

School inspection report

19 to 21 May 2026

Hatherop Castle School

Hatherop
Cirencester
GL7 3NB

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. The proprietor ensures that leaders have the knowledge and skills to carry out their roles effectively. Leaders execute their responsibilities with clarity and purpose, so that the wellbeing of pupils is promoted and the Standards are met consistently. The school's vision is promoted by leaders and staff, who act in the best interests of pupils and are ambitious for them to realise their potential, both academically and in their personal development.
2. The broad, balanced and engaging curriculum integrates academic, creative and technological subjects effectively. It is delivered through engaging and well-planned lessons by teachers who have secure subject knowledge and use classroom resources effectively.
3. Teaching is adapted to meet the needs of pupils, which enables them to make good progress. This includes for those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
4. The early years setting is effective and well led. Staff match activities skilfully to individual needs, as they promote children's curiosity and development. Well-designed tasks encourage the acquisition of children's language and social skills in a nurturing environment. As a result, children make good progress towards their learning goals.
5. In English and mathematics, rigorous assessment informs lesson planning and enables pupils to build on prior knowledge. In other subjects, assessment does not enable teachers to identify pupils' prior learning as effectively, and so does not inform teachers' planning to promote pupils' outcomes as well as possible.
6. Leaders prioritise pupils' health, safety and emotional wellbeing. The school is well maintained. Leaders implement comprehensive and suitable health and safety procedures and robust supervision and medical arrangements.
7. The boarding environment is welcoming, and the boarding accommodation is suitable and comfortable. Boarding staff care for and support boarding pupils well, including through a suitable range of activities at the weekends and during the evenings. Boarders are encouraged to share their views and provide feedback on the boarding experience.
8. Leaders set high expectations for behaviour, which are consistently applied by staff. Leaders and staff demonstrate that pupils are valued and celebrate their achievements. Leaders successfully foster a respectful and kind community.
9. Lessons in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) are effective in helping promote pupils' self-awareness and self-esteem and equipping them with the knowledge and skills to navigate life beyond school. Leaders ensure that the physical education (PE) curriculum is inclusive and supports the development of pupils' physical skills.
10. Leaders actively encourage pupils' understanding of British values, such as democracy, fairness and respect for others, through careful curriculum planning and opportunities across school life. Pupils' sense of social responsibility is fostered through opportunities to take on leadership roles and to participate in charitable fundraising initiatives and community projects. A diverse programme of visiting speakers gives pupils of all ages the opportunity to learn about different educational

pathways and career opportunities. Pupils' economic education is developed through practical experience as well as a programme of talks to promote understanding of how to manage their own money both now and in the future.

11. Safeguarding arrangements are comprehensive and overseen rigorously by the proprietor, who checks that safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented effectively. School leaders and staff are suitably trained in safeguarding and have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities to keep pupils safe. Leaders respond to any safeguarding concerns that arise swiftly and appropriately.
12. The required pre-employment checks are completed, and the single central record of appointments (SCR) is maintained, in accordance with current legislative requirements. However, information relating to prohibition from teaching checks is not recorded consistently clearly in the SCR or staff files.

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 relating to prohibition from teaching checks is recorded consistently clearly in the single central record of appointments and staff files
- develop the assessment framework to ensure teachers' planning across the range of subjects takes effective account of pupils' prior learning in order to promote the best possible outcomes for pupils.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

