

School inspection report

30 June to 2 July 2026

Wetheringsett Manor School

Church Street
Wetheringsett-Cum-Brockford
Stowmarket
IP14 5QX

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 have a clear understanding of the school's particular nature and offer extensive, relevant skills and experience to support leaders. They regularly validate leaders' effectiveness. Governors and leaders collaborate closely to ensure the Standards are consistently met.
2. Leaders and governors understand the social and emotional challenges that pupils face due to mental health issues or past trauma. They effectively meet pupils' personal, social, academic and emotional needs by creating an environment that combines consistent routines with trusting relationships. This approach fosters the emotional safety necessary for pupils to regulate their feelings, attend school regularly and engage in learning.
3. All pupils have special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders implement a well-sequenced curriculum that successfully balances academic options with essential vocational and life-skills qualifications tailored to each pupil. Leaders have recently enhanced the assessment systems used to track pupils' progress. Teachers generally use this information well to pinpoint pupils' areas of success, weakness or gaps in knowledge, skills and personal and social development. However, this is not yet consistent.
4. The programmes for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) are suitable. Together with citizenship lessons, pupils learn why developing healthy and respectful relationships matters. Staff help pupils reflect on their behaviour and understand how their actions affect others. Reflective conversations, positive behaviour support plans and 'natural and logical' consequences help pupils take responsibility for their choices and build respect for those around them. Leaders adopt this trauma-informed approach, so staff build connections with pupils and provide consistency and predictability to model how to reflect actions and regulate their emotions. Staff are skilled at building positive relationships; however, they do not always address inappropriate actions or comments when they first occur.
5. Leaders have developed a well-thought-out careers programme that meticulously tailors advice and opportunities to individuals. It encourages ambition through extensive curriculum opportunities in vocational studies and an understanding of career pathways, including apprenticeships and further education. Leaders foster robust connections with a wide range of external partners, such as colleges and local businesses. Pupils undertake meaningful work experience aligned with their interests, ambitions and situation. Extensive guidance, enriching opportunities and high-quality individualised support help pupils make well-informed choices and prepare them very effectively for leaving school. This is a significant strength of the school.
6. Leaders provide opportunities that prepare pupils well for future education and life in British society. Staff are skilled at motivating and engaging pupils who have previously struggled with mainstream education. Pupils learn to manage their finances, understand how a democratic society functions and build respectful relationships. Leaders create personalised pathways to help pupils develop the social and emotional skills to work with others.
7. Leaders prioritise safeguarding. Staff recognise that many pupils are inherently more vulnerable, and focus on supporting pupils' emotional regulation and early intervention. This creates an environment in which trusting relationships enable pupils to share their concerns without fear. Leaders work with external agencies to support pupils and reduce risks to their wellbeing.

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:

