



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report

Widford Lodge School

November 2022

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School's Details

School	Widford Lodge School			
DfE number	881/6005			
Address	Widford Lodge School Widford Road Chelmsford Essex CM2 9AN			
Telephone number	01245 352581			
Email address	admin@widfordlodge.co.uk			
Headteacher	Miss Michelle Cole			
Proprietor	Mrs Louise Gear			
Age range	2 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	233			
	EYFS	58	Pre-Prep	56
	Prep	119		
Inspection dates	22 to 24 November 2022			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 Widford Lodge School is an independent school located on the outskirts of Chelmsford. Established as a day and boarding school for male pupils in 1935, it became a day school towards the end of the 1980s and has admitted female pupils since 1995. The school is a limited company, owned by the founding family who form the board of directors, one of whom is the sole proprietor. The school is divided into three sections: the EYFS for children aged 2 to 5 years, the pre-prep for pupils aged 5 to 7 years and the prep school for pupils aged 7 to 11.
- 1.2 Since the previous inspection a new headteacher was appointed in September 2018.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.3 The school aims to educate its pupils through a broad and balanced curriculum so that they meet the challenges of the wider world. It seeks to provide a purposeful and secure environment whilst taking into account the values of honesty, courtesy and respect for others.

About the pupils

- 1.4 Pupils come from the local area and predominantly from business and professional families. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is broadly average in relation to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 20 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities including dyslexia, autism and speech and language difficulties all of whom receive additional support. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care plan. There are six pupils for whom English is an additional language, one of whom receives additional support. Data used by the school have identified 16 pupils as being the most able in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY. The FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the standards and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.**

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 National Curriculum tests in the years 2019 and 2022 confirm that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.6 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.7 The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.9 The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.12 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are

appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.

2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. It also includes particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.16 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.18 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.19 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The **EDUCATIONAL QUALITY** inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

The headline judgements apply one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

<i>School name</i>	<i>National Curriculum name</i>
Pre-school	Nursery

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.

- Pupils of all ages display excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across the curriculum and achieve highly in both academic and other areas.
- Pupils have a strong desire to be successful and have extremely positive attitudes to learning.
- Pupils are excellent communicators; they use wide-ranging vocabulary in their speaking and writing, read fluently and develop excellent listening skills from a very young age.
- Pupils' abilities to hypothesize, analyse and synthesize data are unevenly developed across the school.

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.

- Pupils' social development and collaboration skills are excellent. They take pride in contributing responsibly to the everyday life of the school and to the wider community.
- Pupils throughout the school develop high levels of perseverance, resilience and self-confidence.
- Pupils are well behaved, take responsibility for their behaviour, and have a strong moral code influenced by the school ethos and code of conduct.
- Pupils show great respect to each other and to their teachers. They understand and support the need to be respectful of those different from themselves.

Recommendation

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.

