

School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

Sacred Heart School

Mayfield Lane

Durgates

Wadhurst

TN5 6DQ

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. Leaders ensure that the Catholic ethos permeates school life. They develop warm and caring relationships with the pupils. They value every member of the school community by recognising and celebrating their individual achievements. This leads to an atmosphere of inclusion within the clearly articulated Catholic values of the school.
2. Governance and leadership are effective. They have a shared vision which they enact well together. They place high priority on promoting pupils' wellbeing to enable them to feel calm, safe and emotionally resilient. As a result, pupils feel confident and ready to make the most of the range of educational opportunities provided at school.
3. Leaders have designed, and implement, a broad and ambitious curriculum that enables pupils to develop their potential and make good progress from their starting points. Pupils are well prepared for entry to secondary schools and achieve a range of scholarships in this process.
4. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' academic development. They use a range of engaging teaching methods so that pupils enjoy their learning. Teachers use their in-depth knowledge of pupils to provide effective support for individual pupils. This includes pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and, typically, pupils who have higher prior attainment. However, in some lessons, teaching does not always challenge and stretch pupils to deepen their understanding as much as possible.
5. Leaders ensure that academic development is underpinned by effective measures to support pupils' pastoral wellbeing. Through personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education lessons and assemblies, they ensure that pupils learn how to express and regulate their own emotions so that they feel ready to learn. Pupils are articulate about how strategies such as deep breathing exercises help them to remain calm. Leaders have established a variety of support mechanisms, such as wellbeing drop-in sessions and themed zones around the school, to support pupils' emotional wellbeing.
6. Leaders and teachers are effective at promoting and modelling behaviour expectations. This leads to pupils behaving with kindness and respect. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to treat each other considerately and show tolerance and inclusion in their interactions.
7. Pupils develop confidence in the way that their opinions are heard and valued through active involvement in decision-making groups, such as school council. Leaders take pupils' opinions into account when shaping the operation of daily life at school.
8. Leaders successfully promote pupils' understanding of service. Pupils participate in, and often lead, charitable endeavours. Older pupils play a key role in mentoring younger children at school. This helps pupils to develop their empathy towards others and reflects the school's Catholic ethos of sharing God's love with others.
9. Leaders are effective at fulfilling safeguarding requirements. Thorough safeguarding training for staff and governors equips them with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute actively to the school's robust safeguarding culture. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of safeguarding and know how to seek help should the need arise.

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 teaching in all subjects and year groups consistently challenges and stretches pupils to deepen their understanding as much as possible.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors support leaders to implement the school's Catholic ethos and to place pupils' wellbeing at the heart of their practice and decision making. Leaders develop nurturing relationships with pupils so that pupils feel valued and connected to school. They recognise each pupil as an individual which positively impacts pupils' self-worth, confidence and readiness to learn.
11. Governors have effective oversight of the school. They visit regularly to provide support and challenge for leaders. This enables governors and leaders to work well together and to adopt a collaborative approach towards evaluation and development planning. Their shared vision encompasses aspiration for the pupils' academic development while maintaining a key focus on pupils' wellbeing. They consider the views of staff, pupils and parents in the process of evaluation so that they can be responsive to their needs, such as by introducing Spanish into the curriculum and working with pupils to consider a design for school backpacks.
12. Leaders have suitable knowledge, skills and understanding to fulfil their roles effectively. They attend relevant professional development opportunities to enhance their knowledge and keep up to date with new guidance. They monitor and evaluate their performance to provide reassurance that their actions are having a positive impact. Leaders' effective self-evaluation ensures that the Standards are consistently met.
13. Leaders have a robust approach to risk assessment. They implement and monitor detailed risk assessments that consider how to mitigate a variety of risks, including those that are harder to spot. Risk assessments include those related to the school site, such as ensuring pupils' safety when parents are dropping off and collecting their children from the car park, and those related to educational visits to ensure that pupils are safe when they leave the school site. Risk assessment at school is underpinned by the governors' risk management plan. Governors have a dynamic approach to reviewing a variety of risks that could impact the school's work, with consideration given to how to reduce and manage these risks.
14. Leaders use relevant statutory guidance to inform suitable policies and procedures. All required policies and documentation are provided on the school's website for current and prospective parents. Leaders provide parents with detailed written reports about their child's progress and promote open communication between parents and teachers, with regular opportunities for them to discuss how their child is progressing.
15. Leaders have drawn up a complaints policy with suitable timescales for complaints to be managed informally as well as formally. They implement the policy well and have an open approach to considering if they can improve their practice further as a result of resolving complaints. Governors maintain suitable oversight of leaders' management of the complaints policy and know their role should the need arise for them to be involved.
16. Leaders foster appropriate links with external agencies to promote pupils' wellbeing. This includes effective partnerships with local safeguarding partners and the local authority about matters such as child protection and attendance.
17. Leaders are committed to providing an inclusive environment for all pupils. They ensure that the school fulfils the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and that all pupils are treated fairly and with

respect. Leaders implement a detailed and suitable accessibility plan which outlines their work to provide equal access for all pupils without discrimination.