- teachers use personalised targets consistently so that pupils make the best possible progress from their individual starting points
- staff manage pupils' behaviour consistently so that pupils are clear that disruption and inappropriate comments are not acceptable.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. The proprietor maintains effective oversight and encourages collaboration through a central executive group of governors. This team meets regularly with school leaders and visits the school to observe practice and engage with staff. Governors offer guidance, facilitate idea sharing and support with staff training. Leaders provide governors with comprehensive reports detailing their intent, implementation and impact on pupils. These reports help governors monitor progress and identify areas for improvement. Ongoing partnership and accountability assure governors that leaders possess the skills and knowledge to ensure the school consistently meets the Standards.
9. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities with clarity and purpose. They work closely with staff to prioritise pupils' wellbeing and embed the school's core values and ambitions across school life. They understand pupils' varied, often trauma-related and multifaceted, needs and take thoughtful steps to support pupils' emotional wellbeing and academic ambitions.
10. Leaders undertake regular self-evaluation. They base strategic planning on self-review, a reflective ethos and regular consultation with pupils, parents and staff. They use external expertise effectively when needed. Leaders use this feedback to respond proactively to the school community's evolving needs and maintain a focus on enriching pupils' overall experience. Recent decisions to revise the curriculum and expand work experience opportunities have brought positive change for pupils. For example, pupils can now take a GCSE in sports leadership, complete a Laser diploma in motor vehicle studies, and study horticulture and plumbing in weekly vocational lessons.
11. Leaders maintain a detailed suite of policies that align with statutory guidance and reflect the school's procedures. They review and update these documents as necessary. These policies guide staff in school operations and daily routines. Regular training, such as on crisis prevention safety intervention, helps staff deepen their understanding and implement policies effectively. By making information transparent and policies clear, leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing.
12. Leaders collaborate closely with local professionals, such as social workers and educational psychologists, to provide comprehensive support and guidance. This partnership ensures that the diverse needs of individuals are met through shared expertise and a co-ordinated focus on pupils' wellbeing. The school notifies the local authority promptly when pupils join or leave at non-standard transition times. Leaders fulfil their responsibilities for pupils' EHC plans, including conducting reviews and providing appropriate funding information.
13. Leaders comply with the Equality Act 2010. They promote equality and make inclusion a core value that informs decisions and actions within the school. They implement a suitable accessibility plan to support this commitment. Recent improvements, such as installing ramps and increasing the use of pictorial and symbolic representations, enhance access throughout the school. Leaders provide teachers with regular guidance, equipping them with strategies to adapt provision and implement specific, targeted support as outlined in each pupil's EHC plan and individual profile documents.
14. The school maintains an effective complaints procedure. Leaders keep detailed records to support this process. They adhere to the complaints policy and procedures when addressing parental concerns, ensuring they handle issues within the specified timeframes. Leaders often resolve concerns promptly and informally.

15. Leaders have a robust risk management programme, informed by a secure understanding of school-specific and wider risks. They act promptly to reduce potential risks to pupils. Leaders conduct detailed risk assessments that cover many aspects, such as the premises and a wide range of trips, including overseas. They carefully evaluate each pupil's needs, ensuring that every pupil has a positive behaviour support plan, which includes an individualised risk assessment. Leaders adapt and revisit risk assessments as needed, and take practical steps, such as increasing supervision during unstructured times. Regular training ensures staff know how to identify hazards and apply suitable control measures. Leaders frequently review risk assessments to ensure they remain effective and relevant.
16. The school website provides relevant information, including key policies and appropriate details of staff and governors. Staff communicate regularly with parents, who can visit termly to discuss progress and view work. Annual reports give parents a clear picture of pupils' academic progress alongside skills, such as independence, and progress towards EHC plan targets.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. The curriculum is broad and balanced. Staff continually adapt it to meet pupils' diverse needs. They sequence learning toward clear end points, such as GCSE and entry-level qualifications. Leaders retain flexibility within the curriculum to respond to pupils' interests and individual needs through an extensive vocational offer including mechanics, construction, food technology, and hair and beauty.
19. Leaders promote effective liaison between the clinical and education teams, ensuring high-quality therapeutic support interweaves with teaching. Trained therapists, such as occupational therapists, provide regular one-to-one or small-group support. The combined expertise of therapists and staff, and the thoughtfully designed curriculum, ensure that essential academic learning is blended seamlessly with support for pupils' social and emotional needs, emphasising skills such as resilience and independence. Leaders have devised a programme to support this called 'Wetheringsett 101'. Pupils encounter different 101 skills during their time at school, such as filling up a car with petrol or assembling flat-pack furniture. The rich curriculum, targeted support and meaningful qualifications enable pupils to make good progress from their varied starting points.
20. Leaders use initial assessment information and EHC plans to produce 'positive behaviour support plans' for individual pupils. These plans outline each pupil's additional needs, interests, preferred teaching methods and future aspirations. Staff communicate daily to keep this information current. They regularly participate in training focused on strategies to support diverse learning needs, such as pairing spoken words with pictures. Teachers offer clear choices within a structure, break work into micro-tasks and provide reflective time when necessary. These efforts, along with positive relationships, help reduce pupils' anxiety, encourage engagement in learning and promote gradual development of knowledge and skills.
21. Staff typically adapt teaching well to meet the wide range of needs in each class. They know individual pupils and adjust their approach, resources and support to promote independence and engagement. Staff establish consistent, predictable routines and provide regular feedback, so pupils maintain focus, understand what they are learning and know what to do next. Specialist teachers with good subject knowledge use a wide range of resources to engage pupils in practical activities and encourage physical and creative effort. For example, pupils remove a dent in a car bonnet in mechanics and redesign buttons into a bracelet in textiles. Skilled teaching assistants contribute to learning to provide targeted support and encourage pupils to become more independent.
22. Leaders provide a framework to assess pupils' progress. This has recently been enhanced to more clearly identify pupils' starting points and monitor progress over time. Teachers use a range of assessments, including baseline and standardised tests, to understand pupils' learning. They typically tailor lesson content and style, so pupils learn effectively. They also use assessment information to identify gaps or areas of achievement or weakness in both academic and personal development. Teachers could support pupils' learning even more effectively if they used individual targets consistently.
23. The school offers pupils opportunities to enhance their learning and discover new interests in a range of accessible, inclusive activities. These typically take place within the school day. For example, during 'choices' lessons, pupils can develop co-operation through football, perseverance through

