

School inspection report

25 to 27 November 2025

Pennthorpe School

Church Street

Rudgwick

Horsham

RH12 3HJ

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 have a clear vision for the school and provide strategic direction with purpose and clarity. They promote a collaborative and aspirational culture which prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Governors provide ongoing and effective oversight. They ensure that leaders possess the essential skills, knowledge and understanding to perform their roles effectively so that the Standards are met consistently.
2. Leaders base their development plans on thoughtful self-evaluation. A cohesive leadership team works closely together to actively promote the school's motto, 'non nobis solum nati', which means 'not for ourselves alone'. This motto is understood well by pupils and reinforced consistently by staff to foster a supportive school community that values contributing positively to the lives of others.
3. Leaders in the early years uphold high expectations for children's achievements. Children enjoy a well-planned introduction to school life that balances nurture and challenge in a stimulating learning environment. Supportive teachers help children communicate and collaborate effectively, fostering their confidence and promoting good progress in all areas of their learning.
4. Leaders make relevant information available to parents, including safeguarding and attendance policies and information on how to contact school governors. However, at the start of the inspection, information relating to pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) was not published on the school's website. This was rectified before the end of the inspection.
5. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils gain new knowledge and develop skills across a wide range of subjects. The school's use of the 'Pennthorpe purpose' develops pupils' understanding of themselves as learners, encouraging independent learning and demonstrating diligence in all areas of their education. Leaders consistently help pupils to achieve well academically so that they typically secure places at their senior school of choice.
6. School leaders ensure that pupils know that unkind behaviour in any form is unacceptable. The school promotes a kind and respectful culture. Leaders manage any reported incidents of misbehaviour and bullying swiftly, including the use of restorative conversations. In a very few instances, older pupils are not clear about the school's processes for dealing with incidents of misbehaviour and some lack the confidence to speak up when they are upset.
7. Leaders and staff proactively identify and mitigate risks within the school environment. Thorough health and safety arrangements, comprehensive fire safety protocols and effective first aid provision help to create a secure learning environment. Leaders keep careful and detailed health and safety records.
8. An effective personal, social, health, and economic education (PSHE) programme supports pupils' personal growth and development well. Pupils cultivate a secure sense of social responsibility by taking on leadership roles, engaging in charitable activities and building connections within the local community. Staff provide valuable support during transitional periods which helps pupils to build independence as they make progress through their education and prepares them well for life within British society.
9. Leaders and staff demonstrate a robust and proactive commitment to safeguarding. They embed a culture of vigilance within the school community. Staff receive thorough safeguarding training and

regular updates to keep them well informed. Leaders maintain effective communication with external safeguarding partners and utilise their support when required.

