

School inspection report

7 to 9 October 2025

Old Vicarage School

11 Church Lane

Darley Abbey

Derby

DE22 1EW

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 proprietors know all members of the school community well because of the presence they have in the school. They satisfy themselves appropriately that those with leadership and management responsibilities have the necessary skills and knowledge required to fulfil their responsibilities effectively and consistently. Thorough quality assurance processes enable leaders to ensure Standards are met and statutory guidance followed.
2. Leaders undertake a comprehensive self-evaluation and development planning cycle. There is a commitment to continuous improvement in line with the school's aims and ethos. Pupils' wellbeing is central to leaders' decision-making.
3. Leaders take a strategic, systematic and inclusive approach to identifying and managing the risk of harm to pupils' wellbeing. The regularly reviewed risk register and thorough risk assessments ensure that staff are vigilant and aware of how to mitigate risks which may arise.
4. The curriculum is broad, meeting the needs of all pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) access the curriculum successfully and make good progress. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is engaging and stimulating for the pupils. Pupils are motivated by their teachers' engaging lessons as well as by the guidance they receive regarding how they can improve as learners. Pupils' interests are taken into account, ensuring the coverage is bespoke for each class.
5. Effective curriculum planning is in place. However, in some subjects there is a relative lack of coherence and sequencing.
6. The comprehensive assessment framework enables teachers to chart pupils' progress as well as identify areas for development.
7. The extra-curricular provision, enhanced by the programme of visits, enables pupils to widen their interests and to develop their independence and resilience.
8. The school's personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum is well planned, providing the pupils with opportunities to develop positive and healthy relationships. This is reinforced by the school's ethos of character development and kindness.
9. Leaders are committed to ensuring that all regulatory requirements are met. Effective use is made of external organisations as part of the school's quality assurance processes.
10. The behaviour and anti-bullying policies are well thought through and implemented. The family atmosphere of the school and the use of a restorative justice approach ensure that incidents are not allowed to escalate.
11. Pupils develop their sense of social responsibility through school-wide opportunities for leadership and community engagement. They show gratitude as they compare their lived experiences to those in less developed parts of the world and express a desire to make a difference. Pupils use their initiative, make suggestions on charitable work and are aware of changes required to improve their locality.

12. Pupils acquire the knowledge and understanding necessary to recognise and challenge discrimination. They demonstrate respect towards others by living out the school's motto of 'character and kindness'. Pupils appreciate that everyone is unique and understand the importance of celebrating individual differences and talents. Through their learning, they are equipped with the tools to promote equality and foster an inclusive environment where pupils feel that they belong.
13. The robust measures that are in place ensure that there is a strong culture of safeguarding in the school. Central to this is clear and frequent communication between staff at all levels. The school places high importance on training to ensure staff have up-to-date knowledge. The school is aware of local thresholds and liaises with the local authority for advice when required. Rigorous recruitment procedures ensure full compliance with statutory guidance.

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 planning of topics across all subjects and year groups follows a logical sequence so that the pupils can connect new concepts to previous learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

14. The proprietors ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities have appropriate skills and knowledge. They are actively involved in the development of senior staff, undertaking professional reviews annually.
15. The proprietors act as critical friends to the school leaders. They are a constant presence in the school, undertaking bursary functions, running extra-curricular clubs and attending residential trips. Termly proprietor meetings take place and the advisory board, with pastoral, educational, compliance and entrepreneurial expertise, acts as a source of advice, challenge and support for the leaders. Although the proprietors are closely involved in the day-to-day life of the school, they hold leaders to account effectively. They meet regularly with senior leaders, both formally and informally, which helps them to understand how effectively and consistently leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities.
16. Leaders have a shared vision for the school that informs self-evaluation and development planning. At its heart are the school's aims and ethos. The school community is seen as an extended family with the wellbeing of each pupil sitting at the heart of leaders' decision-making. There are detailed recording and monitoring of pastoral concerns. As part of the quality assurance process, leaders send out parent satisfaction surveys and draw on the expertise of external consultants. Such practices help the school to identify key areas for development as well as providing reassurance that Standards are met. All decisions are driven by a commitment to promoting pupils' wellbeing, with recent priorities including developing both independent and outdoor learning.
17. Leaders are rigorous in making sure that policies are in place that are current and well understood by members of staff. An effective policy matrix outlines clear review dates and identifies policy holders. The accessibility plan, with a three-year review window, makes clear how the site has been made accessible and how pupils who have SEND are able to access the curriculum. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.
18. Leaders have a thorough understanding of risk management. There is a detailed risk register, updated annually, which identifies risks that could impact the school, how they are to be mitigated and any action required. Staff are trained in writing risk assessments across all aspects of school life so that pupils' physical safety and wellbeing are assured as much as possible. Leaders are swift to respond to any potential risks and have created plans to deal with emergencies that include a lockdown procedure.
19. Leaders have built appropriate links with other agencies, such as sports and local arts organisations. This has led to greater access to sporting facilities and experiences for the pupils.
20. There is a clear complaints policy which outlines a three-stage process with appropriate timescales and record-keeping arrangements. Leaders implement this policy effectively. The headteacher keeps the proprietors apprised of concerns as they emerge and this facilitates early board level engagement if needed.
21. Leaders make all required information available to parents, primarily through the school's website. Parents receive termly school reports on their child's progress and targets.