metal detecting or creative expression through art. Pupils have access to recreational resources on arrival and during breaktimes, such as gym equipment and pool tables.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

25. The citizenship and PSHE curriculum equip pupils with essential life skills across a wide range of important topics. Pupils learn to care for their mental health and the feelings of others, and to explore behaviour patterns, mutual respect and community cohesion. Pupils learn about the importance of sleep and healthy eating and consider the potential negative effects of social media and mobile phone use on wellbeing. Pupils recognise early signs of anxiety and how these feelings show up in their bodies and thoughts. Pupils practise strategies to calm and regulate emotions, such as breathing techniques, taking a short walk or seeking support. RSE meets national requirements, and pupils' understanding is appropriately assessed. Teaching promotes respect, equality and safety, and helps pupils understand boundaries and the importance of healthy relationships.
26. Staff actively foster pupils' self-confidence, self-esteem and self-knowledge by recognising and celebrating individual achievements and delivering a curriculum that encourages reflection, discussion and appreciation of diverse beliefs, values, and experiences. The religious education (RE) component of the humanities curriculum enables pupils to reflect spiritually and deepen their understanding of a range of religions. Teachers regularly create opportunities in humanities lessons for pupils to explore identity and develop a positive sense of self. The school's focus on neurodiversity helps pupils recognise and value their own identity, encouraging them to take pride in who they are. Debates, such as regarding if identity is fixed or can change over time, further deepen this understanding. Pupils typically show thoughtful reflection and respect for different perspectives. Staff ensure pupils can experience success, especially those who have previously struggled. In this way, pupils gradually develop a positive sense of self and grow into confident, resilient learners.
27. The physical education (PE) curriculum is inclusive and provides opportunities for pupils to develop physical skills and knowledge. Teachers adapt PE lessons to meet pupils' needs and increase engagement, for example by offering flexible activity choices such as football, basketball or athletics, and varying group size. Pupils learn the importance of working together and coping with success and failure through competitive opportunities. Food technology lessons build pupils' understanding of healthy lifestyles by linking healthy eating to overall wellbeing.
28. Behaviour management is effective overall. Pupils know that bullying is not tolerated. Leaders monitor and record behaviour closely. Leaders use this information to train staff, adapt the curriculum, and invite guest speakers, for example, those who address topics such as toxic masculinity and the dangers of knife crime. Staff receive relevant updates during daily briefings and stay vigilant throughout the day. However, staff do not always address behavioural issues or inappropriate comments. This does not give others confidence or show that such behaviour is unacceptable. These instances of disruption and poor behaviour do not meet the usually high expectations set by leaders or staff, and can affect other pupils and the positive learning environment.
29. Leaders ensure that the premises are well maintained and emphasise the importance of robust health and safety procedures, including fire safety. They adhere to health and safety legislation and ensure required checks are carried out, such as legionella and water temperature checks. Leaders implement effective fire safety measures such as commissioning an external fire audit and risk

assessment. Leaders maintain up-to-date and comprehensive records of safety checks, including alarm testing, and fire and lockdown drills.