- Develop pupils' thinking skills further by consistently providing greater opportunities for independent research, analysis and synthesis of ideas.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Throughout the school pupils make excellent progress over time and achieve highly in all areas. Pupils' success is supported by high quality teaching and through effective assessment, detailed planning and targeted support when required. Pupils achieve highly in National Curriculum tests and are successful in entrance exams to senior schools, with many of them being awarded scholarships. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), all children make rapid progress in relation to their starting points, so that the majority reach or surpass national age-related expectations by the end of Reception. Pupils with SEND and EAL make equally good progress, often outperforming expectations. Their achievements are the result of their own excellent attitudes and the effective specialist support they receive. Excellent progress was seen in most lessons. For example, EYFS children rapidly assimilated the concept of two syllable words, sounding out each element before correctly saying the whole word. They made rapid progress in learning the sound made by the letters 'u' and 'a' and were able to write three letter words containing these sounds, while some could independently write words such as *cobweb* and *bucket*. A very large majority of parents and all pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that teaching enables pupils to learn and make progress.
- 3.6 Pupils have excellent attitudes to learning as is witnessed in their enthusiastic and co-operative approach to lessons. They are ambitious learners, with a genuine desire to succeed. They are not afraid to take risks, recognising that making mistakes is part of the learning process and is the way to master new skills. Mutual support between pupils is a strong feature of the school. Older pupils showed excellent determination when collaborating extremely well to devise comprehension questions to confirm understanding of a passage from *Oliver Twist*. Throughout the school, pupils challenge each other's ideas in a constructive way whilst being supportive and respectful of each other's views. For example, in a modelling club there was much debate and exchange of ideas about the best design for a marble run. A scrutiny of work from pupils across the school showed that all work was well organised and neatly presented, demonstrating pupils' evident pride in their work.
- 3.7 Pupils develop excellent knowledge, skills and understanding across all areas of learning. They gain a great appreciation for classical music, not least via the school's accomplished rock band whom inspectors heard playing a rousing version of Pachelbel's Canon. Challenging activities ensure that pupils of all abilities develop their skills well. Nursery children improved their fine motor skills when making dinosaurs from playdough. In an art lesson prep pupils rapidly learned how to create cuts in a polystyrene block to print pictures in the style of John Brunson. By adding detail and using different colours they created sophisticated pictures. In most teaching, well-chosen probing questions, encourage pupils to think deeply about issues. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they feel that support and encouragement from their teachers helps them to become better learners. Pupils show a good understanding of their previous learning and are encouraged to apply this knowledge to new situations. For example, pre-prep pupils successfully applied previously learnt knowledge about past Christmas traditions to contrast these with more modern activities. Prep school pupils showed an excellent knowledge of the short film *Birthday Boy* when devising interview questions for Manuk. School leaders contribute to the success of the pupils by creating an ethos which supports and encourages pupils and staff in the pursuit of academic success. In the questionnaire, most parents agreed that the school benefits from strong governance, leadership and management.
- 3.8 Pupils are highly successful in an extensive range of creative and physical pursuits and are supported in their achievements by a suitably diverse extra-curricular programme, and specialist coaching. Pupils achieve highly in individual external music examinations, and the choir has performed at local festivals. Drama is an important part of school life with many pupils attaining excellent grades in speech and drama examinations. School teams of all ages perform well in a variety of local and national competitions, notably rugby, cricket, cross country and netball. The most talented pupils represent regional teams in a range of sports, including cricket. Pupils have also been successful in national art competitions and in the UK Primary Maths Challenge.