13. Leaders have a clear vision for the school and communicate the school's aims and ambitions for pupils effectively. Leaders have the necessary skills and knowledge to carry out their roles and responsibilities so that pupils' wellbeing is consistently promoted.
14. Leaders undertake thorough and regular self-evaluation, which is informed by the implementation of internal audits, the analysis of academic data, and by seeking the perspectives of pupils, parents and staff on different aspects of the school's provision. The school's strategic plan identifies areas for improvement, with leaders working diligently and thoughtfully to address these such as, for example, through the implementation of an online questionnaire to assess regularly each pupil's perception of their wellbeing.
15. The proprietor, supported by the advisory committee, monitors all aspects of the school's work effectively. Their strategic oversight is underpinned by a well-established cycle of reporting and in-person visits. This productive dialogue with school leaders provides the proprietor with a clear understanding of the effectiveness of the school in all areas, including health and safety, pupils' welfare, safeguarding and the curriculum, so that the proprietor can ensure that all the Standards are met.
16. Leaders ensure the suitability of the boarding provision. Clear policies, procedures, induction and a programme of training are in place to support boarding staff in carrying out their duties and responsibilities effectively. Staff provide a suitable, kind and nurturing environment, ensuring that pupils' experience of boarding is a positive one, which provides for their pastoral needs.
17. All the required information about the school is provided on its website. Parents, including those of children in the early years, receive feedback about their child's academic progress, attainment and general wellbeing at key intervals across the school year, including through detailed written reports and interim face-to-face meetings. Parents of younger children receive their child's Early Years Foundation Stage Profile at the end of the Reception year. Regular newsletters and bulletins keep parents abreast of events and activities taking place across each term and inform them about what pupils are learning.
18. Leaders work effectively with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils. They provide required information to the local authority regarding pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding. They also inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
19. Leaders know pupils well and have a clear understanding of potential contextual risks to which pupils may be exposed, including local risks. Leaders are vigilant in identifying any risks and mitigating these through thoughtful and effective risk management. Regular review of risk assessments by leaders ensures their continued effectiveness.
20. The school has a suitable complaints policy, made available on its website, which sets out its procedures and timeframe for managing complaints. Whenever concerns arise, leaders respond swiftly and sensitively, reflecting on what can be learnt from issues raised, and implementing any changes needed.

21. Leaders and staff promote the principles of equality, respect and fair treatment. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is implemented which is regularly reviewed and updated by leaders, ensuring the site, facilities and curriculum are accessible to all pupils and adapted as required.

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

22. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

23. The well-structured and broad curriculum is designed to enable pupils to develop a broad range of knowledge and skills across a wide variety of subjects. Leaders frequently review the curriculum to ensure it addresses pupils' needs and promotes their progress and attainment effectively. For example, they have implemented measures designed to further develop the spelling skills of pupils in Years 3 to Year 8. The curriculum is enhanced for older pupils through the provision of an engaging and purposeful electives programme, through which pupils develop diverse practical and intellectual skills that help equip them for the future in areas of their choice, such as sports psychology, child development, countryside conservation, business studies and robotics.
24. Over time, pupils extend their knowledge and skills across a range of subjects. In English, teachers use skilled questioning and, when appropriate, provide opportunities for pupils to work in pairs to support learning. For example, pupils' understanding of grammar and punctuation is enhanced as they work together to identify errors in sentences. Pupils develop the ability to write extended pieces accurately and imaginatively through teachers' use of effective teaching techniques and resources, including writing frames, story plans and the modelling of techniques such as the use of onomatopoeia and repetition for creating impact. Links made with the history curriculum deepen pupils' comprehension and interpretation of texts being studied.
25. Teachers demonstrate secure subject knowledge and use a range of carefully selected methods to engage and challenge pupils, address misconceptions and develop their learning. In mathematics, teachers plan lessons that use methods, such as games, which capture the interest of pupils, for example when consolidating their learning about money. Mathematics lessons include activities matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment. This builds pupils' confidence and encourages them to tackle complex problems.
26. The gradual increase in provision of specialist teaching in all areas of the curriculum as pupils get older, including French, Latin, computing, science and expressive subjects, enables them to explore the subject matter at hand with rigour. Teachers provide clear explanations and address any misconceptions. In subjects such as science and music, pupils' knowledge and understanding are developed through opportunities to revisit and build upon concepts as they progress through the different years. Collaborative planning in computing and geography enables pupils to apply their digital skills and knowledge to the subject matter at hand, such as creating a video diary when learning about the rainforest.
27. There is a well-considered early years curriculum. Teachers provide wide-ranging learning activities, drawing on the interests of the children. Teachers' knowledge and daily teaching of phonics means that, from Nursery onwards, children use their developing understanding to start blending sounds. By the end of their Reception year, all children are confident readers and can spell common words independently. Through thoughtful questioning and the skilled use of resources, teachers develop children's mathematical awareness, such as when identifying and naming shapes and their positions in relation to each other. Teachers' detailed knowledge of each child means that appropriate strategies are put in place swiftly for those who need support in their learning. Children are well supported in their transition to Year 1.
28. A suitable assessment framework is in place to track pupils' progress in English and mathematics. Teachers evaluate each pupil's attainment through a cycle of regular assessment. In lessons, pupils

receive frequent feedback from their teachers about their work, how to improve and next steps in their learning. Termly written targets provided to pupils in English and mathematics also enable them to gain feedback on their progress, motivating them to improve their understanding and make their work better. This contributes to the good progress that pupils make. However, in other subjects the assessment of pupils is not developed to the same extent and does not enable teachers to identify pupils' prior learning and attainment as effectively. As a result, assessment in these other subjects does not inform teachers' planning to promote pupils' outcomes as well as possible.