30. An appropriate number of staff are trained in first aid. The provision of medical care and the dispensing of prescribed medications to pupils are well managed.
31. The admission and attendance registers are maintained effectively and in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders monitor attendance closely and address absences each day. Leaders and staff provide individualised support to pupils, parents and carers to address any attendance concerns. Leaders adopt bespoke strategies, such as a reduced timetable, and offer alternative subjects, such as feline cat care or swimming, to limit obstacles that prevent a pupil from attending school.
32. Staff supervise pupils throughout the school effectively, starting with a positive morning routine. Pupils are met on arrival, phones are handed in, and a 'soft start' provides time for pupils to have breakfast, regulate and prepare for learning before lessons begin. Active and engaged supervision throughout the day enables staff to notice subtle indicators of wellbeing, offer timely support, and respond effectively.

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

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

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

34. Pupils gain an understanding of different cultures, beliefs and backgrounds through a curriculum that promotes inclusion and respect. They explore cultural celebration days, such as Eid and Diwali, and learn about the traditions and beliefs associated with them. Activities for events such as Black History Month help pupils appreciate different perspectives and understand the harm caused by discrimination. Enrichment days focus on countries such as Mexico and enable pupils to study differences in cuisine, clothing and religion in accessible, engaging ways. Pupils are encouraged to develop empathy, challenge stereotypes and show inclusive attitudes in daily life. The humanities curriculum and many practical activities, such as learning to build a fire safely, or using a compass correctly, or planning a debate, help pupils learn to interact thoughtfully in a diverse world.
35. Leaders provide a well-planned careers programme that gives pupils access to accurate, up-to-date knowledge and impartial career guidance that is highly individualised. Visitors speak to pupils about the world of work, with recent talks from the RAF, the police and Ipswich Town Football Club. Pupils take part in careers festivals and future skills fairs where they meet employers, attend workshops and listen to talks on a wide range of industries. Staff encourage pupils to explore their particular skills and aptitudes, supporting them as they create a curriculum vitae and prepare for interviews. Leaders build successful links with local businesses, enabling pupils to undertake work experience across a range of industries. The planned careers guidance helps pupils make informed choices about a range of career options and plan their next steps with confidence.
36. Pupils develop economic understanding through a range of activities within and beyond the curriculum. In mathematics lessons, they calculate amounts of money and change; in food technology, they discuss the weekly food bill; and in mechanics, they explore sensible decision-making about spending and saving when buying vehicles to restore. PSHE lessons extend this learning by introducing concepts relevant to adult life, such as bank accounts, loans and wages. During PSHE, staff encourage moral thinking through discussions about topics such as the difference between wants and needs, and whether money is necessary for happiness. Financial responsibility develops further through enterprise activities, such as helping run the school tuck shop. Pupils work within a budget, consider profit and loss, and make decisions about pricing.
37. A well-planned programme of activities and discussions helps pupils distinguish right from wrong. Staff keep discussions relevant and engage pupils with real-life scenarios and current events, such as the proposed social media ban. Visits from the police, magistrates, or the 'Prevent' duty team show pupils the realities of hate crime, racism and the impact of criminal behaviour. These experiences help pupils learn to respect the law by understanding court procedures and to value public institutions, such as the police. Staff reinforce these lessons through the embedded 'natural and logical consequences' approach, so pupils understand the results of their actions and connect their behaviour at school to societal expectations. Teachers explain concepts carefully, so pupils develop an understanding of moral and legal responsibility. Teachers ensure that pupils discuss and appreciate these distinctions in a supportive environment and that political discussions are conducted impartially.
38. Leaders help pupils see the value of contributing positively to wider society through leadership opportunities, fundraising and community projects. The pupil council shapes school decisions, and charitable initiatives often come from pupils' personal experiences. Pupils grow produce in the

allotment, support the local foodbank, and work together on projects such as making a memorial bench and assisting local primary schools. These experiences build pupils' sense of social responsibility and confidence to create positive change beyond school.

