

# School inspection report

Date 25 to 27 January 2024

## **The River School**

Oakfield House

Droitwich Road

Worcester

WR3 7ST

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 school is successful in promoting its aims of creating a supportive Christian community of love and respect in which pupils are able to develop as individuals. Teachers know their pupils' needs well and, as a result, pupils feel happy and safe in school and develop the confidence to learn effectively. Pupils of all ages, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), make good progress in relation to their starting points.
2. Governors and leaders provide a curriculum that meets the needs of pupils, and add more options for senior pupils in response to pupils' feedback. The school provides an extra-curricular programme but the range of activities is narrow and, as a result, pupils do not have the opportunity to fully discover or develop their talents and interests.
3. In the early years, leaders ensure that children learn effectively including through creative play that is linked to the development of their communication, numeracy and literacy skills. Almost all children in the early years achieve well to reach a good level of development. Adults encourage children to talk about their activities as they work and play. In this way, they develop their vocabulary and communication skills effectively.
4. Leaders have appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their roles. Governors and leaders ensure that necessary policies are in place and are generally implemented effectively. Governors and leaders respond swiftly to rectify any health and safety concerns that are identified. However, the routine monitoring of risks around the school site has not been sufficiently systematic or rigorous, and a small number of concerns needed remedying during the course of the inspection.
5. Pupils of all ages behave extremely well in and out of lessons. They enjoy positive relationships with one another and pupils of different ages mix easily, playing and learning together. Almost all pupils feel confident there is an adult they can speak to, if they have any concerns. These positive relationships help to create a close-knit, caring and supportive school community.
6. Governors and leaders provide an extensive programme of personal, social and health education (PSHE) which covers all the required areas and is consistent with the school's aim of encouraging respect for all people. The programme is taught in a balanced way, allowing pupils to develop an open mind when considering sensitive personal and ethical issues.
7. There is a positive culture of safeguarding in the school. Governors and leaders understand and discharge their responsibilities effectively. Staff receive appropriate and regular training. Policies and procedures are up-to-date and follow all 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 health and safety protocols, including the assessment of risks on the school site, are rigorous and effectively monitored
- extend the extra-curricular programme to increase opportunities for pupils to explore and develop their talents and interests beyond the classroom.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors understand their role and fulfil their duties well. Governors and leaders are careful to check that all policies follow statutory guidance and are reviewed regularly. Governors are diligent in monitoring the school's provision and are kept informed of the pupils' activities and achievements through regular reports from the headteacher.
9. Governors know the school well and work closely with leaders to develop a clear vision for the school based on Christian principles and a realistic assessment of the school's strengths and weaknesses. The wellbeing of pupils underpins decision making and planning and, as a result, the school has an ambitious development plan which includes redevelopment of parts of the school site to create better facilities for physical education.
10. Governors offer both support and challenge to leaders to ensure that the oversight and implementation of safeguarding arrangements are effective. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding checks the school's policy and procedures regularly to make sure that leaders consistently promote the wellbeing of pupils.
11. Governors understand the importance of managing any risks to the wellbeing of pupils and respond promptly when risks are identified. For example, a recent review of fire safety by the local fire authority identified a number of urgent actions. The school has responded promptly to install a new alarm system and new fire doors. However, the routine management of health and safety procedures has not been sufficiently rigorous. A number of minor health and safety risks identified around the school site during the inspection were addressed before the end of the inspection.
12. In the early years, leaders know the children's needs well, and plan carefully to ensure that children are well cared for and make good progress. Leaders provide a diverse curriculum to stimulate the interests of children and make good use of the woodland environment to help children to develop an interest in the natural world. As a result, children are happy, confident and successful in their learning. Reports to parents give detailed information about their children's progress against the early learning goals as well as offering guidance about the next steps.
13. Leaders throughout the school work closely with parents and are readily accessible to deal with any concerns that might arise. A suitable complaints policy is in place and any complaints are logged carefully so that trends or patterns can be identified. All the required information for parents is available on the school's website or on request from the school office.
14. Governors and leaders understand their responsibilities under the Equality Act. They ensure that no pupil suffers any disadvantage. They identify and provide the necessary support for pupils with specific learning or behavioural needs. They support pupils who have emotional and pastoral needs so that they feel confident to attend school and make good progress. A suitable accessibility plan is in place which is regularly reviewed.

