

School inspection report

11 to 13 November 2025

Widford Lodge School

Widford Road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM2 9AN

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. Proprietors and leaders work in close partnership so that the wellbeing needs of pupils are met. Proprietors ensure that school leaders are well trained to carry out their roles and responsibilities. They keep themselves informed on the workings of the school through frequent site visits and detailed updates provided by leaders. They collaborate with leaders to routinely evaluate the effectiveness of the school's development plan, including how it reflects the school's values, to ensure that the school continues to develop in line with its vision. Leaders communicate the school's aims clearly so that pupils understand leaders' objectives and expectations.
2. Leaders in the early years set high expectations for children's personal development and learning outcomes. Adults work closely with leaders to adapt planning when necessary. They plan targeted activities which reflect children's interests and develop their independence. Children make good progress as a result.
3. The well-structured curriculum is thoughtfully planned to cater for pupils' prior attainment and learning needs. An emphasis on the development of pupils' skills in English and mathematics helps to prepare pupils for the next stage of their education. Teachers draw up detailed schemes of work so that pupils make meaningful connections to their wider subject learning. Teachers display good subject knowledge. They provide clear explanations, and question skilfully. Pupils achieve well, particularly in reading and mathematics. They are focused and diligent learners who express their ideas clearly and confidently.
4. Leaders implement a rigorous assessment framework to monitor pupils' attainment over time. They use the assessment data to inform regular subject reviews and adapt schemes of work to support pupils' changing needs.
5. A comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum provides pupils with strategies to form successful friendships and manage their emotions.
6. Pupils are polite, considerate and well behaved. Trusting relationships with leaders and staff reassure pupils that any concerns raised will be heard and quickly addressed. Pupils flourish in the school's nurturing environment.
7. A well-planned programme of physical education (PE) and sporting opportunities develops pupils' fitness and leadership proficiency. Teachers demonstrate techniques clearly and use precise instructions that help pupils to improve their skills.
8. Leaders' planning enables pupils to develop financial awareness to inform their decision-making in their adult lives. Pupils are well prepared to be responsible citizens. They embrace responsibility keenly and show sensitivity to the needs of others in carrying out their leadership roles.
9. Leaders provide opportunities through PSHE and other activities to introduce pupils to some different cultures. However, pupils do not develop an understanding of a wider range of cultural traditions and views so as to fully inform their global perspectives.
10. Leaders implement effective measures to protect pupils from harm. Staff are well trained and knowledgeable in safeguarding procedures. Leaders undertake the required checks before adults begin work at the school and record these suitably in a single central record of appointments (SCR).

However, not all information used for staff checks, particularly Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates, is always withdrawn from school records in line with required timings.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

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

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- strengthen pupils' cultural knowledge and understanding to enhance their global awareness
- ensure that all documents used for staff appointment checks, namely Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificates, are consistently managed in accordance with required timeframes.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders put effective arrangements in place to promote pupils' wellbeing and welfare. Proprietors ensure that leaders are well trained and fulfil their responsibilities well. They receive frequent, detailed updates from leaders to inform their understanding across areas such as pupils' attendance, academic outcomes and behaviour. Proprietors engage actively with the views of staff, pupils and parents.
12. Leaders continually evaluate the curriculum to reflect on how well it meets pupils' evolving needs. They skilfully adapt schemes of work when required. Recent initiatives, including new programmes of study in science and mathematics as well as an extended focus on phonics in Year 3, are designed to extend the depth of academic challenge, provide stimulating activities and increase assessment opportunities. Staff attend regular training courses, for example, around such matters as creativity in outdoor learning. Leaders monitor planning closely and observe lessons as part of learning walks. This reflects leaders' commitment to the continuous development of pupils' learning outcomes and their wellbeing.
13. Leaders in the early years meet regularly with their staff to discuss children's learning and pastoral needs. They encourage staff to reflect on their practice. This allows leaders to design activities and learning environments that closely reflect children's interests and needs. Leaders use their detailed knowledge of the children to adapt their practice when needed. They keep parents updated on a regular basis. As a result, children grow in confidence, notably in their conversational skills and their social interactions with peers and adults.
14. Leaders and proprietors set out a well-defined vision for the school's continuing development. The vision is designed to closely reflect its 'HEART' values which prioritise honesty, empathy, acts of kindness, respect and tenacity. Posters displayed throughout the school remind pupils how to achieve these aims. These are well known and understood by the pupils and widely reinforced through behaviours modelled by staff. Pupils incorporate the school's current focus on empathy into their verbal responses, illustrating their awareness of its meaning and importance.
15. Leaders implement an appropriate system for policy review. Proprietors meet regularly with leaders to scrutinise the detail of key policies and to confirm that policies are suitable and reflect the latest statutory guidance. They check the effectiveness of the policies' implementation through site visits, staff training and discussions.
16. Parents have access to all required information about the school, including its aims, contact details and key policies, through the school's website or on request. Leaders regularly share information with parents during meetings and in written reports to keep them informed about their child's academic progress and personal development.
17. Leaders form beneficial relationships with a range of external agencies, such as children's services, to support pupils' wellbeing. Access to specialist advice helps to inform leaders' decision-making when situations arise.
18. Leaders implement detailed risk assessments, including for specialist facilities, off-site visits, visitors to the school and after-school activities. Risk assessments identify suitable control measures to minimise the potential risks identified.