- 3.9 Pupils' communication skills throughout the school are excellent. Pupils are articulate speakers, and many spoke confidently and eloquently to inspectors about their work and life in school. They readily participate in class discussion, and expressed their views with maturity and confidence in interviews and informal discussions. Pupils have many opportunities to practise speaking in public including drama and addressing the whole school in assembly such as when delivering feedback from the school council meetings. The regular supervised reading sessions help them to become fluent and accurate readers. Children in the EYFS have a good understanding of the sounds letters make, and their writing and speaking skills develop rapidly as they grow in confidence and maturity. As pupils progress through the school, they write with increasing fluency and sophistication. For example, pupils showed an excellent understanding of descriptive writing techniques which they used to good effect when writing their own version of a *Just So* story in the style of Kipling. In English, pupils' work demonstrates excellent imagination, and a wide vocabulary and accurate use of grammar. For example, pupils' essays on *Kensuke's Kingdom* made excellent use of descriptive language to bring their writing to life. Pupils use technical language confidently and competently, such as when pupils wrote accurately about erosion and deposition in a study of rivers. From an early age pupils learn to listen closely to each other and their teachers, as was seen in a pre-prep lesson where pupils learned the etiquette of listening and taking turns to talk.
- 3.10 Pupils' study skills are unevenly developed across the school. In the EYFS children develop excellent reasoning ability as they learn to explore and experiment through the provision of many stimulating activities which develop their curiosity. The youngest children develop their thinking skills as they hone their recognition of forms and structures when successfully matching shapes to a diagram. In a reception maths lesson, children predicted how a balance scale would react when different numbers of biscuits were placed in each side of the scale through independent exploration. Older prep pupils showed an excellent ability to infer information from a text, recognising that this required a more detailed analysis of the passage than a simple comprehension exercise. A scrutiny of pupils' work showed some excellent independent learning. However, these opportunities are not consistently available because teaching in some subjects relies heavily upon worksheets which restrict pupils' ability to develop study skills in depth.
- 3.11 Pupils are very competent mathematicians. Their understanding builds over time so that by the time they reach the top of the school they have a strong grasp of the core concepts and the confidence to tackle new challenges. The youngest children demonstrated a secure appreciation of number, recognising that next year they would need 3 candles on their birthday cake rather than 2. Children in the EYFS count with confidence up to 10 and back to zero, and recognise that 8 is greater than 5. More able children were observed undertaking simple addition and subtraction problems, understanding the concept of equal to, greater and less than. Young pupils are secure in their number bonds, successfully adding and subtracting to ten using a variety of techniques. Older pupils could accurately position objects on a four-quadrant grid using both positive and negative coordinates. More able mathematicians compete successfully in national mathematical competitions. Pupils are comfortable using their skills across a wide range of other subjects such as when constructing graphs in science.
- 3.12 Pupils of all ages competently use a broad range of information and communication technology (ICT) skills, as well as specific computing skills such as coding. The range and complexity of their skills increase as they move through the school and their use is embedded as a key part of the curriculum from the start. Children in the EYFS engaged confidently with the interactive whiteboard to complete a phonics based activity. Others selected pictures of modes of transport and then chose which pen and colour to use to accurately 'paint' their picture. In an ICT lesson, young prep school pupils could accurately name the various components of a tablet device and explain what purpose each part served. In an art lesson, pupils used a drawing programme to create a cityscape in the mode of Stephen Wiltshire, accurately creating images, sizing, moving and colouring them. In a maths lesson pupils were confidently using spreadsheets to create pie charts. Older pupils are adept at creating presentations as was seen in an ICT club where pupils created a presentation which included text, photographs and maps downloaded from the internet.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils have a well-developed sense of self-understanding. Pupils flourish and grow in self-confidence through the praise and encouragement they receive from class teachers and other staff who provide individual support. They benefit from the warm and trusting relationships they have with their teachers who know their pupils well and encourage them to share any concerns they may have. Pupils appreciate the detailed written and oral feedback they receive from their teachers, which they say helps them understand how to improve. The youngest children talk comfortably to adults about what they can and can't draw easily. Pupils develop resilience and perseverance from an early age. Children in the EYFS showed much determination and excellent levels of concentration and perseverance when faced with many challenges when building 'junk' models as part of their study of transport. Pupils keep striving until they reach a successful result, being encouraged and supported by their teachers to take setbacks in their stride. Older pupils compare their achievements now with the level of work they could manage in previous years and are proud of the new skills they have learned.
- 3.15 Pupils show excellent social awareness and build constructive relationships with each other in all aspects of school life. They collaborate well with their peers and with pupils across year groups. This is promoted by the school ethos, which encourages relaxed relationships and social confidence. Children in the EYFS were observed socialising happily together, working well with others in lessons and sharing toys at break times. In a science lesson on electrical circuits, pupils solved their own problems through discussion and trying alternatives. Pupils of all ages develop an understanding of their own and others' emotions and recognise how these can influence their actions. Pupils learn how to reflect upon their feelings, by writing them down and placing them in 'jugs' in the classroom. These are then discussed by the class, identifying what makes some one feel good about themselves and how others can support them. Pupils spoke very positively about working together as a team in sports competitions, choirs and in residential trips where they learn to co-operate with each other in team building activities. Most parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school equips their child with the team working and social skills they need in later life, and all pupils said that the school helps them build positive relationships.
- 3.16 Pupils enjoy making a positive and meaningful contribution to the school community through roles such as prefects, sports captains, charity representatives and librarians. The active school council puts forward ideas for improvements in the school community, such as changes to the school food. Year 6 pupils particularly enjoy being reading buddies to reception children and playground buddies for pre-prep pupils. They show a mature understanding of how they can help those less fortunate than themselves, for example by raising funds and providing practical support for a range of local, national and international charities. Pupils have planted a flower garden in a local park, send Christmas cards to the school's neighbours and the choir sings carols for residents of a nearby retirement home.
- 3.17 Pupils' moral understanding is excellent, as seen in their strong support and understanding of the school rules and behaviour policy. The development of their moral values begins in the EYFS where children learn to understand school and class rules, share, take turns and be polite to staff and each other. Pupils' personal development is characterised by excellent standards of behaviour and respect. The mutually agreed *HEART* values of Honesty, Empathy, Acts of Kindness, Respect, Tenacity are prominently displayed on a large board in the entrance hall and repeated elsewhere round the school. Pupils have embraced these values and strive to live their lives by them. In discussions, pupils articulated a clear understanding of right and wrong. From the youngest age they are very mindful of the well-being of others and are considerate and caring in their relationships with peers and adults. Most parents and all pupils agreed that the school actively promotes and expects good behaviour. Pupils are polite and well-mannered, for example standing to one side when meeting on comers in a narrow passageway.

