ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

Littlegarth School

Horkesley Park

Nayland

Colchester

CO6 4JR

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. Governors play an active role in the school by overseeing leaders' actions and their impact, ensuring that the Standards are met. Governors and leaders discuss and enact how to improve pupils' wellbeing through an effective process of self-evaluation.

2. Leaders assess risk robustly and implement a range of policies and procedures in order to provide pupils and staff with a safe and suitable learning environment. Leaders understand their responsibilities as set out in statutory guidance, such as Keeping children safe in education (KCSIE) and Working together to safeguard children (WT). Leaders take action to improve school attendance. Leaders discourage families from taking holidays during term time and inform parents that these are logged as unauthorised absence. However, some absences are incorrectly recorded in the attendance register as being authorised. This was corrected during the course of the inspection.

3. Pupils follow a broad and effective curriculum that includes creative subjects, modern foreign languages and, in Year 6, a post-examination programme which develops pupils' learning skills and prepares them for the expectations of secondary education.

4. Pupils achieve well as they move through the school. They secure places at a range of secondary schools through competitive entry processes. A number of pupils win scholarships for their academic achievements or for their skills in sport or creative disciplines.

5. Teachers are knowledgeable and skilful about the subjects they teach. In most lessons, their careful planning takes note of the pupils' prior attainment. Teachers tailor their teaching to each pupil's individual requirements. This includes for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). However, in some lessons, teachers do not use pupils' assessment data well enough. Their planning and teaching are less effective because activities are not well matched to pupils' learning needs. In these lessons, this limits the progress that some pupils make.

6. Children in the early years make good progress because staff develop their skills and understanding through meaningful learning experiences. Children learn to communicate and collaborate with one another, as well as developing core skills in early mathematics and reading such as accurately counting the number of objects and understanding the sounds that letters make.

7. Pupils increase their confidence over time because teachers provide them with support and planned experiences such as participating in dramatic productions, presenting fortnightly news programmes and holding positions of responsibility.

8. Pupils behave well because leaders instil high expectations through a shared ethos which is understood and appreciated by the whole community. Bullying is rare but any incidents which do arise are promptly and effectively managed by leaders.

9. Teachers deliver a robust and effective programme of personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education. This, together with the wider curriculum, successfully teaches pupils about different communities, society, the wider world and cultures other than their own. Pupils also learn valuable life skills such as how to manage personal finances.

10. Safeguarding arrangements are effective in securing pupils' wellbeing. Staff, governors and safeguarding leaders are all trained to an appropriate level. Staff are vigilant and understand how to

share concerns about pupils, or about other adults. Leaders seek advice from external agencies promptly when required.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- maintain oversight of attendance registers and make sure that staff always use the correct codes to record any absences in accordance with statutory guidance
- ensure that teachers use assessment information in their planning and teaching consistently, so that pupils' different learning needs are effectively met.

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Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Governors assure themselves that leaders are effective by scrutinising and analysing leaders' reports which are then discussed during meetings. They visit the school regularly to meet with leaders, staff and pupils to support their understanding of school life. Governors are involved in discussions around the school's self-evaluation and provide appropriate challenge as well as support to leaders.

12. Leaders demonstrate that they have the appropriate knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They prioritise pupils' wellbeing. For example, they consider how to appropriately manage pupil and parent expectations around selection processes for sports teams or theatrical productions. Leaders adapt the curriculum to provide additional opportunities for pupils to develop their subject-specific skills. They implement methods for tracking the progress pupils make over time.

13. Leaders identify and manage risk both strategically and in the day-to-day operation of the school by taking appropriate action. For example, leaders consider pupils' safety when they walk between buildings on the school site and consider segregating areas for solely pedestrian use. Risk assessments for trips are prepared and vetted thoroughly to ensure that potential hazards are identified. Risk assessments for different areas of the school are regularly checked for their ongoing suitability.

14. Governors and leaders know their safeguarding responsibilities. They make sure that staff are appointed with due regard to statutory guidance. Governors exercise suitable oversight to ensure that the necessary checks have been carried out.

15. Leaders foster appropriate links with external agencies that focus on pupils' safety and wellbeing. For example, they have an effective working partnership with local safeguarding partners.

16. Leaders understand their duties under the Equality Act 2010. An appropriate accessibility plan is in place to promote improved access to the curriculum and school buildings for those pupils who have SEND. This plan is updated periodically to consider the ongoing needs of pupils and prospective pupils.