19. The policy for handling parental complaints is effective. Leaders respond to concerns promptly and deal with them in accordance with the specified timeframes.
20. Leaders and proprietors fulfil their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. The accessibility plan details the school's present commitment to equal opportunities for pupils and outlines future planning for accessibility. Adaptations, including specialist classroom resources, use of ground floor classrooms and handrails, enable all pupils equal access to the curriculum, school documentation and the physical environment.

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

21. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders have designed a well-structured curriculum that gives pupils secure foundations in English and mathematics alongside opportunities in creative, scientific and technological subjects. Pupils develop the relevant skills and knowledge for the next stage of their education. Pupils routinely secure places at a range of selective senior schools.
23. Leaders review schemes of work regularly and monitor planning vigilantly to ensure that pupils' knowledge is developed methodically. They plan topics carefully to engage pupils' interest and reinforce key learning points to help them make connections across different subjects. For example, music lessons for the younger pupils introduce them to conducting classical music, simultaneously developing their handwriting fluency as they match arm movements to patterns displayed on a screen.
24. Pupils make good progress from their starting points, notably in mathematics and reading. A new mathematics scheme provides pupils with additional challenge and a focus on subject-specific terminology. A school-wide focus on developing pupils' comprehension skills has led to improved understanding across fiction and non-fiction passages.
25. Lessons are well planned to take into account pupils' prior attainment and learning needs. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and make effective use of questioning and varied resources to deepen pupils' knowledge and understanding. For example, in geography lessons older pupils compare map representations with films that depict the same places in real life. Younger pupils use tablet devices confidently when researching topics such as Arctic animals. Pupils achieve well as a result.
26. Teachers create a purposeful learning environment where pupils collaborate effectively with their peers and listen respectfully to their views. Pupils become curious and attentive learners. They engage actively in discussions and offer well-reasoned responses.
27. Leaders implement extensive assessment systems to track pupils' attainment over time. They conduct meticulous analysis of assessment data and adapt lesson planning accordingly. For example, teachers use information at the start and end of topics to provide pupils with targeted feedback and address misconceptions. Leaders use progress books successfully so that pupils reflect on their learning over time. For example, pupils compare samples of their writing from previous years to their current work and identify improvements they have made.
28. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress from their starting points, notably between Years 4 and 6 as their confidence grows. Leaders identify pupils' needs early and use assessment data to arrange in-class and individual support sessions focusing on reading, writing and mathematics. They use specialist classroom resources and activities, including dance and stories, to nurture pupils' emotional wellbeing.
29. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive targeted support as required, including access to resources such as word banks and sentence builders. Teachers prioritise clear explanations and repetition of key words and phrases so that pupils develop their understanding and fluency in English.

30. Adults in the early years use questioning and sentence modelling successfully to engage children in purposeful conversation. They share examples drawn from everyday life to encourage children to contribute their own ideas. For example, children in Nursery enthusiastically select from a restaurant menu. Others add detail when describing their construction of model cars. Children quickly develop their confidence in communication. Adults provide stimulating activities during mathematics lessons and other activities to reinforce children's number recognition and sequencing skills. Children achieve well as a result. For example, in Reception children pretend to be space rockets, confidently counting backwards as they prepare for launch. They challenge themselves to perform star jumps to match numbers on dice.

31. Leaders arrange after-school clubs and off-site visits to enhance pupils' wider learning. For example, dodgeball activities help to improve pupils' throwing and catching skills. Recent trips to farms, zoos and gardens complement pupils' classroom-based learning about animals, rocks and soils.

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

32. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

33. Leaders encourage pupils' spiritual wellbeing through personal reflection time in assemblies and activities that draw on nature, including feeding the chickens and spending time with the school dog. Pupils value their engagement in music. They listen attentively and participate enthusiastically. Regular opportunities to perform in assembly increase pupils' self-worth and boost their confidence.

