

School inspection report

18 to 20 November 2025

Orwell Park School

Nacton

Ipswich

Suffolk

IP10 0ER

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 fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They ensure that statutory requirements are met, including those relating to the early years and the boarding provision. Governors monitor policies, premises and pupils' experiences, holding leaders to account for the quality of education that the school offers.
2. Leaders evaluate provision carefully. They act on feedback, maintaining a culture of continuous improvement, which aligns with the school's values and promotes pupils' wellbeing effectively.
3. Health and safety risks are identified and reduced. Leaders anticipate any potential challenges and implement suitable risk-related mitigations.
4. Boarding arrangements contribute effectively to pupils' wellbeing. Leaders plan the boarding provision thoughtfully, creating a welcoming environment in which the diverse group of pupils feels happy, safe and valued.
5. The school's well-sequenced curriculum develops pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. Curriculum plans are carefully designed to reflect pupils' aptitudes and starting points.
6. Teaching is purposeful and appropriately matched to pupils' needs. Pupils make good progress. They develop confidence and articulate their ideas with increasing precision as a result.
7. Leaders in the early years create a stimulating learning environment. They provide a well-structured curriculum that meets the requirements of the early years foundation stage. Children are motivated and curious learners. They co-operate with their peers. Effective curriculum design and implementation ensure that children are suitably prepared for the next stage of their education.
8. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) have their needs identified accurately. Appropriate follow-up support is provided. Teachers adapt lessons effectively to meet these needs. As necessary, relevant specialist support is put in place for those pupils who require it. Leaders monitor pupils' progress closely and make changes to improve the impact of the interventions offered when needed.
9. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive appropriate classroom support and English lessons. They also access effective support in the boarding accommodation. As a result, they participate confidently and engage successfully with the whole curriculum.
10. Pupils typically behave well. However, there are some inconsistencies in adults' application of leaders' high expectations. As a result, a few pupils do not always behave as well as they should. These inconsistencies affect older pupils' perception of fairness in applying the rules. Bullying is rare and, if it occurs, staff address it appropriately.
11. Pupils are happy. They feel safe and they are confident when managing challenges. Leaders promote pupils' emotional wellbeing. Adults listen carefully to pupils. They help them to understand their feelings and provide timely support when concerns emerge. Wellbeing activities and specialist input develop pupils' sense of self and belonging.

12. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual, moral and cultural development through opportunities to reflect on fairness, consequences and personal responsibility. Pupils explore religious and ethical perspectives. Consequently, they are respectful. They appreciate diversity within and beyond the school, showing curiosity about a range of traditions and viewpoints.
13. The school's 'aspire' curriculum enrichment programme enhances pupils' educational and personal development. Leaders implement a wide range of activities during the school day so that all pupils can participate. This includes, for example, sports, arts and support with prep.
14. Pupils develop an understanding of economic education through personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons, which are known as life skills lessons, and 'aspire' activities. They explore enterprise, work with money and learn from visiting speakers. Pupils engage positively with these opportunities, but they do not always link the content taught to managing their own finances.
15. Pupils learn about British values and contribute positively to the school community. They reflect on democracy, liberty, tolerance and respect in discussions during lessons and assemblies. Through the service aspect of 'aspire', pupils support younger peers, participate in charitable activities and take on leadership roles. Careers education prepares older pupils well for their next steps in education.
16. Safeguarding arrangements are robust. Staff understand their responsibilities. They respond promptly to concerns. Pupils learn how to stay safe, including online. Recruitment procedures are rigorous and meet statutory requirements.

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 all staff apply the school's high expectations of pupils' behaviour consistently, so that pupils routinely behave as well as they should and recognise the systems as transparent and fair
- strengthen the economic awareness programme so that pupils build a deeper understanding of managing their personal finances.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

17. Leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills to carry out their responsibilities effectively. They ensure that policies, including those relating to health and safety, the early years and boarding, are well understood by staff and pupils. Leaders and governors check that policies are implemented effectively. They ensure that the school's values of kindness, collaboration, courage, spirit and respect are embedded. As a result, the school consistently meets the Standards and National Minimum Standards for boarding schools.
18. Governors make sure that leaders promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. They use information from a range of sources to assess the effectiveness of leaders' work, including the views of pupils, staff and parents. They monitor, for example, premises, policies and the complaints process carefully. Pupils' wellbeing is consistently prioritised. Governors' effective oversight of the boarding provision includes discussions with boarders to hear their views, reviews of records and first-hand visits to the boarding accommodation.
19. Leaders also evaluate the school's effectiveness regularly. They act promptly when improvements are needed, such as in the recent simplification of the school rules. They review the quality of teaching, pastoral procedures, and assessment systems to confirm that the provision routinely meets pupils' needs. This ongoing evaluation ensures the school's culture of continuous improvement is well embedded.
20. Leaders identify, manage and reduce risks efficiently, anticipating potential issues and implementing mitigations. They maintain detailed risk assessments, such as for the boarding accommodation, early years, design technology and trips. Leaders monitor actions and make changes when patterns emerge, including adapting procedures following incidents. They also guard against less visible risks, such as those that might arise from harmful behaviours. In boarding, leaders regulate visitor access carefully, making sure that pupils' rooms and shared spaces remain secure.
21. Leaders regularly review the published accessibility plan. This is designed appropriately to increase access to learning and facilities for pupils who have SEND as specified by the Equality Act 2010. Staff training further supports understanding of equality and diversity. Leaders maintain effective relationships with external agencies. They work with health professionals, safeguarding partners and specialist services to support pupils' wellbeing. Early years staff work with the NHS to plan timely support for younger children with emerging needs.
22. Early years leaders provide effective supervision and continuous professional development for staff. They identify specific training needs through regular observations and discussions. They follow this with targeted support, for example, to continue to improve phonics teaching. This targeted approach continues to improve staff practice and children's early learning experiences. Appropriate staff and pupil ratios ensure adequate supervision. Suitable staff induction procedures are in place. Staff implement the requirements of the early years foundation stage confidently. Leaders keep required records, including those relating to accidents, medication and supervision. They also maintain safe and hygienic premises, including conducting daily risk checks.
23. Suitably experienced boarding leaders promote pupils' wellbeing through clear routines, respectful relationships and purposeful activities. Boarding accommodation security is a priority. Leaders

consistently meet the required Standards by maintaining clear principles to underpin boarding practices, together with well-kept records and boarding-specific training for staff.

24. Leaders respond promptly to complaints. Most are resolved informally. Leaders follow formal procedures diligently where necessary, recording actions and procedural changes appropriately. Any complaints specific to boarding are clearly identified and addressed. Boarders know how to raise concerns. They know that leaders will follow up on any worries quickly.
25. Leaders share the required information with parents of current and prospective pupils. The school's website contains key documents, including those related to attendance, behaviour and anti-bullying policies. Parents receive regular updates on their children's progress and achievements. Leaders submit the necessary information to the local authority for pupils with an education, health and care (EHC) plan, including information on the use of funds.

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

26. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

27. Leaders implement a broad and balanced curriculum. This covers an appropriate range of academic and creative areas from the Nursery to Year 8. Plans and schemes of work outline progressive steps in learning, deepening pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Leaders make sure that the curriculum takes into account pupils' individual aptitudes and needs.
28. In the early years, adults plan appropriate activities. They routinely promote children's communication and language development in other aspects of learning, such as physical, personal, social and emotional development. Consequently, children build their language skills systematically through effective interactions with adults and their peers. They experience a broad range of vocabulary, which staff model consistently well. Thoughtfully designed activities encourage children's independence, including, for example, using cue cards effectively for learning letters and sounds in phonics sessions and table-top resources in mathematics. As a result, children are motivated to succeed. They enjoy learning and build appropriate readiness for successful progression into Year 1.
29. Teachers deliver well-planned lessons allowing pupils to acquire new learning as intended. They demonstrate secure subject knowledge. As a result, new content and concepts are explained well so pupils understand them quickly. Teachers, for example, model pronunciation of unfamiliar words, provide well-matched resources to support the tasks they set and check pupils' understanding regularly. Pupils respond positively to these approaches. Consequently, they are motivated, curious and willing to try challenging tasks. Teachers' effective interactions with pupils during lessons address misconceptions quickly. They ensure that activities are adapted in line with individual pupils' needs.
30. Leaders prioritise pupils' reading knowledge and skills across all phases. In the early years, adults teach phonics in flexible groups so that children learn at the right level for their stage of development. Older pupils have time in daily tutor sessions to further develop their understanding of the texts they read. These sessions complement their work in English. Staff listen regularly to individual pupils' reading aloud. They revisit prior learning in phonics where needed and systematically seek to extend pupils' vocabulary.
31. Teachers identify pupils who have SEND quickly and put effective strategies in place to support their learning, as needed. They adapt their lessons, provide individual support, clarify tasks, and use appropriate resources to help pupils to understand abstract concepts. Pupils who need further support attend tailored small group or one-to-one sessions. These include activities such as motor skills practice, language support and support with reading and spelling. Leaders monitor the outcomes of this support closely. They adjust pupils' learning plans regularly as required. As a result, pupils who have SEND access the curriculum successfully and achieve well.
32. Adults support pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) through a combination of inclusive classroom practice and targeted interventions. Early checks on these pupils' language skills on entry lead to suitable support strategies. These include individual support, small-group sessions, or adapted classroom tasks when needed. Teachers also use visual prompts and vocabulary support effectively. Pupils acquire English language skills quickly and understand new concepts as they are introduced. In boarding, leaders label key items in English, carefully match roommates and provide assistance with prep. As a result, pupils access the full curriculum with growing confidence.