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

**All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

15. Leaders have devised and implemented a curriculum which meets the needs of pupils, although the range of subjects in the senior school is narrow. However, leaders respond positively to pupils' requests for new or additional subjects at GCSE level. For example, computer science was recently introduced in response to feedback from pupils.
16. In the primary school, the development of mathematical and literacy skills is prioritised and, as a result, pupils are well skilled in these areas. Leaders astutely adjust the experiences to suit the needs and interests of children in the early years and hence ensure that children experience the key areas of learning. Throughout the school, pupils have opportunities to develop their technological education in ICT lessons.
17. Leaders have designed an extra-curricular programme which offers opportunities for pupils to experience some physical and creative activities, but the range of activities and clubs is narrow. Pupils, particularly in the senior school, would like more opportunities to develop their talents and interests beyond the classroom.
18. At GCSE pupils make good progress and attain results above or in line with expectations. Similarly in the primary school, pupils make good progress, measured against their starting points. In the early years, almost all children reach the expected levels for their age. Leaders have implemented an age-appropriate and rigorous assessment framework throughout the school that enables teachers to track progress and plan effectively. Pupils receive clear feedback from teachers that enables pupils to know what they need to do to improve their work. As a result, pupils know their strengths and weaknesses.
19. In the early years, careful planning, based on a detailed knowledge of each child, supports children's learning. Children are encouraged to speak confidently and to extend their vocabulary, and most children are able to discuss and describe their activities to adults using a rich array of language. The teaching of phonics, mathematics and literacy is systematic and often linked to practical play, so that the children enjoy their learning. Teaching assistants are used effectively to offer support and help children build confidence in their learning.
20. Pupils who have SEND also make good progress. Teachers know the pupils' needs well and design activities in lessons which allow this group to access the curriculum. Similarly, individual support offered by specialist teachers and by teaching assistants, helps pupils who have SEND to feel confident about their work.
21. Teaching throughout the school is well planned and teachers set ambitious but realistic expectations for pupils because they know the needs of pupils well. Teachers are readily available after school or in breaktimes to support pupils who require extra help or need to catch up with their work. Teachers often ask pupils to make presentations in lessons and encourage them to ask questions and discuss ideas, to embed their learning. This promotes pupils' confidence and helps them to develop their communication skills. Pupils of all ages are articulate and discuss their ideas and achievements fluently.
22. Teachers' planning and the sound professional understanding of pupils' needs means that pupils enjoy their learning, are quick to settle, and behave well in lessons. They enjoy opportunities to share ideas, to question, and to work together to develop their understanding. For example, in art

pupils' work is refined for their age. Pupils collaborate supportively as they experiment with different media and techniques.

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

**23. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

24. Leaders ensure that pupils receive physical education through the curriculum but do not provide a broad range of physical and sporting activities at other times. Pupils say they understand the importance of adopting a healthy lifestyle as a result of topics discussed in PSHE lessons but would value opportunities to play a wider range of sports and so further develop their skills.
25. Leaders provide an extensive programme of PSHE which includes relationships and sex education (RSE) The programme helps pupils to understand their own physical development and gives them confidence to make healthy choices. The PSHE programme links closely to the school's aims of treating all people with respect. Pupils have a mature understanding of the differences between people. Pupils have the skills to discuss sensitively how showing respect and acceptance for others accords with the Christian aims of the school.
26. Leaders conduct assemblies that promote and sharpen pupils' spiritual awareness. Many pupils readily discuss their beliefs, whilst others, who have a different or no faith, recognise that the school's religious values help to create a warm and caring school community. Pupils in the early years and in the primary school enjoy the woodland experiences afforded by the school site and develop a love of the natural world through the outdoor lessons.
27. Pupils behave extremely well and show deep-seated kindness to one another. For example, when discussing their work, pupils are complimentary about each other's achievements and are quick to highlight and praise the talents of others. Leaders keep records of the rare incidents of serious misbehaviour or bullying. They deal with such incidents sensitively and appropriately.
28. Pupils mix across age groups. Older primary pupils support younger pupils by reading with them. Senior pupils often help in the early years by supporting children in their activities. At break times, pupils of different ages play well together, or find areas to relax and chat. Pupils relate easily to staff, who know them well. Pupils can find an adult to discuss any concerns they might have. There is a strong sense of community in the school and pupils are proud to be a member of such a close-knit school.
29. Staff rigorously supervise pupils on the site. A recent survey by the local fire authority highlighted some concerns about the management of fire risk. Governors have acted promptly to install a new fire alarm system and new fire doors, and to improve the assessment of fire risk in the school. However, whilst responding promptly to any highlighted concerns, the school does not effectively monitor and manage routine risks to health and safety on the school site. Measures were taken during the inspection to rectify these issues. The maintenance of school premises is adequate but governors and leaders are aware that a number of areas need to be refurbished and redecorated to enhance the learning environment for pupils.
30. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid, including paediatric first aid and provide pupils with the medical help they need.
31. Attendance and admission registers are maintained accurately and staff notify the local authority if any pupil joins or leaves the school at a non-standard time.