- 3.18 Pupils respect and value diversity within society. They are aware that their own community is not widely diverse in terms of different cultures and backgrounds, but strive to understand, respect and value the beliefs and values of those from different backgrounds. The school widens pupils' experience of diversity through PSHE and RE lessons which teach about different faiths and cultures. Nursery children served pretend sushi and sweetcorn into rice bowls and showed knowledge of a wide variety of foods from across the globe. Relationship education encourages pupils to challenge their own stereotypes and empathise with those who are different. This was seen in a PSHE lesson where older pupils discussed maturely the rights of transgender people. Almost all parents and all pupils who responded to the questionnaire felt that the school encourages an atmosphere of respect and tolerance. Pupils develop a thorough knowledge of fundamental British values, such as respect for the rule of law and tolerance of others, through a comprehensive PSHE programme. They value not only themselves as unique and worthwhile people but others as well. They understand that another person's appearance, personality, beliefs, and interests bring something special to the world. Pupils' understanding is fostered by the strong school culture embodied by school leaders and the proprietor.
- 3.19 Pupils develop their decision-making skills from an early age. Nursery children make many decisions throughout the day as they move freely between rooms which offer a choice of story time, messy play, role play and quiet areas. In lessons, Reception children select from a wide range of activities to consolidate their knowledge and understanding. At playtimes there is an equally wide-ranging choice of toys and play areas. Pre-prep pupils take 'Travelling Ted' home with them for the weekend, choosing what he does with them and how they present his experiences with them to the class on Mondays. Over time pupils become adept at making choices and are increasingly aware of the consequences of their decisions. Pupils think carefully about which clubs to join, whether to be members of the school council or which position of responsibility to apply for. Many lessons involve an element of choice and decision-making, such as when older pupils select the level of challenge in a maths lesson.
- 3.20 Pupils exhibit a strong spiritual awareness. Pupils consider philosophical and ethical concepts thoughtfully during philosophy lessons and they have a strong appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. They are appreciative of quiet moments in their day, including the opportunity to walk with an adult and the school dog, or the chance to gaze at the fish bubbling up the tube in the sensory space. Pupils of all ages enjoy the woodland learning environment which increases their appreciation of nature through activities such as building a fire and tree climbing.
- 3.21 Pupils show a good understanding of how to keep themselves healthy and stay safe. Almost all parents and all pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school encourages pupils to learn about and adopt a healthy lifestyle. Pupils are aided in making healthy eating choices by the ready availability of fresh fruit and vegetables at mealtimes. They grow to understand what a healthy lifestyle means in practice, through discussions in PSHE and science lessons. Pupils acquire effective skills to manage stress and maintain positive mental health through various relaxation sessions, seen when pre-prep pupils used breathing exercises to help them feel calm. Pupils very much appreciate the school wellbeing dog, Bonnie, who they say is a reassuring presence around school. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the school teaches them about safety and how to stay safe online. Pupils appreciate the importance of physical fitness and enjoy both the formal sports programme and opportunities for recreation using the facilities provided. In interview, all pupils could name numerous people they could talk to should they have any worries or concerns.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mr William Ibbetson-Price	Reporting inspector
Mrs Catherine Braithwaite	Compliance team inspector (Head, IAPS school)
Mr Jonathon Anderson	Team inspector (Head, IAPS school)