

School inspection report

18 to 20 March 2025

Hollygirt School

Elm Avenue Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG3 4GF

> 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

- Governors know the school well and work closely with school leaders in their decision-making to ensure that pupils' wellbeing is prioritised. Staff forge positive relationships with pupils in a nurturing environment in order to develop pupils' confidence and enable pupils to achieve academically and personally.
- 2. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school. They provide support and challenge as appropriate, as the school develops its strategic planning in response to its evolving circumstances and for the benefit of the pupils. Policies and procedures are subject to regular review and are revised when required to meet the needs of the school. Leaders typically implement any changes to policy and procedure in a timely manner. However, leaders did not implement the recently updated statutory guidance relating to attendance as soon as it took effect and there was a delay in uploading the revised policy to the school's website.
- 3. Leaders have developed a broad and structured curriculum that supports pupils' development and responds to pupils' interests and needs. Teaching builds pupils' confidence and stimulates their motivation and engagement.
- 4. Teachers are responsive to the needs of the pupils in the classroom so that pupils consolidate and develop their learning. Leaders' approaches to supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) ensure that these pupils' needs are identified and supported appropriately. Teachers have access to relevant tracking and assessment information. However, the school's use of assessment data to inform teaching so that it meets pupils' needs is not always as effective as possible. As a result, not all pupils make as much progress as they could.
- 5. Leaders in the early years provide a suitable and positive learning environment which supports children's development well, including in areas of communication and language development. Staff interaction with children develops their social skills and ability to learn and play together.
- 6. Leaders encourage a culture of inclusivity and understanding. Relationships are positive and staff model how to behave so that pupils themselves behave well. The school's behaviour policy and expectations are well understood, and pupils largely take responsibility for their own behaviour.
- 7. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme helps pupils to appreciate the value of their personal identities and those of others, and develops their skills in terms of interacting with others and supporting their community. Pupils have opportunities to be involved with their house, their school and their local community, as well as to reflect on their roles as responsible citizens. Pupils are well prepared to make a positive contribution to society.
- 8. A wide range of extra-curricular activities allows pupils to demonstrate their autonomy and to engage positively with new opportunities and develop their skills and confidence as they do so.
- 9. The school buildings and site are well maintained. Health and safety requirements are met. Risk assessment procedures are effective in promoting the welfare and safety of pupils when at school and on trips. Leaders understand contextual risks and mitigate them effectively, including those related to the school's setting and also online.

10. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are suitably trained for their roles. Staff receive regular safeguarding training which is adapted to take into account any local and contextual safeguarding issues. Staff know how to recognise safeguarding concerns and respond appropriately.

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:

- strengthen the use of assessment data to inform teaching so that it meets pupils' needs consistently and effectively
- ensure that any changes to statutory guidance are implemented in a timely manner.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

- 12. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school. They review leaders' reports and policies and make regular visits so that they understand the school and check that leaders are fulfilling their responsibilities effectively. Recruitment to the governing body has been focused on making certain that governors have the capacity to ensure that leaders use their good knowledge and skills to meet the Standards. Governors have been figures of constancy during a period of flux in the leadership of the school and have ensured that support and accountability are in place as appropriate. School leaders are assisted by governors in prioritising the wellbeing of the pupils. This is achieved by fostering a culture in which staff and pupils know each other well, so that positive and supportive relationships with pupils are achieved.
- 13. Leaders have undertaken a thorough self-evaluation of the school at all levels. Governors work closely and collaboratively with leaders to steer the school's strategic direction, planning and implementation as the school moves forward in the next phase of its development. Senior leaders alongside middle leaders continually refresh the school's policies in order to reflect the current needs of the school, with governors actively involved in policy oversight and review. Policy updates are typically actioned in a timely manner.
- 14. Governors oversee leaders' arrangements for safeguarding and pastoral support for pupils, which are effective. Leaders have a clear awareness of their pupils and engage in ongoing dialogue about them with other members of staff in order to ensure that pupils' wellbeing and developing needs are met.
- 15. Leaders maintain constant and productive links with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners such as children's services and the police. These links inform the development of the school's approaches, such as those relating to safeguarding, welfare, attendance and contextual risk management.
- 16. The school's site crosses a public area and there are suitable security measures in place to keep pupils safe. Leaders ensure that staff receive appropriate training in assessing risk. This enables staff to prepare suitable risk assessments that detail effective control measures. Leaders then review risk assessments so as to mitigate risk further. Governors deploy risk management strategies in order to minimise any potential risks to both the school and the pupils.
- 17. Leaders are alert to potential contextual risks within the school and respond sensitively to pupils' specific needs. Recent whole-school training has included lockdown practices. Staff chaperone younger pupils from one area of the school to another when transiting spaces where there is a public right of way, and pupils feel reassured by the vigilance and extra measures taken by staff.
- 18. The school complies with the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders implement the suitable accessibility plan and review and update it regularly. Suitable procedures to meet the needs of pupils who have SEND are implemented effectively. Leaders ensure that there is no discrimination against any groups of pupils in the school.
- 19. Leaders provide parents with regular formal written reports about their children's progress, as well as hosting parents' meetings and facilitating individual discussions with staff, so that relevant information about children's progress and attainment can be shared. Leaders provide other required information to parents in newsletters and on the school's website and parent portal. Leaders