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

**32. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

33. Pupils have a clear understanding of the concepts of respect, tolerance and democracy. Through the PSHE curriculum and through wall displays that illustrate the close links between these and the school's values, pupils develop a strong awareness of right and wrong. Pupils also have a sound financial awareness gained through PSHE lessons, where they discuss financial management, bank accounts, mortgages and pensions.
34. Pupils develop a deep understanding of the Christian faith but also learn about other world religions. Pupils from a variety of backgrounds get along well in school and are interested to share their own faith, whilst learning about the beliefs of others.
35. Pupils learn to respect and value others. They are confident to be themselves, to discuss and accept difference, knowing that leaders and fellow pupils adopt a non-judgemental attitude within the ethos of the school.
36. There is a robust vetting system for checking the credentials of visiting speakers so that pupils are prevented from any potential risks of harm, such as religious or political radicalisation. Pupils receive a balanced view on topical issues. For example, recent talks on abortion gave opposing views. Pupils demonstrate an open mind and are confident to express their own views on topical and ethical issues.
37. Pupils can assume positions of leadership and service, for example as house captains or representatives to the school convention, where practical issues of school life are discussed. Pupils who are elected to such roles enjoy the opportunities to develop their leadership skills and develop the confidence to speak in front of others. Pupils feel their views are considered carefully and respectfully by school leaders but accept that not all their wishes can be granted.
38. Pupils in the primary school raise money for several charitable causes. Their fundraising increases their awareness of the needs of others. In the senior school, pupils take opportunities to serve the local community by volunteering for environmental work such as litter picking and path clearance. Senior pupils acknowledge the importance of serving others beyond the school community and describe how their volunteering has helped them to become more socially aware.
39. At each stage in the school, leaders help pupils to prepare for the next phase in their education. Transition arrangements between the early years and the primary school are carefully managed so that children feel confident to move between classes. Similarly, effective arrangements are in place for children to move easily from the primary to the senior school. Pupils in the senior school value the guidance offered by staff when making subject choices and when considering their next steps beyond school.

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

**40. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

41. The culture of safeguarding is embedded in the school. The policy, published on the school's website, follows statutory guidance, and is clear and comprehensive in providing helpful information to help staff recognise and manage any safeguarding concerns. The arrangements to safeguard pupils are effective because staff are well trained and know the pupils well. Staff are alert to any possible risks to pupils' welfare or changes in their behaviour.
42. Staff are confident to recognise and report any safeguarding concerns to the safeguarding leaders in the school. Governors undertake annual safeguarding training and understand their responsibility to ensure that the safeguarding arrangements are effective. The governor with responsibility for safeguarding regularly checks the implementation of safeguarding procedures.
43. Leaders know how to refer concerns to the relevant external agencies and any such referrals are made promptly. Safeguarding records are detailed and kept securely. Leaders understand the contextual risks for pupils in the school, such as risks of political radicalisation, and are alert to identify any pupils at risk.
44. There is a designated safeguarding lead for the early years. All the specific safeguarding requirements related to the early years are met. The early years setting has a clear policy on the use of mobile phones or smart devices.
45. Pupils know how to stay safe online through their ICT and PSHE lessons. Pupils are clear where to go if they have worries or concerns. They often make use of the quiet room where staff are available to talk through their issues. Pupils feel safe in school and know that there is always an adult to talk to.
46. Appropriate recruitment checks are completed for all staff, governors and volunteers and an accurate record of appointments is kept.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	The River School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	885/6030
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1171394
<b>Address</b>	The River School Oakfield House Droitwich Road Worcester Worcestershire WR3 7ST
<b>Phone number</b>	01905 457047
<b>Email address</b>	info@riverschool.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.riverschool.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Worcester Christian Education Trust
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Tim Lonergan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Adrian Parsonage
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 16
<b>Number of pupils</b>	144
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4 February 2020

## Information about the school

48. The River School is a co-educational independent school situated on the edge of Worcester.
49. The school is owned by the Worcester Christian Education Trust, a registered charitable trust, which is also a company limited by guarantee. It is administered by a group of Trustees appointed by the trust, who act as governors of the school.
50. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of trustees has been appointed.
51. The early years provision comprises two classes, the Brook Nursery for children aged between two and four, and Reception for children aged four to five.
52. In the primary school, pupils are taught as one class in Years 1 and 2, in Years 3 and 4, and in Years 5 and 6.
53. The school has identified 16 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Eight pupils in the school have an educational health and care (EHC) plan.
54. No pupil in the school has English as an additional language.
55. The school states that Christian values underpin all aspects of school life. It aims to build a community where every pupil is valued as an individual, where pupils are helped to develop a strong character so that they realise their full potential and discover their unique role in the world.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

23 to 25 January 2024

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

57. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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