17. Leaders share their high expectations with pupils and their parents that pupils must attend school as often as possible. Leaders give a clear message that pupils should not miss school during termtime for family holidays unless there are exceptional circumstances. However, some unauthorised absences are recorded in the attendance register as authorised. This was corrected while inspectors were onsite.

18. Leaders provide or make available all the necessary information to parents and prospective parents, mainly via the school website. Leaders inform parents of their child's progress and achievements, along with other details that keep parents up to date with the school's expectations and events.

19. Leaders respond to any parental complaints in a timely manner and in accordance with regulatory requirements. Leaders attempt to find early resolutions to any issues and keep appropriate records of any such concerns, together with the school's response and the outcomes.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. Pupils are taught an ambitious curriculum with an appropriate balance between core subjects and wider areas of learning, including languages, scientific and creative disciplines. Younger pupils also experience regular outdoor learning lessons. Pupils develop skills and knowledge in these subjects because schemes of work organise subject content in a logical order. After their senior school entry examinations have concluded, pupils in Year 6 work towards the 'Mallett-Erith Award', in which they undertake individual research projects. Pupils are taught the skills of research, analysis, synthesis and presentation.

22. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to apply their core skills in activities throughout the week. For example, during assemblies everyone adds up and counts the total of the pupil birthdays being celebrated. Teachers know the wider curriculum their pupils learn and use this to reinforce key knowledge and concepts across different subjects. For example, in music links are made to the topic of slavery which pupils also learn about in history.

23. Children in the early years experience many planned activities which develop their communication, language and numeracy skills. For example, children take turns, share and listen to each other whilst they make cakes in the sand tray and share ideas about how to construct a marble run. Children count the number of eggs in nests and search for the hidden number of the day.

24. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and use a range of resources and methods to support their teaching. Teachers prepare and teach engaging activities which hold pupils' interest and encourage effective learning. For example, Year 4 pupils are taught to evaluate the nutritional impact of the acidity of soil on growing plants and in drama pupils learn and demonstrate a range of acting techniques.

25. Pupils generally make good progress from their various starting points. In most lessons teachers plan their teaching carefully to meet pupils' individual needs. This is based on their own assessments of the progress pupils make during lessons and the standardised data gathered about pupils' attainment. However, in some lessons planned and taught activities are not sufficiently adapted to pupils' needs. This is because teachers do not use the information collected about what pupils already know and what they need to learn next. When this is the case, pupils' progress is not as rapid as it could be.

26. Teachers typically offer different levels of challenge in the work provided. For example, pupils are given suitable 'focus spellings' to support their literacy skills and access to the curriculum. In German, pupils are offered appropriate levels of complexity in their translation challenges. Older pupils are encouraged to compose and answer 'burning questions' in science, in order to develop a deeper understanding of scientific matters and the world around them.

27. Pupils who have SEND make good progress and achieve well. They are supported by their teachers, teaching assistants and learning support teachers. These staff assist pupils who have SEND in the classroom through individual and small group support and the use of specialised resources. For example, pupils receive additional support in mathematics and in their phonic understanding to address any misconceptions. Pupils also have access to adapted materials or technologies to help them interpret and record their work. Where appropriate, additional professional support is arranged to supplement the school's provision.

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28. Staff monitor the progress of the very small proportion of pupils who speak English as an additional language. They provide additional support if required. For example, staff help pupils to understand and use complex vocabulary.

29. Pupils are equipped with learning skills that prepare them for competitive entry procedures to secondary schools. Pupils achieve success both individually and corporately in a number of national academic competitions.

30. Pupils enjoy playing different games with their friends during recreation times. Many pupils participate in the wide range of extra-curricular activities on offer, from cookery to music ensembles, dance, various sports and intellectual pursuits. Pupils take part in an esports club and are frequently successful in national tournaments. Pupils extend their interests and develop their skills by taking part in these clubs. For example, pupils who participate in the hockey club have the opportunity to devise and lead their own practice drills.

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

31. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

32. Pupils develop their confidence and self-knowledge because of their teachers' ongoing support as well as opportunities to take part in performances and drama productions. Older pupils take turns presenting news or sports reports for the fortnightly 'Littlegarth TV' programme. Pupils recognise the contribution their participation in these activities makes to their personal growth. Pupils are encouraged to offer their thoughts and share their ideas during lessons. Pupils use outdoor learning and recreation areas to take appropriate risks, make choices and work together towards common goals.