29. Leaders identify the needs of pupils who have SEND. The drafting and sharing of individual learning plans (ILPs), known as 'pupil passports', provides teachers with precise guidance on how best to support them. Teachers adapt their teaching effectively to support pupils who have SEND, using specific resources, strategies and technology. When required, pupils also receive targeted support and guidance from specialists. Leaders routinely monitor the effectiveness of support provided by seeking feedback from staff, teachers, parents and pupils. Pupils who have SEND learn effectively.
30. Leaders maintain a register of pupils who speak EAL and assess whether they need any additional support such as word banks or translated text. Leaders monitor the progress of pupils who speak EAL to ensure that any extra support provided is effective and promotes their full integration in all aspects of school life.
31. Boarders are well supported in their academic work. Teaching staff supervise homework each afternoon, which is undertaken in classrooms away from the boarding accommodation. This enables pupils to manage their time effectively and be more independent as they set about their studies.
32. The school provides a large and suitable range of age-appropriate extra-curricular and recreational activities, including for children in Reception. Staff encourage pupils to explore their interests and develop their skills in diverse areas such as dance, coding, public speaking and performance, cricket, choir and skateboarding.

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

33. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

34. Leaders and teachers acknowledge and celebrate pupils' effort, achievements and commitment to the school's values of 'happiness, teamwork and respect' through a well-established reward system based on house points. This motivates pupils and builds their confidence and self-esteem. As a result, pupils take pride in their achievements and those of others. In the early years, clear and embedded routines create a calm and purposeful environment, which promotes children's understanding of the school's high expectations and enables them to fully engage with their learning.
35. The school provides effective pastoral care. Leaders encourage pupils to share any concerns or worries they have using 'chatterboxes' for younger pupils and the frequent completion of online questionnaires for those who are older. Leaders and staff meet regularly to discuss pupils' wellbeing and respond promptly and sensitively to any concerns raised. Ready access to a specialist emotional support assistant is available for pupils who need it.
36. In religious education (RE), pupils learn about a range of religions, including Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Links made with the history and geography curriculums mean that pupils gain an understanding of belief systems prevalent in different parts of the world and their cultural importance, along with an appreciation of how values and beliefs may change over time. Teachers encourage pupils to respect the views and spiritual perspectives of others. Lessons in theology, philosophy and ethics (TPE) provide older pupils with opportunities to discuss and debate a range of spiritual and philosophical ideas, such as forgiveness, social justice, and religious and secular responses to issues such as poverty and inequality.
37. The school has in place a suitable programme of PSHE, delivered through dedicated weekly lessons, as well as through assemblies. Younger pupils learn about themes such as what constitutes a healthy lifestyle, how to stay safe when using the road and how best to navigate new challenges and obstacles. They consider the relationships that are important to them and how these provide them with support. They learn how to recognise, respond to and seek help if they encounter teasing, bullying or aggressive behaviour. Older pupils consider different types of friendships and the feelings associated with them. They explore concepts such as power and control in relationships and how these relate to respect and consent. Pupils explore how to communicate confidently and appropriately in person and when using the internet.
38. Relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught as part of the PSHE curriculum in an age-appropriate manner. Pupils gain knowledge and understanding of the emotional and physical aspects of growing up, so they are well prepared for the next stage of their lives. For example, pupils in Year 3 start to learn about how male and female bodies change on the inside and outside during the growing process and why such changes are necessary. From Year 5, pupils consider the changes that take place both physically and emotionally during puberty. Older pupils learn about the development of a baby from conception to birth.
39. Pupils' physical development is supported through a broad and well-planned programme of PE, informed by teachers' expert knowledge. For example, younger children in Nursery develop their co-ordination skills by learning to use balls, hoops and balance bikes. In athletics, pupils develop their skills in the high jump through a carefully structured lesson, supported by positive feedback, and

adapted to their abilities. All pupils have opportunities to represent the school through the programme of weekly sports fixtures across each term. Extra practice and training sessions help to develop specific sports-related skills further, such as in hockey and cricket, for pupils who need further challenge and support.