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

39. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

40. Leaders cultivate a robust safeguarding culture that prioritises pupils' wellbeing. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities are knowledgeable and understand relevant issues, such as anxiety related to school attendance and concerns associated with online bullying. They implement transparent policies and procedures aligned with the latest statutory guidelines. Governors conduct an annual review and maintain regular communication with the safeguarding team. This helps them stay informed about current challenges, monitor developments, and assess the effectiveness of implemented measures.
41. Members of the safeguarding team receive appropriate training, including on broader risks to pupils, such as those in the care of the local authority. They structure staff training carefully, beginning with an in-depth induction programme and providing ongoing, thorough support. Regular quizzes identify any safeguarding misconceptions which staff may have. Leaders and staff are aware of the potential vulnerability of pupils, such as those who have experienced trauma and those who find it harder to communicate their needs. Staff maintain high levels of vigilance across the school. They know pupils well, which helps them quickly recognise any changes in pupils' mood or behaviour.
42. Leaders diligently document safeguarding matters, detailing the decisions made and actions implemented. Any issues that arise are swiftly recognised, and appropriate action is taken. Leaders analyse patterns in individual pupils' records and take necessary steps, including recognising specific events that affect pupils' wellbeing. Staff know how to report low-level concerns regarding adults working in the school, and are alert to concerns regarding child-on-child abuse. They also understand the risks of radicalisation and extremism. They utilise the online reporting system effectively.
43. Leaders maintain close links with a variety of local authorities and other external agencies, such as police community support officers and the Children and Family Court Advisory Support Service (Cafcass). They regularly seek advice and make referrals to children's services when appropriate, including for pupils who experience or have experienced school avoidance. Caring staff support these pupils effectively.
44. Leaders promote a culture of listening by offering different ways for pupils to share concerns, such as during the daily 'soft start', when pupils can have breakfast and settle into the school day. A range of staff, including trained therapists and counsellors, are available during this time and throughout the day.
45. Online safety is carefully managed through a combination of teaching pupils the importance of acting responsibly online and a robust internet filtering and monitoring system. This system is appropriately overseen, and any concerns are promptly addressed. Pupils are knowledgeable about the different risks they may encounter when using the internet and the need to be careful. Pupils know not to share any personal information and can spot signs of phishing messages.
46. Leaders are well informed and trained in safer recruitment practices. They conduct all necessary pre-employment checks on individuals before they begin work with pupils. Leaders accurately document these checks in the single central record (SCR) and maintain well-organised files.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

47. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Wetheringsett Manor School
Department for Education number	935/6027
Address	Wetheringsett Manor School Church Street Wetheringsett-Cum-Brockford Stowmarket Suffolk IP14 5QX
Phone number	01449 703935
Email address	office@wetheringsettmanor.co.uk
Website	www.wetheringsettmanor.co.uk
Proprietor	Acorn Care and Education Ltd
Chair	Mr Richard Power
Headteacher	Mr Mark Jeffries
Age range	7 to 18
Number of pupils	100
Date of previous inspection	8 August 2024

Information about the school

48. Wetheringsett Manor School is an independent, co-educational specialist day school near Stowmarket in Suffolk. It provides for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs. The school is owned and operated by Acorn Care and Education Ltd, with oversight provided by a regional director. The previous inspection of the school was conducted by Ofsted in August 2024. This is the first inspection of the school conducted by ISI.
49. All pupils who attend the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities and an education, health and care plan.
50. There are no pupils in the school who speak English as an additional language.
51. The school states its aim is to provide an environment where pupils feel safe and supported and can flourish. It seeks to nurture confident, resilient, and successful pupils who embrace challenges, respect and accept others, and celebrate achievements in all forms. It promotes a happy, healthy environment where tolerance prevails, and every individual's wellbeing and progression are valued.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 June to 2 July 2026

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

53. 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 regional chair and other staff from Acorn Care and Education Ltd
- 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.

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

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

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

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