33. Older pupils derive confidence from the positions of responsibility they hold, for example school leaders, prefects and sports captains who lead training sessions immediately before house competitions. They make presentations and give notices in assemblies which further enhance their confidence and communication skills.

34. Pupils understand how their actions and behaviours have a direct impact on their learning. Pupils' behaviour during lessons and when moving around the school is considerate and thoughtful. Pupils listen to and follow their teachers' instructions. Pupils enter and leave school gatherings appropriately. They form orderly queues at lunch time and wait patiently to go into the playground. Pupils reflect on their actions when they make poor choices because staff are consistent, clear and supportive in how they apply the behaviour policy.

35. The school's anti-bullying policy and procedures are clear and understood by staff and pupils. Staff take swift action with regard to any issues which may arise. On the rare occasion when leaders need to act, they do so effectively and in a timely manner. Leaders keep detailed records of any incidents and monitor these records for any patterns or trends which emerge, whether in respect of individuals or pupil groups.

36. Pupils follow a well-structured physical education (PE) curriculum which develops their fitness, co-ordination and teamwork skills. Teachers organise inclusive activities which encourage pupils to reach their potential in an appropriately competitive environment. Teams and individual pupils are regularly successful in both regional and national competitions.

37. Children in the early years experience a range of activities which promote their physical and emotional development. Specialist PE teachers develop children's gross motor skills through playing games such as asking children to change the speed and direction as they run around pretending to be cars. Staff know children's emotional and sensory needs. Children are taught how to manage their emotions. Staff provide a calm zone where children can cuddle up with a blanket, toy or book. Children are encouraged to have a go and to accept that they will make mistakes.

38. The curriculum for PSHE includes the teaching of relationships education in line with statutory guidance. Parents are consulted and informed about the topics their children are taught. Elements of sex education are taught in an age-appropriate way to older pupils, including how their bodies grow and change.

39. During PSHE lessons pupils learn important topics such as equality and the ways that people can be different alongside the importance of respecting these differences. Pupils understand how the

school community is built on the foundations of tolerance and respect. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe in different situations and how to live healthily. They learn about important topics such as privacy and consent, as well as how to recognise the difference between positive and unhealthy relationships.

40. Teachers provide effective supervision for pupils during the school day, including during break times. Leaders monitor pupils' attendance to look for and act on any patterns of absence which might impact on pupils' learning. The school informs the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points. The school maintains an accurate admissions register of current and past pupils which holds all the necessary information.

41. The premises are well maintained. Health and safety policies and procedures are appropriate, for example water checks and electrical safety inspections are completed on a regular basis. Leaders ensure that fire risk assessments are carried out by a competent person, and that any action points are addressed promptly. Staff are trained in fire safety procedures and evacuation drills are regularly practised to ensure that everyone knows what to do in case of an emergency.

42. First Aid procedures are appropriate and delivered by trained staff. There is always at least one staff member trained in paediatric first aid present in the early years setting. Records are kept of any aid given to pupils, as well as any medication dispensed. There is an appropriate facility for ill or injured pupils to use on a short-term basis. Parents are informed if their child has been ill or injured.

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

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

44. Pupils are taught how societies and communities use rules to function effectively, through their own school rules, known as 'The Littlegarth Way'. Pupils learn about laws in Britain and elsewhere in the world. Pupils develop their moral understanding, for example through structured debates which encourage them to consider different perspectives around respect and tolerance.

45. Pupils learn about making choices from an early age. Children in Reception vote for the story they want to hear at the end of the day. Pupils are able to participate in the school council, which promotes pupils' ideas to improve the school. Recent pupil-led improvements include a wider range of food including salads available at lunch time, an updated uniform code, a new system to exchange merit points for rewards, and outdoor learning lessons for some older pupils.

46. Pupils in Year 6 prepare persuasive presentations about political parties they create in their 'Mallett-Erith Award' lessons to address particular issues in society. This develops their understanding of concepts including manifestos and slogans. As a result of these various opportunities, pupils learn about British values and institutions such as parliament and how they can play a role in forming and developing communities. Teachers are careful to ensure that any discussions regarding political issues are conducted fairly and without bias.