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

18. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

19. The curriculum comprises a wide range of subjects so that pupils experience a holistic education. As well as studying the core subjects, pupils develop their knowledge of languages in Spanish, French and Latin. They gain understanding of the world around them in the present and past in their humanities lessons. They acquire technological skills within the computing curriculum, and they develop their aesthetic appreciation through art and music. Creative and imaginative skills are further enhanced through 'creative flow' lessons and the use of open-ended class and homework tasks when appropriate. Leaders ensure that the curriculum is flexible so that they can consider the needs and aptitudes of each cohort and adapt the curriculum accordingly.
20. Teachers demonstrate comprehensive subject knowledge when planning and teaching lessons. They ensure that new learning is introduced incrementally, starting with establishing firm foundations in the early years to enabling pupils to progress rapidly with their learning as they advance through the school. This leads to pupils successfully developing their knowledge, skills and understanding. Typically, lessons involve pupils being stretched to challenge their thinking and deepen their understanding as fully as possible. This is particularly the case within mathematics lessons and when pupils are writing to a high standard. However, this level of stretch and challenge is not consistently the case in all subjects and year groups.
21. Teachers plan interesting lessons that motivate pupils to work hard and persevere. There is an overall atmosphere of calm, purposeful learning in lessons, with high levels of independence. Pupils are competent at accessing resources independently to support their learning. Pupils also have a well-developed understanding of how they can improve their own learning. This is as a result of the constructive feedback they receive from teachers and the personalised targets that inform them how to achieve further.
22. Leaders involve teachers in collecting and analysing assessment data that enables them to monitor and evaluate the progress of different groups of pupils. They use the assessment framework to make sure that pupils make good progress in their learning. Leaders use data effectively to identify if any pupils need additional support and how teaching might meet these individual needs.
23. Leaders ensure that staff who support pupils who have SEND have suitable knowledge and experience. They are effective at supporting pupils with a variety of learning needs and provide a nurturing approach in their support. This includes trialling different resources and strategies to find those that are most useful for individual pupils and providing regular check-in sessions for pupils who need help with regulating their emotions. Leaders and staff carefully monitor pupils who have SEND to ensure that they make good progress. All staff communicate effectively to ensure that pupils who have SEND have their needs met in class through extra support, additional resources or specific activities designed to meet their requirements.
24. Leaders assess the English language skills and acquisition of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). When required, they provide support to enable these pupils to fully access the curriculum and improve their fluency skills.
25. Teachers in the early years plan topics based on the needs and interests of the children and ensure that children have access to a wide range of activities. Structured activities led by teachers, enhanced by independent play activities, lead to children making progress in developing their skills

and confidence in relation to their prior levels of attainment. Teachers encourage children to develop their spoken language skills through discussions and answering carefully the teachers' questions. This enables children to speak articulately, particularly when talking about their emotions and needs. Children develop their skills in literacy when learning about letters and sounds and applying this knowledge to reading and writing simple, and then more extended, sentences.

26. Pupils have access to a wide range of clubs outside of teaching time. These enable them to acquire new skills in enjoyable ways, such as learning sign language and taking part in bushcraft activities, or to deepen their understanding in curriculum areas such as sport, music and art.