33. Across subjects, teachers assess pupils' learning regularly through evaluation of classwork and tests. They use this information to shape their planning for pupils' ongoing success. Subject co-ordinators track pupils' progress across their departments. They use information well to highlight pupils who need support or additional challenge to continue to improve. Leaders share individual progress reports with parents each term. In the early years, parents access ongoing updates on their child's progress through the school's online platform.
34. Pupils achieve well across subjects. They make good progress over time, including in extended writing and mathematical fluency. In science, geography and creative subjects, pupils develop subject-specific knowledge through investigations, independent research and the provision of well-chosen resources. Pupils develop a wide range of skills to a high standard in art. They use a variety of techniques and media, including drawing, painting and ceramics. Pupils demonstrate curiosity and technological skill, for example, by interpreting weather maps using digital tools or engaging in imaginative activities in the woodland. The well-implemented curriculum underpins their success, including in school entrance exams and scholarships.
35. Leaders ensure that pupils access varied and inclusive recreation activities. The 'aspire' extra-curricular programme is integrated into the timetable for all prep pupils, so all can participate. Staff provide opportunities for a range of sports, arts, music, academic support, and extended study for scholarships. These opportunities allow pupils to develop new skills, confidence and independence. Pupils value the variety on offer and enjoy extending interests beyond the classroom.
36. The boarding environment contributes positively to pupils' educational and recreational experience. Boarders access supervised study and additional support where needed. Leaders co-ordinate pupils' recreation well. Consequently, boarders have sufficient free time and take part in sports, creative activities and weekend events regularly.

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

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

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

38. Pupils' personal, social, health and economic education, known as life skills, develops their mutual respect and social awareness through lessons and assemblies. Pupils reflect thoughtfully, for example, on issues such as gender stereotyping and the inappropriateness of making decisions based on physical difference. Adults and pupils show respect for each other. Staff lead specific sessions which successfully empower pupils to resolve friendship issues respectfully. As a result, pupils show respect to all members of the community.
39. Leaders promote pupils' emotional wellbeing, known in school as 'OrWellbeing', effectively. Staff implement clear routines, with positive adult-child relationships in school during the day and in boarding. Adults listen to pupils while helping them to understand their feelings. They use appropriate strategies, such as visual prompts in the early years. Staff quickly identify and support pupils who need help. Wellbeing leaders engage specialists, such as play therapists and counsellors, when appropriate. Pupils take part in regular 'OrWellbeing' days, learning about the impact of diet on health, alongside skills such as stress reduction techniques and self-care. Consequently, pupils are happy and safe at school.
40. Leaders promote pupils' spiritual and moral development through reflection and exploration. Pupils consider fairness, consequences and personal responsibility in life skills and in religion, philosophy and ethics lessons. Staff encourage pupils to reflect on achievements. They set individual goals, which build pupils' self-awareness. Pupils show pride in their work because adults recognise their effort. In the early years, children show early spiritual awareness, notice seasonal changes and express curiosity about the world around them. Older pupils reflect on a range of religious or spiritual practices, including Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Ethical Veganism.
41. Physical education (PE) lessons develop pupils' co-ordination, fitness and teamwork. Pupils apply effort and develop physical skills across activities, including swimming, athletics and team games. Children in the early years build strength and co-ordination, for example, through mark-making with large tools, using wheeled equipment and practising movement patterns linked to early writing skills. Pupils practise ball-handling skills, while older pupils refine movement patterns and tactical play. All older pupils represent the school in sports, further developing their team skills and resilience through experiencing winning and losing.
42. Staff teach relationships and sex education (RSE) as part of the life skills curriculum. Pupils learn about maintaining positive friendships, managing conflict, and their developing bodies. Teachers offer clear explanations and support pupils to make thoughtful choices. Early years staff model and teach respectful interactions and age-appropriate understanding of consent, helping children to form positive relationships with adults and peers.
43. Pupils behave well in classrooms, showing respect for their teachers and peers, and when moving between lessons. Pupils respond well to adults' application of the recently revised behaviour expectations and the rewards system based on the school's values. Staff intervene quickly when concerns arise. Staff expectations of pupils' behaviour, however, are currently inconsistent. The variations in the responses of some adults who work with older pupils challenge these pupils' sense of fairness. This is because the rules are not always evenly applied when a few pupils misbehave.