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 curriculum covers all the required areas of learning and takes account of pupils' needs, aptitudes and ages.
24. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is designed to emphasise and promote the development of core skills in literacy and numeracy. Children in Nursery have a strong knowledge of their initial sounds and confidently match sounds to letters, combining them to read simple words. Pupils in Year 6 confidently write extended text, using well-constructed sentences and sophisticated vocabulary. Pupils are confident readers, typically reading beyond their chronological age. They enjoy the text-based English curriculum and relish the opportunity to participate in the school's 'Reading Points' programme.
25. In mathematics, children in the early years can recall number bonds up to and beyond ten. Pupils in Year 6 tackle equations with a strong understanding of the BODMAS principles and clearly explain their methodology. Pupils are confident in identifying the most appropriate methods in mathematics and select appropriate resources to help. The 'times tables award' is a strong incentive for the pupils to develop their mathematical knowledge.
26. Throughout the school, pupils develop a good knowledge of investigative methods in science through opportunities to engage in practical experiments. In computing, pupils put into practice their strong programming and foundation skills, benefiting from leaders' decision to invest in mobile devices.
27. Curriculum lessons are delivered in the school's well-resourced classrooms and in its natural woodland and garden areas. Such surroundings afford opportunities for the pupils to develop their confidence and perseverance.
28. The curriculum is planned in teams. The early years curriculum covers all seven areas of learning, with an appropriate balance of child- and adult-led activities. It routinely adopts a range of communication and language strategies, with the use of song encouraging children to listen and respond. The continuous provision is well thought through so that children can engage in independent learning that supports all areas of their development.
29. Leaders encourage teachers with strengths in specific subjects to assist with planning. Teachers take into account the particular interests of the pupils in their class and adapt their plans to engage pupils effectively. However, there is no overview that shows coverage and progression from early years through to Year 6. As a result, in some subjects, topics do not follow a logical sequence whereby each new concept introduced connects to previous learning. This can reduce the opportunities for pupils to reinforce and retain skills and knowledge.
30. Teaching has a positive impact on pupils' learning. Staff routinely share learning objectives and targets with pupils so that they are clear about their next steps. Helpful feedback about their work, as well as time to reflect on their learning, helps the pupils to know how to improve. Teachers present learning in interesting ways with well-chosen activities that engage pupils and maintain their interest, encouraging them to think and work hard.

31. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. They have a clear idea of the progression of skills and knowledge in their area and they challenge pupils appropriately. Mutual respect between staff and pupils leads to positive attitudes to learning. Classrooms are calm and productive.
32. The curriculum is adapted to meet the individual needs of pupils who have SEND. Teachers know pupils well and take their needs into account when planning learning. Effective use of teaching assistants, one-on-one support and group teaching also help pupils to make good progress.
33. There is a rigorous assessment framework in place which covers all curriculum areas. Leaders meet regularly with staff to discuss pupils' progress and to ensure they use assessment information effectively to inform their planning and put the right support or challenge in place for pupils.
34. Pupils achieve well from their starting points and make good progress. Typically, all pupils in Reception achieve a good level of development. A number of older pupils gain a range of scholarships at secondary schools, from academic and sport scholarships to awards for drama and music.
35. The school offers a wide range of clubs which enable pupils to develop their skills, interests and knowledge beyond the curriculum. Clubs include activities such as dodgeball, model-making, Shakespeare monologue, chess, quiz and cooking. Each year group participates in termly educational visits which enhance their classroom learning, including trips to museums and castles. Older pupils take part in residential trips where they have the opportunity to experience outward bound activities and develop their independence, teamwork and resilience.