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 the policy for pupils who speak English as an additional language is published on the school's website as required
- ensure that pupils confidently understand how to report any incidents of misbehaviour.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors support school leaders and monitor the impact of their work carefully. They are informed about the school's effectiveness and any areas for improvement through receiving regular reports, making frequent visits, consulting with pupils and holding focused discussions with school leaders. This insight allows governors to provide ongoing support and appropriate challenge to the leadership team. As a result, the school consistently meets the Standards.
11. Leaders evaluate the school's performance and identify opportunities to improve the educational provision. They use their expertise and insight to develop thoughtful, effective actions that enhance pupils' overall experience. This thorough self-evaluation informs the school's development plans and leads to positive outcomes for pupils. For example, leaders have recently reviewed the curriculum to increase the time spent on outdoor learning and strategies which promote pupils' resilience and problem-solving skills. These ongoing developments help leaders to set high aspirations for pupils to achieve consistently well.
12. Leaders foster a collaborative learning environment that enhances positive relationships among pupils and teachers. Decisions taken by staff align with the school's core aim of providing an inspiring and broad education. Leaders prioritise and ensure that pupils' wellbeing is central to their decisions and aims. They regularly monitor and track pupils' wellbeing through the effective use of pastoral surveys and identify any pupils who require additional support.
13. Leaders ensure that they comply with the Equality Act 2010. They implement a comprehensive accessibility plan that identifies measures to improve pupils' access to the site and curriculum. For example, ramps and railings have been installed to improve access to all buildings. Additionally, teachers have researched and implemented strategies such as reducing bright colours and crowded wall displays to support pupils' focus, concentration and individual needs.
14. Leaders maintain constructive and timely links with external agencies. The knowledge and advice leaders receive guides their decision-making relating to different aspects of the school's provision including safeguarding, providing effective academic support and promoting positive mental health. The school informs the local authority promptly whenever pupils join or leave at non-standard transition times.
15. Parents are well informed about their child's progress and achievements through parents' evenings and written reports. These reports outline their child's learning, highlight positive learning and provide targets for improvement. Regular pastoral review included in the reports explains how pupils develop manners, behaviour, organisation and engagement with school life. Leaders provide the local authority with the required information about the school's use of funds provided for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
16. Leaders revise and update policies promptly. The school's website is typically well maintained and provides appropriate information, including a range of policies and procedures. However, information relating to pupils who speak EAL was not available for parents on the website at the start of the inspection. This was rectified during the inspection.
17. Governors and leaders provide comprehensive risk management procedures that consider any potential concerns. Leaders identify risks to pupils' wellbeing, including harmful behaviours and attitudes that may not be immediately obvious. They employ effective strategies and write careful

risk assessments to mitigate any potential risks, including those for educational visits and for the premises and accommodation. Leaders review and revise risk assessments to ensure that they remain effective and suitable.

18. Leaders consistently implement a suitable complaints policy which enables parents to raise concerns informally or formally. Leaders maintain a detailed log of all complaints which are submitted, including any actions taken in response.
19. Leaders in the early years set an ambitious vision and maintain high expectations so that children achieve effectively. Leaders design supportive and engaging indoor and outdoor environments. Staff support each child's individual developmental needs well. Leaders consult effectively with staff so that they enhance their practice and enrich children's experiences. Staff communicate clearly and consistently with parents which fosters and promotes a supportive and collaborative early years community.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Leaders design a thoughtful curriculum that supports pupils' learning across a wide range of subjects, paying particular attention to their individual needs. The curriculum builds on prior learning and enables pupils to benefit from rich, creative experiences. Teachers plan the curriculum methodically, designing programmes of study that broaden pupils' learning. This approach ensures pupils are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
22. Leaders regularly review the curriculum so that it remains relevant and engaging for pupils. Teachers supplement the core curriculum with additional opportunities to promote collaboration, resilience and communication. For example, pupils in science work collaboratively to investigate the needs of living things by designing imaginative habitats. Pupils from Year 6 choose topics of interest and develop research skills as part of their Pre-Senior Baccalaureate (PSB) project, such as 'how do different game reserves in South Africa try to prevent rhinoceros poaching?' In mixed art and outdoor learning lessons, pupils learn practical skills and develop resilience through building a campfire.
23. Teachers in the early years carefully plan the curriculum to suit children who are at different stages of development which lays a solid foundation for each child's future learning. Leaders create a language-rich early years environment that promotes listening, speaking, and vocabulary development. Teachers encourage children's use of language through purposeful discussions, role play and lessons. Children collaborate and engage in problem-solving activities which support their communication skills. Well-planned independent play sessions help children to articulate their choices and express their ideas confidently. As a result, children typically achieve the early learning goals (ELGs).
24. Staff plan lessons carefully so that they consider pupils' individual learning needs. Teachers possess secure subject knowledge and use it to craft engaging and stimulating lessons that captivate pupils' interest. Pupils thrive in a well-managed learning environment and benefit from positive relationships with their teachers. Pupils feel encouraged to ask and answer questions freely in lessons, sharing their ideas and views. They demonstrate effort, motivation and interest in their work. Pupils make good progress from their starting points.
25. Leaders and teachers implement a thorough assessment and performance framework to evaluate pupils' progress. Robust systems enable leaders to monitor and track pupils' progress effectively, both individually and across different groups. Collaborative discussions among staff ensure assessment information is used to inform planning. Teachers address any learning gaps and provide timely additional support when needed. Teachers' feedback motivates and celebrates pupils' achievements and sets targets to help them to improve their work. A supportive atmosphere fosters reflection and encourages pupils to strive for improvement.
26. Leaders of provision for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) provide highly effective oversight of their individual needs. Leaders identify these pupils' needs quickly, track and monitor their progress carefully and provide individual teaching strategies. For example, pupils are provided, when required, with additional adult support, specialised resources to improve concentration and assistive technology, such as reader pens. Information about pupils who have SEND is disseminated clearly to teachers through regular conversations and pupil passports. As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress in their work.