40. Pupils respond positively to the high expectations leaders have for behaviour and the consistent and rigorous implementation of the school's behaviour policy. Positive behaviour charts displayed in classrooms make explicit the required expectations, and pupils understand the consequences if they fall short of them. Pupils move around the school calmly, politely and confidently.
41. Leaders promote positive behaviour in the boarding house through reinforcement of the school's values of respect and kindness. Mobile phone use is not permitted during the school day, including during breaktimes, neither is the use of pupils' personal devices.
42. The anti-bullying strategy is effective. Leaders make clear that bullying is harmful and not to be tolerated. Incidents of bullying are rare, and leaders are swift to investigate and deal with any reported incidents, using approaches which focus on repairing the harm caused by the wrongdoing. Meticulous record-keeping and regular pastoral meetings enable leaders to identify and respond to any patterns or trends and put in place measures to mitigate risks of such incidents recurring.
43. Health and safety arrangements across the school are robust and ensure that the site is well maintained. All required health and safety, maintenance and fire safety checks are implemented appropriately. Staff receive suitable training in fire safety. Pupils learn what to do in case of an emergency through regular drills, including in boarding hours. Leaders act on the advice of external experts if required, commissioned through the proprietor's advisory committee.
44. The boarding house provides pupils with suitable facilities, including comfortable sleeping accommodation. Boarders complete an induction process and are well supported as they settle in. Boarding staff treat boarders in a kindly and supportive manner, which enables them to feel secure. Pupils are informed how to access help if they need it, including at night. Meals provided to boarders are nutritious and fulfil their dietary needs.
45. Pupils are well supervised in all areas of the site. Pupils have a clear understanding of the areas they are permitted to access during breaks and in their free time. The requisite number of suitably qualified staff oversee children in the early years at all times. Supervision of boarders, including overnight, is well organised, with sufficient staff overseeing activities each evening and during the weekends. The whereabouts of boarders is carefully monitored.
46. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with current statutory requirements. Leaders work with pupils and their families when there are any concerns and have suitable procedures to work with the local authority should there be any concerns about sustained absenteeism.
47. Suitably trained staff, including paediatric first aiders in the early years, care for and support any pupils who are sick or injured. The medical room contains appropriate facilities and is available to pupils, including boarders, throughout the day and evening. Staff implement appropriate procedures for the storage and administration of medicines.

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

48. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

49. Leaders promote a respectful and inclusive community. Pupils learn the importance of having respect for all people. They discuss issues relating to diversity and equality, such as learning how to recognise and challenge gender stereotypes. A dedicated programme gives older male pupils opportunities to discuss issues such as misogyny and the online world. Workshops on empathy and compassion enable the older girls to explore friendships and develop strategies to manage their feelings. These promote pupils' sense of right and wrong, and fair treatment.
50. Ethical issues, laws and moral dilemmas are discussed in a range of lessons, such as in science, when pupils explore the challenges and ethics of climate change and sustainability. In history, pupils learn about the Suffragette movement and its role in the development of women gaining the right to vote in government elections.
51. The school's 'happiness, character and service' programme ensures that pupils have a wide range of opportunities to make a positive contribution in school as well as in their local community. For example, pupils' visits to local care homes give them insight into the needs of older members of society. Volunteering at a local centre for neurodivergent people fosters empathy and understanding. Opportunities for older pupils to read to younger children in Nursery, and lead 'wake and shake' sessions at morning registration for pupils in Reception to Year 2, promote a sense of belonging across the whole school community as well as instilling a sense of responsibility towards others. Opportunities for pupils to act as representatives on forums such as the school council and eco-committee, and to serve in positions of leadership, such as head of boarding, 'wellbeing ambassadors' and sports captains, also promote pupils' awareness of how they can act on behalf of others and make a positive difference.
52. Leaders promote pupils' understanding of British values, public roles and institutions. For example, the youngest children participate in dedicated 'language days' and celebrate cultural festivals to promote respect for the different members of British society. Trips to cultural institutions such as the University of Oxford instil a sense of pride in British academic achievements and research, inspiring pupils to aim high and contribute to British society.
53. In the early years, staff develop routines that make children feel safe. Through these routines they teach children about the importance of turn-taking, listening to each other and showing kindness towards others. As a result, children learn how to understand their own feelings and those of others, promoting positive friendships and co-operation between peers.
54. The school provides pupils with a broad economic education. In PSHE, younger pupils learn about the importance and use of money, getting a job and having a career. External specialists in finance and wealth management give pupils in Year 8 lessons relating to money, using real-life examples from the world beyond school, to increase their knowledge of financial considerations such as pensions, insurance, budgeting and how to use online banking. Pupils gain experience of setting up their own small businesses, developing skills in budgeting, marketing and project management as they work in small groups to make products which they go on to sell in support of a chosen charity.
55. Leaders support pupils to consider their own future ambitions and careers through a carefully curated programme of talks from external speakers representing areas such as veterinary medicine,