47. Pupils of all ages develop an appropriate understanding of, and respect for, cultures other than their own through a range of planned learning experiences throughout the school year. In religious education (RE) pupils visit various places of worship to supplement their learning in class. In geography, pupils in Year 6 explain how ancient traditions are still important to tribes in the south American rainforest which have otherwise adopted a modern way of life. As part of the school's international celebrations, the main festivals of world religions are included and the cultures associated with different world languages are explored. Pupils learn how geography as well as culture shapes the everyday lives of different people, for example pupils in Year 4 consider both home design and energy generation for those living in the Arctic circle.

48. Children in the early years enjoy visits from people in the local community who have roles that help other people, such as the police. Children eagerly brush a dinosaur's teeth with a large toothbrush to understand what a visiting dentist tells them about oral hygiene. Older pupils meet professionals who talk about their work and careers, and pupils learn about the skills needed to put together a business proposal as part of their 'Mallett-Erith Award' curriculum.

49. Pupils are suitably prepared for their next stage of schooling. In the final months at Littlegarth, the oldest pupils are readied for their transition to senior school through appropriate academic preparation. Teachers adapt how the curriculum is taught to include more independent learning so that pupils are equipped with confidence and self-organisation skills.

50. Pupils develop their economic understanding through the curriculum. Children in the early years take part in role play activities where they exchange money in the class flower shop, and younger pupils handle currency during mathematics lessons. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about the difference between 'needs' and 'wants', which pupils in Year 6 interpret as 'necessities' and 'luxuries'. Older pupils learn how interest rates affect borrowing and how taxation is used to fund

public services. They learn about personal finance and the risks associated with gambling. Pupils are also taught how their own school operates from a business perspective.

51. Pupils develop their understanding of wider society and how they can contribute positively to the lives of others. Pupils take part in charitable fundraising such as sponsored runs and providing contributions to Christmas and foodbank collections. Older pupils decide which charities to support, and which fundraising activities to undertake. Charities close to the school community's heart receive ongoing support.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

53. Leaders put in place appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures. They foster an effective culture within the school where everyone takes responsibility. Staff know how to spot signs that a pupil's welfare might be at risk because they have been appropriately trained and understand the need to be watchful. Staff know to act on any concerns they have about the behaviour of other adults. Staff understand their responsibilities under the 'Prevent' duty and are aware of the possible risk of radicalisation.

54. Governors also receive training so that they can evaluate the school's safeguarding practices. They receive regular safeguarding reports so that they are aware of any trends and can offer support and professional challenge to safeguarding leaders.

55. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and the safeguarding team are trained and updated with the knowledge necessary for their roles. They take prompt action and liaise effectively with external agencies when necessary to support vulnerable pupils and their families. Leaders maintain detailed records and monitor any ongoing concerns effectively.

56. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to share any concerns they have about their own welfare or that of other pupils. There are several ways in which pupils can report concerns including, for older pupils, post boxes which can be used anonymously. Pupils have access to a range of suitably trained professionals if they need further support.

57. Pupils are confident about using the internet appropriately because they learn about online safety. Their access to the internet whilst at school, and when using school devices at home, is suitably monitored and filtered. These systems are regularly and systematically tested.

58. Leaders' processes ensure that the appointment of new staff meets regulations. The required information is sought, including references which indicate a candidate's suitability to work with children. The necessary checks are undertaken for the appointment of a new chair of governors. All these checks are accurately recorded on the school's single central record (SCR).

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Littlegarth School
Department for Education number	881/6019
Registered charity number	325064
Address	Horkesley Park Nayland Colchester CO6 4JR
Phone number	01206 262332
Email address	office@littlegarth.org
Website	www.littlegarth.org
Proprietor	Littlegarth School Limited
Chair	Mr James Keohane
Headteacher	Mrs Kathy Uttley
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	314
Date of previous inspection	2 to 4 March 2022

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Information about the school

60. Littlegarth School is an independent co-educational day school located near Colchester, Essex. Since the last inspection, a new chair of governors was elected in September 2023.

61. There are 72 children in the early years comprising two Nursery classes and two Reception classes.

62. The school has identified 15 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).

63. The school has identified English as an additional language for a very small proportion of pupils.

64. The school states its aims are to inspire a lifelong love of learning through the provision of a stimulating and wide-reaching curriculum designed to enable each pupil to develop a range of talents. It seeks to encourage self-confidence and co-operation whilst teaching children to appreciate and understand different people and opinions.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	25 to 27 March 2025

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

66. 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.

67. 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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