27. Teachers promptly identify pupils who speak EAL and meet their needs through targeted language support. Effective teaching strategies include the provision of extended thinking time and vocabulary lists. This approach ensures pupils with EAL receive the support they need to develop confidence and make good progress in their written and spoken English.
28. A diverse and inclusive extra-curricular programme allows pupils to develop their interests, talents and leadership skills. For example, pupils participate in a mountain biking club and develop their fitness. Pupils improve their academic performance in enrichment activities such as when they broaden their understanding of digital literacy. Pupils develop their leadership skills by running activities such as the chess club.

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. Pupils develop their spiritual knowledge and understanding through a well-taught theology, philosophy, and religion (TPR) curriculum and regular opportunities to attend services in the local church. Pupils learn about a broad range of religions, fostering appreciation and respect for different faiths. For instance, children in Reception learn about the topic of 'into the light', creating Diwali lamps, producing Eid fact files and confidently describing the symbolism of Christingles. Discussions in TPR, such as asking 'is fairness the same as equality?' and moral messages delivered through assemblies teach pupils to think of others and treat each other kindly.
31. The PSHE curriculum helps pupils to develop their self-knowledge and understanding. Pupils complete regular wellbeing surveys which leaders analyse to identify ways to promote pupils' self-esteem and confidence. Pupils participate in residential trips and undertake weekly wellbeing walks that build resilience and enhance their understanding of themselves and others. All pupils participate in music and drama productions which develop their performance skills and promote mutual respect and confidence.
32. Leaders provide pupils with a suitable physical education (PE) curriculum which includes a range of sports and games such as swimming, rugby, netball and golf. Pupils learn how participation in PE activities maintains their physical health and contributes to emotional wellbeing. Leaders tailor the programme to the needs of groups and individual pupils, including those who have disabilities. The school supports pupils of all levels including those who compete at regional or national levels. Pupils' involvement in sport and physical activities helps them to develop co-ordination, confidence, self-esteem and teamwork.
33. The PSHE curriculum includes a suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) programme which is age-appropriate and taught effectively. Pupils learn about the onset of puberty and explore relevant social issues such as the risks caused by drug and alcohol misuse. Pupils are taught strategies so that they can manage any anxiety they may experience. They learn about consent and how to build and maintain healthy relationships. Pupils gain a secure understanding of how to support both their physical and emotional development. Teachers promote discussion, equipping pupils with the knowledge and skills to make informed personal choices to promote their safety and wellbeing.
34. Leaders promote positive behaviour by emphasising courtesy and good manners. Most pupils behave well and respect each other, such as when they take turns during conversations and celebrate each other's successes. Leaders implement an anti-bullying strategy, supported by anti-bullying ambassadors and 'champions.' Pupils choose and regularly meet with a trusted teacher which supports their wellbeing. Leaders thoroughly investigate reported incidents of misbehaviour or bullying and maintain clear records. Staff provide support for all those who are involved in any unkind actions, though they do not consistently use the school's 'consideration of impact' strategy. Pupils know they can approach adults for help. However, a small number of older pupils are not clear or confident about how to report any concerns they may have about continued inappropriate behaviour. This means that a few instances of inappropriate behaviour are not managed as effectively as they could be.
35. Leaders emphasise the importance of robust health and safety procedures, including fire safety. They adhere to required health and safety legislation and ensure all required checks are carried out.