law and banking. Older pupils are given tailored support for academic tests through undertaking regular written examinations and digital assessments. The 'aspire programme' for pupils with higher prior attainment supports them in their preparation for music, art, sport and academic scholarships. Most pupils gain entry to their first-choice senior school. Talks from visiting senior school staff give pupils some early insight into applications to university and degree apprenticeships. Pupils are given time in PSHE lessons to consider the impact of change and strategies to navigate this as they anticipate the transition to their next school.

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

56. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

57. The school's arrangements for safeguarding are effective. Leaders promote a school culture where the importance of safeguarding is clearly understood by staff. Safeguarding policies and procedures reflect the requirements of current statutory guidance.
58. The proprietor monitors safeguarding effectively. This includes through the member of the advisory committee with responsibility for safeguarding, who oversees and supports leaders in their decision-making and visits the school regularly, talking to pupils and staff, and scrutinising policies and other documents to ensure that appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed.
59. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding respond effectively to safeguarding concerns that arise. Safeguarding records are detailed, comprehensive and well maintained. Suitable procedures are in place to manage any concerns about pupils or any adults working with pupils. Leaders are knowledgeable and skilled in the implementation of statutory procedures and local guidance. Leaders work effectively with external agencies and make referrals to them when required to ensure any safeguarding concerns that do arise are dealt with rigorously and in a timely manner.
60. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities receive appropriate training to ensure they have the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake their roles effectively. All staff receive comprehensive safeguarding training, including at induction and through regular and timely updates as required. This supports them to be vigilant and confident in the systems available to report and respond to any safeguarding concerns that may arise.
61. Established systems in the boarding house ensure that pupils feel safe and secure. Boarders are familiar with the independent person and other organisations whom they can contact should they have any concerns. Boarders are given appropriate access to mobile phones at agreed times. No boarders stay with guardians.
62. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when online, through lessons and dedicated whole-school events. Pupils develop their understanding of the potential dangers of using the internet and how to navigate them, such as avoiding sharing personal information and knowing the systems for reporting any concerns.
63. An appropriate internet filtering and monitoring system is in place to prevent pupils and adults accessing inappropriate content. Boarders have access to the internet only at set times. Leaders act swiftly if any potential issues are identified, either during the school day or out of school hours.
64. Leaders are trained in safer recruitment. They ensure that all required checks are completed before adults start working with pupils. Staff personnel files and the SCR are maintained in accordance with current legislation. However, the SCR and staff files do not record information relating to prohibition from teaching checks consistently clearly.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Hatherop Castle School
Department for Education number	916/6012
Address	Hatherop Castle School Hatherop Cirencester Gloucestershire GL7 3NB
Phone number	01285 750 206
Email address	admissions@hatheropcastle.co.uk
Website	www.hatheropcastle.co.uk
Proprietor	Hatherop Castle Limited
Chair	Mr Sam Antrobus
Headteacher	Mr Nigel Reed
Age range	2 to 13
Number of pupils	275
Number of boarding pupils	12
Date of previous inspection	16 to 18 May 2023

Information about the school

66. Hatherop Castle School is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located near Cirencester, Gloucestershire. It comprises: the early years, for children aged two to four years; the pre-prep, for pupils aged four to seven years; and the prep, for pupils aged seven to thirteen years. The school is overseen by the chief executive officer of Wishford Education Group, assisted by an advisory committee.
67. Boarders are accommodated in one boarding house in the main school building. A small number of pupils board full time. Most boarders reside on a weekly or flexible basis.
68. There are 80 children in the early years, comprising 64 children in two Nursery classes and 16 children in one Reception class. The Nursery setting is in a separate building on the school site.
69. The school has identified 20 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Five pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
70. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small number of pupils.
71. The school states its aims are to provide a stimulating, secure and safe environment with a wide-ranging curriculum, in which children can thrive and enjoy the adventure of childhood. The school seeks to help each child to find success, while developing consideration, confidence, tolerance and patience.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

19 to 21 May 2026

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

73. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the proprietor and member of the advisory committee
- 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 and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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For more information, please visit isi.net