provide the local authority with the relevant information pertaining to the use of funds connected with any pupils who have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.

20. Leaders have a suitable complaints policy in place. Leaders respond to any complaints promptly, following up on them in accordance with the procedures that the school has set out and maintaining a suitable record of any concerns raised and the school's responses to these.

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

- 22. The broad and well-structured curriculum is designed to provide pupils with relevant knowledge and skills across a wide range of subjects. Detailed schemes of work are well-matched to pupils' ages and abilities, allowing pupils to build on prior learning to further their knowledge and understanding. Schemes of work are designed so that pupils can revisit and strengthen their learning, such as by revisiting topics in the sciences to apply knowledge in greater depth over time, or by mixing and applying different concepts or skills in mathematics.
- 23. The curriculum fosters oracy and promotes literacy, while also supporting pupils' creativity. Teachers respond to pupils' interests in planning courses of study. In the prep school, where the 'topic' course connects geography, history, art and design and technology, pupils choose themes, such as 'the pyramids', which teachers then adapt in order to encourage pupils' input and involvement. Pupils are encouraged to explore the perspectives of others. Teachers provide pupils with work that demands their effort and challenges them effectively to advance their learning. Educational trips locally and overseas also broaden pupils' experience and enrich their understanding of the curriculum and the wider world.
- 24. Teachers' subject knowledge, coupled with their understanding of the pupils, enables them to teach suitably paced lessons so that pupils consolidate their learning before moving on to new topics. Teachers are supported by teaching assistants where appropriate, and pupils are comfortable to access support as needed. Careful questioning by teachers serves to correct pupils' misconceptions. Teachers encourage pupils to raise questions so that they then secure their understanding of important concepts. Effective classroom management and communication of aims and learning points helps pupils to feel secure in the classroom and supports their positive behaviour. The quality of relationships between staff and pupils means that pupils are willing to share their thoughts and contribute well to discussions. Teachers provide writing structures that are tailored to pupils' individual needs so that pupils can develop their writing skills and confidence across different subjects. As a result of all these measures, pupils typically make good progress. They achieve well in public examinations, and many go on to study academic and vocational courses.
- 25. Teachers provide pupils with a wide range of feedback, both oral and written, according to the needs of the pupils and the nature of the task. Pupils reflect on this feedback and respond to the observations that are made. Leaders and teachers have access to both internal and external tracking and assessment information about pupils' academic performance, but they do not always use this information to inform their teaching or pupils' approaches to learning. As a result, teaching is not always in line with pupils' needs. Where this is the case, some pupils do not make as much progress as they could.
- 26. Leaders and staff work to support pupils who have SEND so that these pupils can learn effectively. Leaders provide whole-staff training and advice relevant to specific pupils, which is supplemented by comprehensive briefing notes so that staff are best placed to support their pupils. Staff adapt their teaching so that pupils who have SEND can complete their tasks successfully and make good progress.
- 27. Leaders work with parents in order to identify ways to support pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Teachers make effective use of resources such as word banks and electronic word readers, modify tasks and provide additional support when required. As a result,

pupils who speak EAL develop their confidence in spoken and written English and their language skills improve rapidly.