Leaders implement effective fire safety measures. For example, pupils regularly rehearse fire drills and leaders commission an external fire audit and risk assessment. Staff mitigate risks and implement a thorough schedule to provide ongoing training and ensure that any maintenance issues are managed competently and in a timely manner. As a result of such measures, the premises are tidy, well maintained and secure for pupils.

36. Appropriate provision is made for pupils seeking medical attention. Clear records are kept of any accidents and the administration of medicines. Staff receive suitable training so that first aid is administered competently, including paediatric first aid training for those who work in the early years.
37. Staff supervise pupils throughout the school diligently, including during breaks and lunch. They use these times to develop positive relationships and promote responsible behaviour. Leaders maintain suitable staff-to-child ratios in the early years.
38. Appropriate arrangements are made to maintain the admission and attendance registers. Leaders monitor and follow up on any concerning patterns when necessary,
39. Leaders ensure children in the early years receive a range of stimulating opportunities that promote their emotional and physical development. Children settle quickly and engage confidently in activities. They benefit from specialist PE teaching and use appropriate outdoor equipment which promotes co-operative play and develops their co-ordination and strength. Staff know the children well and provide well-planned opportunities for them to engage enthusiastically in creative activities. For instance, children develop their fine motor skills when they use clay to mould and create imaginative hedgehogs and make patterns with scissors by learning to cut straight and curved lines.

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. Leaders ensure that pupils develop economic understanding through a well-planned PSHE curriculum, assemblies known as 'huddles', and an 'innovation week'. During this week, pupils collaborate about real life problems with local businesses. Staff use themes like 'being me in my world' to help pupils explore their identity, aspirations and financial responsibilities. Children in the early years are introduced to coins and money through hands-on activities, such as setting up a market stall. Older pupils learn about budgeting and the concept of loans.
42. Pupils receive effective support which prepares them for their next phase of education. Leaders arrange a suitable careers programme which informs pupils, including children in the early years, about a range of future employment opportunities. This programme includes a schedule of regular speakers who share the work they do as, for example, pilots, police officers and journalists. Leaders help older pupils to prepare well for examinations and provide activities which develop their interview and presentation skills. The annual 'good goodbye' provides pupils with opportunities to prepare for their transition to the next academic year and celebrate their shared experiences.
43. Staff in the early years guide and support children effectively so that they appreciate, understand and value each other. They act as positive role models and help children to form inclusive and successful friendships. Teachers greet children warmly during morning registration which promotes positive relationships. Children exhibit kindness and empathy, respond positively to praise and assist each other during play. They show regard for others, share materials, listen attentively and take turns.
44. Staff promote the importance of respect for everyone through PSHE lessons and the wider curriculum. Pupils explore issues relating to cultural diversity and equality. For instance, they attend assemblies which raise awareness about people who have different disabilities. Themed weeks, such as 'neurodiversity spotlight week', enhance pupils' understanding of the consequences of discriminatory and prejudiced attitudes towards individuals and groups. Pupils celebrate Black History Month and explore the lives of notable historical figures from diverse cultures, ethnicities and backgrounds who have campaigned for an equal society.
45. The well-planned curriculum deepens pupils' understanding of democratic principles and fosters their respect for public institutions and services. For instance, in the early years, children learn about the importance of public services through their 'superhero' topic and visit a fire station. Older pupils visit the Houses of Parliament which widens their knowledge of government and the rule of law. Pupils in Year 8 write speeches as the Prime Minister, examine the electoral process and begin to explore the British legal system. Pupils' understanding of democracy is supported effectively through a range of school events, such as when younger children vote on how to name their class mascot or pupils elect school council representatives.
46. Leaders promote pupils' understanding of right and wrong and moral responsibility through PSHE lessons, effective discussions and assemblies. Pupils learn to debate, explore moral dilemmas and consider appropriate court cases and their outcomes. The guest speaker programme provides opportunities for pupils to investigate issues such as civil rights, ethics, and moral beliefs. Teachers ensure that any political discussions are conducted fairly and without bias.