44. Incidents of bullying are few. Pupils understand what bullying means and how to minimise it through discussions in life skills lessons, form time and assemblies. Early years staff embed kindness through consistent modelling and praise. Adults intervene if incidents occur, record information and look for trends so they can implement improvements when needed.
45. Pupils are suitably supervised at all times, including through the application of the staffing ratios required for younger children. Appropriate supervision is in place for boarders. Effective communication systems ensure contact with adults if pupils become unwell or distressed at night.
46. Leaders maintain accurate records of checks, including fire systems, water temperatures, and equipment servicing. Daily checks, such as hygiene during food preparation and the condition of classrooms, are conducted throughout the school. Any required maintenance and repairs are completed quickly. Leaders conduct regular fire evacuation drills, including during boarding time, and adjust practices to continue to improve system effectiveness.
47. Appropriately qualified staff provide suitable first aid and medical care during the day and night. Staff, including those in the early years, maintain accurate records of injuries, any potential choking incidents and those linked to medication. They inform parents as appropriate.
48. Attendance and admission registers are accurate. Leaders follow up on absences promptly. Boarding staff track pupils' whereabouts. Attendance registers are analysed frequently to determine emerging patterns and actions needed to support improvements.

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

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

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

50. Leaders actively promote fundamental British values. Pupils learn about democracy, liberty, tolerance and respect through life skills and critical thinking lessons. They explore fairness and responsibility through structured discussions. They know how rules support safe communities and how decisions affect others. Pupils also learn about public services and community roles. They benefit from visits to institutions such as the Houses of Parliament. Pupils vote for class representatives to the school council and forward ideas for discussion, such as changes to the menu and enrichment activities. Boarders experience democratic practices when they help to plan weekend activities, for example, in contributing their ideas during house meetings.
51. Pupils are prepared well for life in modern Britain. Teachers provide opportunities to practise debate, reasoning and active listening in critical thinking, as well as in religion, philosophy and ethics lessons. Boarders build their independence as pupils learn to organise their belongings, plan routines and adapt to shared living with their peers.
52. Pupils accept responsibility, for example, by understanding that effort contributes to their progress. House points and recognition systems increase motivation, such as the effort-acknowledgement postcards given to pupils by leaders. Pupils reflect on their choices throughout the school. This includes reflection, for example, on the impact of their actions when not following rules and the effect of 'aspire' choices.
53. Staff teach economic education through life skills lessons, 'aspire' and the Year 8 leavers' programmes. Pupils manage money on stalls at school events and consider profit and loss, as well as learning from external speakers with business and finance backgrounds. They explore decision-making and the value of effort, which helps develop independence later on. However, pupils do not always link this learning to managing their own money.
54. Pupils show initiative. They contribute positively to their school community. Through 'aspire', for example, pupils support younger children during shared reading sessions. They also help organise equipment at breaktimes, support lunchtime routines and contribute to the many pupil representation groups. Pupils enjoy these opportunities to serve others, linking their sense of service to making the school a better place for all. They plan and carry out charity events and support local and national causes. In the early years, children take on responsibilities such as fetching resources or helping a friend to put on outdoor clothing. Boarders contribute through house roles, including helping with evening routines and welcoming new boarders.
55. Pupils develop their understanding of right from wrong through effective teaching about choices and consequences. Pupils explore themes such as honesty, responsibility and fairness through role-play and scenario-based tasks. Early years children learn about right and wrong during guided play, for example, when being supported to resolve disputes over toys.
56. Careers guidance is integrated into the curriculum for older pupils. Through 'aspire' and the leavers' programme, for example, pupils explore personal interests, strengths and future pathways. They attend lectures from visitors such as sports therapists, artists and economists, and take part in career-themed activities. Staff successfully prepare pupils for their next school through academic

support for entrance tests, scholarships, and individual advice. As a result, pupils are well prepared for their next steps in education.