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

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

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

37. Leaders create an inclusive 'extended family' environment. The ethos of kindness and character development is threaded throughout daily routines, and pupils are highly respectful of their peers.
38. Pupils develop a growing spiritual awareness through the assembly and PSHE programme. Use of the outdoors enables the pupils to have a first-hand appreciation of the natural world in the woodland and open areas. The religious studies curriculum and assemblies programme teach pupils about a range of faiths and beliefs, which enables them to develop an understanding and appreciation of the views of others.
39. Because leaders place an emphasis on emotional literacy from early years onwards, pupils have a strong self-awareness. They identify their feelings and adapt their behaviour accordingly.
40. From the outset, staff purposely model positive relationships. As a result, the pupils are happy, friendly and kind. With support and guidance, children overcome difficulties they face in relationships. As they get older, pupils manage their relationships well, with staff encouraging a restorative approach to solve disagreements.
41. Weekly pastoral meetings ensure that staff are aware of pupils who require attention and targeted support. The pupils are well known and valued for their differences. Frequent celebration of individual success by staff and peers and the wide range of activities on offer such as performing in choir, school plays and the orchestra help the pupils to grow in confidence.
42. The PSHE and RSE curriculum is detailed, well planned and delivered weekly. The PSHE curriculum covers activities which develop emotional awareness and resilience. It includes units on how the pupils keep physically and mentally healthy and empowers them to play a positive part in the world. In RSE, pupils learn about topics such as healthy relationships, diverse family structures and consent. The curriculum supports the school's aims in helping pupils to develop character and kindness with a positive 'glass-half-full' attitude.
43. Leaders ensure that the pupils build and refine their physical skills through a well-planned and inclusive physical education curriculum, complemented by a broad extra-curricular programme. Children in the early years demonstrate well-developed fine and gross motor skills through activities such as using parachutes and scooters. As pupils progress through the school, they build on these foundations and acquire the skills needed to participate successfully in a range of sports, including football, netball, cricket, and hockey. Pupils are proud to represent the school in competitive fixtures at local, regional, and national levels. The curriculum is taught skilfully by subject specialists who successfully promote pupils' physical development.
44. There is a comprehensive behaviour policy in place that is implemented consistently throughout the school. Pupils know the school rules and follow them well. Pupils are given coins to recognise good behaviour, which go towards earning valued rewards for their house. This develops the pupils' sense of ownership and personal responsibility.
45. Pupils learn about what bullying is and the forms it can take through the PSHE curriculum and assemblies programme. They can speak with an adult if they are ever worried or concerned. The

school's 'three-knock rule', worry box and school listener are well established and familiar to pupils. There are very few bullying incidents, but when they do arise, leaders take suitable actions so that they do not recur.

46. The school has stringent procedures in place to ensure that the school buildings and facilities are properly maintained and kept safe. All required checks, including those relating to fire safety, are carried out. Pupils take part in termly fire drills to ensure that they know what to do in case of emergency.
47. Staff are suitably deployed so that pupils are carefully supervised at all times. The supervision of drop-off and pick-up times is thorough and effective. Staff are warm and friendly as parents hand over their children, which aids trust and provides an opportunity for feedback. Staffing ratios in the early years ensure that children are within sight and hearing of adults at all times.
48. There are rigorous systems in place to monitor and address absence. The admission and attendance registers are maintained in accordance with statutory requirements. The school informs the local authority appropriately of any leavers or joiners at non-standard transition times.
49. The first aid policy and procedures are thorough, including arrangements for the administration of medicine. Pupils receive prompt and competent treatment if they are ill or injured. All staff in early years receive full paediatric first aid training. When children in the early years are eating, a staff member with paediatric first aid training is present.

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

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

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

51. Leaders actively promote British values throughout the school. Pupils are offered a balanced presentation of opposing views on political issues, and the promotion of partisan political views is precluded. This is aided by the stringent checks in place for visitors. Pupils from the nursery upwards have first-hand experiences of the democratic process by voting for those who wish to stand for positions of responsibility, such as school council.
52. Pupils share their own cultural backgrounds and faiths, which encourages their peers to understand and appreciate differences. The curriculum supports the development of pupils' knowledge of other cultures. For example, in geography, pupils learn about cultural differences between the countries they study, such as the political and societal norms of Mexico.
53. The PSHE curriculum offers pupils the opportunity to learn about the ways in which they can be different from each other, for example through race, religion and disability. Pupils support each other well, creating a happy atmosphere where they feel they belong. Children in the early years recognise that everyone is unique and special in their own way and they begin to understand that we can all have different opinions. Pupils in Year 5 discuss real-world examples of discrimination and its effect on individuals and communities.
54. Pupils develop an economic understanding through the PSHE and mathematics curriculums. By the time pupils reach Year 6, they are aware of how to budget and keep money safe and they learn about financial decision-making. They participate in teams in an entrepreneurial project where they sell unsold items after the summer fair and raise money for the school.
55. Pupils understand the rule of law and have a strong moral compass, reinforced by the school values and class rules. By Year 6, the pupils have an understanding of how laws are created and enforced in Great Britain. Activities such as mock trials, where pupils act as advocates and jury to decide whether or not Goldilocks is guilty of trespassing and vandalism, enable the pupils to have a deeper understanding of the British legal system.
56. From an early age, leaders plan opportunities to develop the pupils' social skills. Turn-taking in structured games starts in the Nursery. Children learn how to compromise during play with increasing confidence. Pupils in Year 3 engage in collaborative problem-solving, appreciating diverse viewpoints and reflecting on how their behaviour impacts group success. Year 6 pupils work as part of a team to organise house events, recognising and celebrating each member's strengths.
57. Leaders ensure that all pupils in Year 6 have a position of responsibility, which enables the development of leadership and teamwork skills. Younger children take on jobs such as helping to hand out snacks or looking after the hens. Pupils in Year 6 lead clubs for younger pupils, and school council members represent their class, taking peer views forward to fortnightly meetings. They have forged change, for example, by improving the PE kit. Older pupils identify the difference they make to the life of younger children by helping them to grow in confidence as they listen to them reading.
58. Pupils are prepared for key transition points through activities such as talks from professionals across a range of careers, including business, the arts and sport.