34. Regular PE and games sessions enable pupils to keep fit and active. Teachers provide detailed explanations and skilful modelling of techniques so that pupils improve their skills and agility. For example, precise instructions for body positioning enable older pupils to steady their landings in gymnastics and children in early years to crawl safely and correctly through equipment. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' behaviour and outcomes. Planning is designed to enhance pupils' confidence through an emphasis on their leadership skills alongside technical and tactical improvement. Leaders regularly review activities to reflect pupils' interests and needs. For example, table tennis sessions have been added and the recent inclusion of team games for Reception children introduces them to collaborative play in readiness for the future.

35. Children in the early years increase their physical development through regular PE lessons and outdoor activities. Frequent use of woodland and playground areas supports children's development in co-ordination and agility. Children increase their strength when climbing trees. They use scooters confidently and safely, varying their body positions for balance. Activities such as drawing circles, jigsaws and tracing straight lines develop children's fine motor skills and co-ordination.

36. An appropriate PSHE curriculum, including topics on goals, healthy lifestyles and coping under pressure, provides pupils with practical strategies and increases their self-understanding. A suitable programme of relationships and sex education (RSE) teaches older pupils about puberty, including discussions about growth spurts, irritability and fatigue. A recent update to the policy has been shared with parents. Information on the different topics has been provided so that parents can support their child at home.

37. The behaviour strategy offers pupils clear guidance. Sanctions are applied fairly if necessary. Pupils have a secure understanding of procedures when behaviour falls below the school's high standards. They respond positively to earning privileges, for example, an early lunch pass. Staff create a nurturing environment where pupils are relaxed and happy, trusting that teachers will follow up when any concerns are shared. Pupils are courteous, well behaved and respectful in their daily interactions with staff and peers. They are sensitive to the differences and needs of others and keenly celebrate each other's successes. Leaders offer pupils strategies for identifying and reporting bullying behaviours through assemblies and PSHE. Bullying seldom occurs and leaders address situations which arise swiftly.

38. Supervision is effective and teachers intervene quickly to support pupils when needed. An appropriate ratio of adults to children is consistently maintained in the early years.

39. Leaders establish a positive culture regarding pupils' attendance and monitor pupils' absence closely. Pupils understand the impact of irregular attendance on their education. Leaders maintain admission and attendance registers in accordance with statutory guidance. They inform the local authority when pupils leave or join the school at non-standard transition points.

40. Thorough safety checks are routinely carried out and monitored by proprietors and leaders and facilities are well maintained. Fire evacuation routes and signage are clearly marked. Regular fire drills take place to assess the effectiveness of procedures in the event of fire.
41. The school caters suitably for pupils' medical needs. Leaders take well-stocked first aid kits to off-site visits. Staff are well trained in paediatric first aid and maintain detailed first aid records. Medication is stored securely.
42. Children's nurturing relationships with adults help to enhance their personal development. Children can explain what makes them happy and recognise kind acts. Adults encourage children to share their feelings and to listen to others. They grow in self-confidence as a result.

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. A suitable PSHE curriculum develops pupils' early financial awareness. Younger pupils practise using coins for financial transactions and learn to distinguish between financial need and want. Leaders have recently reviewed the economic scheme of work for older pupils. Topics, including dangers of online gambling, salaries linked to specific occupations and ethical spending, broaden pupils' knowledge in readiness for their decision-making as adults. Pupils reflect maturely on the importance of considering quality and price before making a purchase.
45. Leaders emphasise the importance of mutual respect through PSHE lessons and assemblies which highlight key themes around celebrating difference. They provide opportunities for pupils to discuss issues, including racism and misogyny, during regular viewings of current affairs programmes. In a whole-school assembly, leaders explain how empathy enables pupils to consider perspectives of different groups within society. An art display illustrating neurodiverse brains celebrates the varying ways individuals think and learn. These activities help pupils to value their own individuality and respect others' views.
46. Leaders introduce pupils to various cultures during PSHE lessons, languages day and different subjects. Pupils learn about Spanish festivals and celebrate Diwali and Chinese New Year. A discussion about the Windrush generation provides pupils with insight into experiences of different groups of people historically. However, opportunities for pupils to gain a broader understanding of cultural traditions, customs and perspectives beyond their own experiences are less well developed. This reduces the possibility for pupils to develop a well-informed world view.
47. Pupils are well prepared for their transition to senior school. Teachers support pupils' preparation through specialist entrance examination guidance and interview practice.
48. Leaders develop pupils' sense of right and wrong effectively. Subject leaders plan for pupils to debate moral principles, including fairness and honesty. For example, questions about why humans should act morally, or whether pupils would want a landfill site located close to their home encourage pupils to reflect on how their decisions affect society and the environment.
49. Pupils respond positively to the leadership positions available to them. Roles including prefects, sports captains, wellbeing mentors and digital leaders prepare pupils for their wider responsibilities to others. Older pupils act as reading partners to children in early years and accompany them to the theatre. School councillors treat their roles seriously in representing the views of their peers. They propose pupils' suggestions, including lunch menus and film night snacks, to senior leaders to ensure that pupils' views are heard.
50. Pupils engage with the local community, for example they sing carols at a residential care home and invite residents to afternoon tea. They create Christmas cards to distribute locally. Pupils undertake fundraising activities, providing clothes donations to a children's charity and running stalls in support of endangered animals. Pupils develop greater empathy when recognising how their contributions positively impact the lives of others.