- 28. Leaders take pupils' and parents' views into account when selecting a broad range of extra-curricular activities for pupils. They schedule these carefully so that pupils can pursue a variety of interests in a range of areas. Supplementary courses, such as 'fun science', prepare pupils for the further and wider study of curriculum subjects and practical skills. Pupils participate positively and develop a sense of achievement and confidence in sports clubs such as badminton and football, creative activities such as sewing and musical theatre, and sessions designed to promote their emotional wellbeing, such as the 'mindfulness' club and gardening.
- 29. Children in the early years make a positive start to their learning. Communication and language development are prioritised by staff modelling language skills, sharing stories and initiating free-flow activities to which children respond positively. Staff utilise topics well to motivate children to engage with activities that include narratives which encourage an understanding of the world around them while developing their talk and motor skills. Staff make effective use of children's work to show children the progress they are making, and this helps build their independence and confidence. Children develop their physical skills and explore their environment, investigating the school's outdoor spaces. This enables children to meet their developmental goals and achieve well.

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

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

- 31. Leaders and staff utilise tutor time, assemblies and house activities to encourage pupils to reflect on the value and identities of themselves and others. Themed weeks and activities, such as Children's Mental Health week, form a regular focus for the whole school and include presentations and activities that encourage pupils to reflect upon themselves and to recognise their emotions.
- 32. Leaders promote pupils' reflection on faith, spirituality and morality. Pupils learn about different religions and explore different perspectives on topics such as the nature of belief, life after death and suffering. Such learning develops pupils' engagement with considerations about non-material aspects of life.
- 33. The school's 'sparkle week' celebrates diversity and the promotion of the concept of 'this is me', encouraging pupils to think about how everyone is different and everyone has different needs. The school promotes the importance of respecting people's protected characteristics, such as race, religion and sex and situations such as neurodiversity. Pupil groups act to develop an awareness of the wider community, with particular groups gaining the confidence to represent themselves in the community. Pupils are respectful of one another. Schemes of work ensure that pupils learn about the nature of prejudice and discrimination in both historical and contemporary contexts. Pupils look at stereotyping and the harm it can cause, as well as how to challenge stereotypes in their own community.
- 34. Leaders have established various spaces in the school where pupils can seek emotional support, advice or counselling from staff. Leaders meet regularly to discuss pupils' pastoral needs and ensure that these are supported. Tutor time and house time allow staff an opportunity to check in with pupils both formally and informally. As a result, pupils feel well cared for at school.
- 35. The well-structured PSHE programme is delivered through form time and workshops, as well as in classroom lessons which are increasingly taught by specialist teachers. The programme is structured around the themes of health and wellbeing, relationships and living in the wider world. Topics include physical and mental health, online safety and the workplace, as well as oral health and hygiene in the early years. Pupils complete self-assessments at the beginning of each lesson and leaders track pupils' end-of-topic assessments so that the profile and importance of each subject is clear to pupils. Leaders seek pupils' and teachers' feedback on a regular basis so as to inform future delivery, such as by increasing time for certain topics that are thought to be most pertinent, and providing additional training for staff in areas of need.
- 36. Pupils across the school experience a suitable and age-appropriate programme of relationships and sex education (RSE). Parents are appropriately consulted in relation to the RSE curriculum and are aware of their right to withdraw their children. Pupils explore topics on different types of relationships and different types of families. Older pupils learn about gender and puberty. They also discuss the nature of healthy and unhealthy relationships, as well as the importance of consent.
- 37. Leaders have revised the school's behaviour management policy in consultation with pupils in order to create a traffic light system in the prep school and stages of response in the senior school. Pupils have a clear understanding of what is appropriate behaviour. Policies and procedures around behaviour are implemented consistently and fairly. Leaders and staff develop pupils' skills to resolve

behavioural matters positively amongst themselves. In the early years, positive behaviour choices are celebrated and staff model how to negotiate disputes with peers, so that children can build and develop their friendships. Staff regularly use praise to promote good behaviour. Pupils are kind, polite and respectful towards one another and to adults. The school has a clear anti-bullying strategy and pupils learn about different types of bullying and how to address these through the PSHE programme, as well as through a regular anti-bullying week and sessions in form time and assemblies. The few incidents of unkindness and bullying are responded to appropriately.