59. The school values highlight the importance of service, with pupils appreciating their own talents and advantages and giving back to the community. Pupils actively engage in the local community through activities such as singing in nursing homes, community litter-picking and organising a road survey to ensure respectful parking outside the school. They also initiate their own charitable work. Supporting a school in Tanzania helps the pupils to have a better understanding of the inequalities in the world and the difference they can make.
60. Pupils acquire a broad general knowledge of and respect for public institutions and services in England. Visitors to the school include: the local member of parliament, who also attends school events, the police, the fire brigade and representatives from charities.

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

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

Safeguarding

62. Effective arrangements are in place to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils as outlined in the school's safeguarding policy. All procedures are in line with current statutory guidance.
63. Leaders, including those with safeguarding responsibilities, ensure that there is a robust safeguarding culture within the school. All staff are aware of the need to be vigilant. Leaders brief them on a weekly basis about welfare issues, thereby ensuring that pupils receive individual monitoring and support when needed. Pupils are confident about how to access sources of support, such as the school listener or using the 'three-knock rule' or worry box.
64. Staff are regularly trained to refresh their knowledge and skills, as well as to inform them about changes to statutory guidance. Leaders make them aware of emerging safeguarding risks in the locality. Lists of attendance at training are maintained so that there are no gaps in adults' training.
65. Staff know to look for signs of abuse and are clear about the lines of reporting of safeguarding issues, including low-level concerns about and allegations against staff. They understand the school's whistleblowing policy.
66. Staff with safeguarding responsibilities act swiftly when issues arise, identifying relevant actions so that immediate support and guidance can be given.
67. Leaders refer to local thresholds and work closely with the local authority where there are safeguarding concerns to report. They seek advice from other agencies such as the police or social services and make referrals when necessary.
68. Leaders implement safer recruitment procedures effectively. They carry out all of the required statutory checks for adults working with pupils and maintain a suitable and accurate central record of staff appointments.
69. Pupils learn how to keep safe generally, including online, through up-to-date content in their PSHE and computing lessons.
70. The school stringently applies its processes relating to filtering and monitoring internet content. Relevant staff meet weekly to discuss any issues that have arisen, such as pupils attempting to access inappropriate material or information. The systems are regularly checked for their effectiveness, including through an annual external audit.
71. The school provides information for parents on pertinent safeguarding matters, such as online safety and the use of social media, to encourage a consistent approach between home and school.
72. The proprietors monitor safeguarding arrangements effectively. They undertake detailed scrutiny of records and documentation. An annual safeguarding review is completed, and the proprietors engage with leaders to evaluate the effectiveness of the school's actions and safeguarding procedures.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

73. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Old Vicarage School
Department for Education number	831/6002
Address	Old Vicarage School 11 Church Lane Darley Abbey Derby Derbyshire DE22 1EW
Phone number	01332 557130
Email address	office@oldvicarageschool.co.uk
Website	www.oldvicarageschool.co.uk
Proprietors	Mr Matthew Adshead and Mrs Jenny Adshead
Headteacher	Mrs Kerry Wise
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils	111
Date of previous inspection	7 to 10 November 2022

Information about the school

74. Old Vicarage School is a co-educational day school located in Darley Abbey, a suburb of Derby in the county of Derbyshire. The school was founded in 1933 and acquired by the current proprietors in 2007. An advisory board of educational and industry professionals provides independent guidance to the school. The school comprises a Nursery, pre-prep and prep school.
75. There are 21 children in the early years comprising, one Nursery and one Reception class. Children in the early years are accommodated in two classrooms, with outdoor provision and a woodland area.
76. The school has identified 13 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
77. No pupils have been identified as speaking English as an additional language.
78. The school states that its aims are to ensure that every child feels loved and supported in all their endeavours. The school strives to ensure that pupils are well educated and acquire a love of learning. It aims to enable pupils to be friendly and self-confident with a good sense of humour, generous in spirit, proud of their talents and able to celebrate the talents of others, with a desire to contribute to society and the common good.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

7 to 9 October 2025

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

80. 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 a member of the advisory board
- 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.

81. 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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