57. In the early years, children develop social awareness through stories, play and shared celebrations. Practitioners introduce cultural events and use inclusive language. Children learn to co-operate through group tasks and structured play. They help each other with routines such as tidying up and dressing for outdoor learning. Children in the early years are kind to each other and respectful of differences in age-appropriate ways.
58. Leaders embed cultural education throughout the school. Assemblies and lessons explore diverse groups and international customs. Teachers use stories, festivals and peer conversations to develop pupils' awareness of individuals' similarities and differences. Boarders gain cultural understanding through shared routines, including celebrating different home traditions and discussing life in other countries. As a result, pupils respect individual differences and show curiosity about a range of traditions and viewpoints.

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

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

Safeguarding

60. Leaders prioritise safeguarding. They ensure that safeguarding arrangements protect pupils' welfare effectively. Staff follow statutory guidance, updating policies and procedures as appropriate.
61. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies have suitable training and experience. The DSL is a member of the leadership team, with the authority and time to fulfil the required responsibilities. Safeguarding leaders work with external agencies effectively. They seek advice appropriately to ensure that pupils receive timely support when they need it. Suitable safeguarding records are accurately maintained.
62. Effective staff recruitment procedures are in place. Leaders complete all the required checks before adults start to work with pupils. They record the information accurately in a single central record. Leaders check the suitability of adults visiting boarding accommodation, contractors and visiting professionals.
63. Staff understand their responsibilities. They follow the school's safeguarding procedures consistently as required. New staff complete a safeguarding induction before they begin work. Staff receive regular updates on themes such as online safety and harmful behaviours. Staff undertake additional training for roles that involve boarders or younger children. They recognise changes in pupils' behaviour, attendance or emotional wellbeing that may signal emerging needs. They act promptly if concerns arise.
64. Staff understand how to raise concerns about adults. Leaders record and respond to all such information appropriately.
65. Leaders ensure that pupils feel safe and that they know how to seek help if they need it. Opportunities to raise concerns are embedded in daily school life, including access to the safeguarding team, use of anonymous worry boxes and online systems. Boarders have daily access to trained staff. They can seek help at any time, including at night.
66. Staff teach pupils how to keep themselves safe. Pupils know who to talk to if they feel worried about something and can explain the strategies they use to stay safe. Younger children learn about privacy and appropriate touch. Older pupils understand real-world and online safety concepts such as personal boundaries, uploading of images and the pressures surrounding social media.
67. Leaders maintain a suitable internet filtering and monitoring system to ensure internet safety. They test its effectiveness regularly.
68. Governors review the effectiveness of the safeguarding arrangements thoroughly and regularly. This oversight, along with leaders' follow-up actions, maintains a rigorous and consistently effective approach to safeguarding.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Orwell Park School
Department for Education number	935/6005
Registered charity number	310481
Address	Orwell Park School Nacton Ipswich Suffolk IP10 0ER
Phone number	01473 659225
Email address	opssecretary@orwellpark.org
Website	www.orwellpark.co.uk
Proprietor	Orwell Park School Educational Trust Ltd
Chair	Mr Callum Licence
Headteacher	Mr Simon O'Malley
Age range	2 to 14
Number of pupils	179
Number of boarding pupils	87
Date of previous inspection	21 to 23 September 2022

Information about the school

70. Orwell Park School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school near Ipswich, Suffolk. The school comprises lower prep, which includes an Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) for children aged between two and a half and five years, a lower prep for pupils aged five to nine years, and an upper prep for pupils aged nine to thirteen years. The school is a registered charity, whose trustees are the governing body.
71. The current chair of governors has been in post since March 2025. The current headteacher joined the school in September 2025.
72. Boarders are accommodated in one boarding house situated in the main building.
73. There are 24 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery classes and one Reception class.
74. The school has identified 63 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Few pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
75. The school has identified English as an additional language for 34 pupils.
76. The school states its aims are to offer an all-round education in which happy children can grow in self-esteem, develop their abilities and persevere when confronted with obstacles. It seeks to excite, develop and challenge each child. The school endeavours to develop a lifelong love of learning and an increasing sense of self-reliance as children prepare for senior school and allow them to understand the needs of others and the outside world.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

18 to 20 November 2025

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

78. 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 headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- visits to the boarding house accompanied by pupils
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

79. 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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