- 38. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance. However, leaders did not implement all the requirements of this statutory guidance relating to attendance as soon as it was updated. At the start of the inspection, the revised attendance policy and registration procedures were not published on the school's website. Leaders rectified this during the course of the inspection. Leaders now monitor attendance levels carefully and actively follow up on any non-attendance. They liaise effectively with the local authority and inform them about any pupils who leave or join the school at non-standard times of the year.
- 39. Leaders provide a range of physical education (PE) opportunities for pupils across the school. Children in the early years and pupils in the pre-prep develop specific skills as a result of specialist PE teaching. Pupils go off-site regularly each week in order to access specialist sports coaching and facilities. Leaders have established local fixtures, including netball and football, where pupils have enjoyed success. Pupils learn about the benefits of exercise in relation to physical health and emotional wellbeing.
- 40. Pupils have access to well-maintained outdoor spaces. Staff are present to supervise pupils during breaktimes, as well as at the beginning and end of each day, and also when in transit between parts of the site and to activities in the locale. Appropriate levels of supervision are also in place for children in the early years, including before and after school. As a result, pupils feel safe and are well cared for at school.
- 41. The school buildings and site are maintained well through regular checks and servicing of equipment. Staff receive appropriate fire safety training. A suitable fire risk assessment is in place and staff conduct regular fire evacuation drills. Management committees meet regularly to review health and safety and fire safety arrangements.
- 42. There is suitable accommodation for pupils' medical needs and first aid. Staff are appropriately trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid.

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

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

- 44. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to develop a sense of responsibility towards the community both in school and beyond. Pupils engage in house challenges in response to initiatives such as Developmental Disability Month, which promote mutual respect. Houses select a charity for which they raise funds and pupils make connections with the local community. Leaders promote pupils' engagement in whole-school initiatives such as the 5000-step challenge for Comic Relief. Pupils demonstrate their own initiative when organising independent charitable activities, such as spending time helping the elderly in local care homes.
- 45. Leaders co-ordinate opportunities for pupils to take on areas of responsibility. Pupils engage with a democratic process through which senior prefect positions and membership of the school council are awarded following hustings and elections. Leaders meet every half term with both senior pupils and form representatives who have gathered agenda items from their classes in order to share ideas for discussion and action. A number of initiatives have been put forward by pupils that have been adopted, including additional external seating and changes to lunch menus, enabling pupils to see the impact of their contributions on decision-making. Pupils learn about political structures in different countries and older pupils compare their approaches to government with that of the UK Parliament. Any political issues or themes are discussed in an impartial manner.
- 46. Pupil leadership appointments provide structured opportunities for leadership, teamwork and personal development, so that pupils contribute meaningfully to school life. Pupils are able to express an interest in specific roles that are of importance to them, such as working with younger pupils in the early years or prep school or supporting extra-curricular activities, and they develop a sense of responsibility and commitment to others. Children in the early years are included in prep school events, such as productions and house charity events, and interact with older year groups at playtimes and through extra-curricular activities so as to support their social development.
- 47. The school's behaviour and discipline policy promotes the distinguishing of right from wrong, with house points awarded for pupils who demonstrate the schools' positive values. Pupils consider why laws are important and discuss the impact on individuals, the wider community and society when rules are broken. Teachers organise visits to the local magistrates' court and National Justice Museum to develop pupils' understanding of the rule of law and the concept of justice.
- 48. The PSHE curriculum promotes a practical understanding and appreciation of money, as well as economic responsibility. In the early years, children learn about counting money and exchanging cash for goods. Older pupils learn about financial risk, the dangers of gambling and aspects of how the global economy operates. They also receive advice about student loans and learn about how personal choices can impact financial budgeting. English lessons include discussion of the comparative economic status of characters in English literature and encourage pupils to reflect on social perceptions of wealth.
- 49. The school prepares pupils effectively for the next stage in their education. Prior to arrival in a new section of the school, teachers host pupils in their new teaching spaces while also continuing to teach lessons in pupils' usual learning spaces to ensure that they experience a smooth transition between their old class and their new one. The careers guidance programme is well structured and up to date. Visiting speakers, including from healthcare, legal and financial professions, talk to pupils