47. Pupils develop their sense of social responsibility through active involvement in charitable and social initiatives. Outreach work includes singing at a residential home for the elderly and collecting goods for a local charity. Pupils participate in community service as part of their 'Pennthorpe citizens award,' which promotes responsibility and kindness. These experiences foster independence and help pupils to understand how their actions positively influence and support other people.

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

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

Safeguarding

49. Leaders prioritise effective safeguarding arrangements which comply with current statutory guidance. They implement a detailed and clear safeguarding policy. Staff demonstrate confidence, knowledge and understanding about the school's safeguarding procedures.
50. Governors maintain an effective overview of safeguarding policies and procedures. They communicate regularly with the safeguarding team which allows them to understand ongoing issues, track emerging trends and evaluate the actions which have been taken. Governors undertake a thorough annual review of safeguarding policy and procedures.
51. Leaders collaborate with external agencies, including children's services and the police, to address concerns swiftly and effectively when required. They establish positive relationships with local safeguarding partners, promoting a culture of open communication and teamwork. Staff proactively refer, report and document any safeguarding concerns so that leaders are well informed. Leaders keep thorough safeguarding records, maintain ongoing communications with pastoral teams and monitor pupils' wellbeing effectively.
52. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding receive effective training. They structure safeguarding training for staff carefully, beginning with an in-depth induction programme and offering continuous and thorough support. Regular quizzes identify any safeguarding misconceptions which staff may have. This comprehensive approach informs leaders about safeguarding practices, enabling them to respond well to potential issues. Staff are alert to concerns regarding child-on-child abuse and understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Leaders arrange specific training, when necessary, so that staff support pupils' individual needs effectively.
53. Pupils learn about personal safety, including online safety, through assemblies, computing and PSHE lessons. They explore various issues, such as road safety and the importance of exercising caution when interacting with strangers. The safeguarding team implement an effective internet filtering and monitoring system, review its robustness and promptly address any alerts which are received. Pupils are encouraged to voice their concerns through various channels, such as 'worry boxes' and confiding in trusted adults.
54. Leaders follow suitable safer recruitment procedures when appointing new members of staff, including governors and volunteers. They ensure that all required suitability checks are completed before anyone begins working at the school. These checks are accurately recorded in a suitable single central record of appointments (SCR). Staff files are well organised and kept up to date. Governors systematically scrutinise the SCR to assure themselves that all adults who work at the school have been appropriately checked.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Pennthorpe School
Department for Education number	938/6026
Registered charity number	307043
Address	Pennthorpe School Church Street Rudgwick Horsham West Sussex RH12 3HJ
Phone number	01403 822391
Email address	enquiries@pennthorpe.com
Website	www.pennthorpe.com
Proprietor	Pennthorpe School Trust Limited
Chair	Mr Richard Sharkey
Headteacher	Mr Chris Murray
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	169
Date of previous inspection	23 to 24 November 2022

Information about the school

56. Pennthorpe is an independent co-educational day school in Horsham, West Sussex. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. The school consists of three sections: the nursery, for children aged two, three and four; the pre-prep, for pupils aged four to six years; and the prep school, for those aged seven to thirteen. The chair of the board has been in post since September 2024. The headteacher took up his position in April 2023.
57. There are currently 47 children in the early years setting, comprising two Nursery and two Reception classes.
58. The school has identified 60 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
59. The school has identified nine pupils as speaking English as an additional language (EAL).
60. The school states its aims are to inspire and nurture its pupils through a broad and holistic education. This is encapsulated in the 'Pennthorpe Purpose', a set of values and learning dispositions which provide a common vocabulary for all. The school seeks to build strong community links and to invest in the future of the pupils and their wider environment.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 November 2025

61. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

62. 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

63. 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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