51. Pupils learn the importance of the systems that support a fair and democratic society. Older pupils experience how democratic systems work by voting for school councillors. They hold mock general elections where they form political parties and participate in a leadership debate.
52. Planned activities for children in the early years successfully promote their social development. Children take turns as classroom and lunchtime helpers. Adults act as positive role models so that children develop successful friendships. They encourage children to greet their friends on arrival in school and engage them in conversation. Routines, such as registering their arrival, and role-play activities like booking doctors' appointments, enable children to develop independence and to understand behaviour expectations for their future lives.

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

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

Safeguarding

54. Proprietors maintain close oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements, including those for children in the early years. They carry out an annual review to verify that the safeguarding policy reflects the latest statutory guidance. Proprietors attend staff safeguarding briefings, eat lunch with pupils and talk with staff to reassure themselves that measures to promote and safeguard pupils' welfare are understood and implemented effectively.
55. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are suitably trained to carry out their roles. There are comprehensive arrangements to safeguard pupils from harm and neglect. Leaders collaborate purposefully with a range of specialist agencies, including children's services and the police, to seek advice and make prompt referrals when needed. They maintain thorough and confidential records, monitoring them to identify any emerging patterns. Leaders manage any incidents that do occur effectively and reflect on any lessons that can be learnt to improve their practice further.
56. Adults throughout the school are knowledgeable about the school's safeguarding procedures, including processes for reporting concerns about adults working with children. They receive regular training updates, including in the 'Prevent' duty with regard to the dangers of radicalisation. A detailed induction programme introduces new staff to safeguarding protocols, including expectations of staff behaviour and safe use of technology.
57. Positive and trusting relationships between pupils and staff enable pupils' concerns to be heard and addressed. Leaders, teachers and specialist wellbeing staff use their detailed knowledge of the pupils to identify any changes in pupils' behaviour. They act quickly and sensitively to offer support when needed.
58. Leaders oversee appropriate systems for filtering and monitoring internet use and respond to any breaches thoroughly. Pupils demonstrate a clear understanding of how to keep themselves safe online, both at home and in school. They explain the importance of using trusted sources, protecting personal information and being alert to misinformation.
59. All required safer recruitment checks are carried out before adults start working at the school and are recorded in the SCR. However, not all records of staff checks, specifically copies of DBS certificates, are consistently removed from staff files within the required timeframe. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

60. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Widford Lodge School
Department for Education number	881/6005
Address	Widford Lodge School Widford Road Chelmsford Essex CM2 9AN
Phone number	01245 352581
Email address	admin@widfordlodge.co.uk
Website	https://widfordlodge.co.uk
Proprietor	Mrs Louise Gear
Chair	Mrs Louise Gear
Headteacher	Miss Michelle Cole
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	175
Date of previous inspection	22 to 24 November 2022

Information about the school

61. Widford Lodge School is a co-educational day school located on the outskirts of Chelmsford, Essex. The school is a limited company, governed by a board of directors, one of whom is the sole proprietor.
62. There are 39 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery class and a Reception class.
63. The school has identified 14 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
64. The school has identified a very small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language.
65. The school states its aims are to educate its pupils through a broad and balanced curriculum so that they can meet the challenges of the wider world. It seeks to educate children of all abilities in a purposeful, safe and secure environment where emphasis is placed on the traditional values of honesty, courtesy and respect of self and others.

Inspection details

Inspection dates	11 to 13 November 2025
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66. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

67. 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 proprietor
- 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.

68. 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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