been a charitable trust managed by a board of governors. Pupils in Years 1 and 2 and The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) form the pre-prep department. The preparatory department comprises a middle school for pupils in Years 3 to 4 and an upper school for those in Years 5 to 8.
47. Pupils can start boarding from the age of seven. Senior boarders are accommodated in the main boarding house and younger boarders have their own boarding house nearby. All boarders' accommodation is gender separate. There is a small number of full-time boarders. The large majority of boarders reside on a flexible, part-time basis.
48. A new headmaster was appointed in September 2023.
49. The school has identified 79 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). One pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
50. English is an additional language for 11 pupils.
51. Underpinned by *The Old Buckenham Hall Way* set of values, the school aims to enable pupils to leave the school having developed intrinsically important and recognisable characteristics that will support them, and the communities in which they live, for the rest of their lives. It also strives to ensure pupils are challenged academically according to their ability so that they develop a love of learning.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

25 to 27 June 2024

52. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

53. 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 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.

54. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)