throughout the school about their professional experiences and help pupils to understand how to take their next steps in relation to future careers. Subject-related presentations for pupils in the younger years allow them to begin to understand the different careers that pupils can pursue if certain subject disciplines are followed and how they might achieve this. Older pupils receive individual advice about university applications and career pathways.

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

Safeguarding

- 51. Safeguarding is effective. The safeguarding policy and procedures reflect current statutory guidance and are reviewed annually by the board of governors. The policy gives clear guidance as to how leaders and staff can identify safeguarding concerns and how they should respond when concerns arise.
- 52. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities are deployed effectively across the school and are suitably trained for their roles. All staff, volunteers and governors receive suitable induction and ongoing training. Staff understand how to report and respond to any safeguarding concerns, including any allegations against or low-level concerns about other staff.
- 53. The safeguarding team responds appropriately to any safeguarding concerns and provides suitable support for any pupils affected by these. Leaders understand the thresholds for referral and refer concerns to relevant safeguarding partners when required. The safeguarding team maintains appropriate records of any safeguarding concerns that have arisen and the decisions made in relation to these.
- 54. Leaders encourage pupils to raise any concerns that they might have and ensure that pupils know to whom they can talk. Pupils are confident to share any concerns that they might have.
- 55. Pupils are taught how to stay safe online through the PSHE programme, as well as during computing lessons and assemblies. The school's online filtering and monitoring systems are effective. Leaders respond to any alerts effectively.
- 56. Leaders of the school's recruitment arrangements are appropriately trained and ensure that the school's safer recruitment practice is rigorous. All the necessary pre-appointment checks are undertaken so as to ensure that new staff or governors are suitable to work with children. Governors regularly review the school's single central record (SCR) of appointments, which is well-maintained and accurate.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

School details

School	Hollygirt School
Department for Education number	892/6001
Registered charity number	1174296
Address	Hollygirt School Elm Avenue Nottingham Nottinghamshire NG3 4GF
Phone number	0115 958 0596
Email address	info@hollygirt.co.uk
Website	www.hollygirt.co.uk
Proprietor	Hollygirt School
Chair	Mrs Alison Bingham
Headteacher	Ms Rebecca Purdy
Age range	3 to 18
Number of pupils	215
Date of previous inspection	5 July 2023

Information about the school

- 58. Hollygirt School is an independent co-educational day school which originally opened in 1877 as a school for female pupils, becoming fully co-educational in 2014. It occupies four adjacent buildings in a pedestrianised area close to the centre of Nottingham. The school is owned and overseen by the trustees of Hollygirt School. The current headteacher took up her position in January 2025, and the current chair of governors took up her responsibilities in November 2023. The school consists of a kindergarten, for children aged 3 to 4 years, a prep school, for pupils aged 4 to 11 years, and a senior school for pupils aged 11 to 18 years.
- 59. There are nine children in the early years comprising one Nursery and one Reception classes.
- 60. The school has identified 63 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 12 pupils have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
- 61. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for eight pupils.
- 62. The school states its aims are to help pupils achieve and develop academically and socially, support the development of the whole child, embrace diversity and provide a nurturing environment that allows pupils to thrive and achieve their potential within small classes. It seeks to achieve this through fostering a warm, vibrant, family-orientated community in the heart of Nottingham that seeks to develop socially responsible individuals ready for successful lives. The school intends to actively promote fundamental British values through developing an understanding of respect for the self, the school and the wider community and to ensure that values of kindness, honesty, resilience and hard work are embedded in the pupil experience.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

18 to 20 March 2025

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

64. 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.
- 65. 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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