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

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

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

28. The PSHE programme is effective in helping pupils to develop their physical, mental and emotional health. It covers topics such as relationships education and how to keep safe and healthy. Pupils learn about changes they will experience in their bodies as they get older. They develop a mature awareness of managing their own wellbeing through activities such as mindfulness. Starting in the early years, children and pupils learn how to identify and regulate their emotions. These activities develop the pupils' self-knowledge and self-esteem as they become aware of their own needs and more proficient at managing these needs. The relationships education component of the PSHE programme reflects the requirements of current statutory guidance.
29. High quality teaching in physical education (PE) lessons leads to pupils developing their fitness and co-ordination skills. Through well-planned lessons in PE and swimming, pupils participate with enthusiasm in a range of competitive and non-competitive sports and activities. Alongside the PE curriculum, children in the early years experience a variety of activities to develop and enhance their gross and fine motor skills, which then supports their development of handwriting skills.
30. Pupils develop their understanding of diversity and inclusion by learning about a range of religions and cultures. Within the religious education (RE) programme, pupils study diverse faiths, such as Judaism and Islam, so that they can develop their awareness of and respect for different people's beliefs. The Catholic teaching and ethos of the school enable pupils to develop their spiritual and moral understanding. Well-structured RE lessons and assemblies based on liturgical themes teach pupils to be kind and loving towards each other, based on the teachings of the Bible. Pupils consider suitable themes, such as why God loves everyone and why people pray. This develops their ability to show sympathy and empathy to people within their own lives and display a nurturing attitude towards others.
31. Leaders ensure that there are many ways that pupils can express their views about school. This takes place through a variety of pupil-led groups. For example, wellbeing ambassadors suggested the idea of having a quiet indoor space for pupils at playtimes. This has been established and is being accessed by a variety of pupils who appreciate having the choice of a quieter play time experience.
32. All Year 6 pupils have a position of responsibility, either through membership of one of the pupil-led groups or with individual roles, such as being a digital leader or a 'buddy' for a child in Reception. Older pupils help the younger pupils and children, such as when assisting them at lunchtimes or accompanying them during a recent Lent walk for charity. These activities develop pupils' self-esteem through being role models for younger pupils and feeling an integral part of school life.
33. Pupils are kind and respectful in their interactions with others, within an atmosphere of ensuring that everyone feels valued and included. Staff are effective role models for the pupils when demonstrating how to show consideration to others and in setting high expectations for pupils' behaviour. Pupils recently agreed on, and signed, a 'behaviour pledge' that articulates shared values for how they should behave as members of their caring school community. When required, leaders and staff help pupils to reflect on their behaviour choices with an emphasis on forgiveness and reconciliation, in keeping with the school's ethos.

34. Leaders have an effective anti-bullying strategy which they reinforce through assemblies and PSHE lessons. Bullying is well understood by pupils, and they know how to deal with it. This includes knowing that they need to tell an adult when being an 'upstander not a bystander'. Bullying is rare but is effectively resolved when it does arise.
35. Robust health and safety procedures ensure that the site is secure and well maintained. Leaders commission external reviews, such as a fire risk assessment, and address and record all actions in a timely manner. Pupils take part in regular fire and lockdown drills so that they know what to do in the case of an emergency. Pupils are well supervised throughout the school day, including at breaktimes and when being collected at the end of the school day. They have access to qualified first aiders if they are unwell or injured. This includes a suitable number of paediatric first aiders for children in the early years.
36. Admission and attendance registers are maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders adopt a proactive and nurturing approach in managing any concerns about attendance. They inform the local authority about any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.

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

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

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

38. Leaders are effective in developing the pupils' social skills. The PSHE programme enables pupils to understand how to relate successfully to others and how to resolve any potential conflicts independently. This leads to positive and respectful interactions with their peers, not just in their own year group but across year groups. Pupils enjoy having contact with those in different year groups and this leads to an enhanced sense of social responsibility for their school community.
39. The curriculum enables pupils to develop their financial literacy. In the early years, children play with pretend money, such as in their 'garden centre' role-play area. Within the mathematics curriculum, pupils learn how to calculate different sums of money. In PSHE lessons, pupils learn about different payment methods and how to budget. Pupils in Year 6 consider financial inequalities and link this to the idea of charitable giving. This concept is further explored in a practical way during 'Number Day' where pupils are given unequal amounts of money to spend on cakes in order to explore how it feels to have either too much or too little money and how this can help them think about displaying charitable service to others.
40. Pupils engage meaningfully with the local community. This is through activities such as supporting local care homes and providing food donations to local food banks and other local and global charities. Such engagement enables pupils to develop empathy for the wider community, contribute positively and increase their understanding of the importance of service to others.
41. The school provides pupils with opportunities to learn about cultural events, such as Thanksgiving and Australia Day, often through their 'General Knowledge homework', so that pupils can develop their knowledge of diverse cultures. The PSHE curriculum develops pupils' understanding of why discrimination and prejudice are not acceptable. Pupils learn about different disabilities in assemblies and consider learning needs during events such as 'neurodiversity week'. Such experiences help the pupils to reflect on the value of diversity and why equity and inclusion are both important at school and in the community beyond.
42. The PSHE curriculum prepares pupils for life in British society effectively, including by teaching them about rights and responsibilities. Pupils learn about democracy when discussing political elections nationally and globally. Leaders ensure that balanced views are presented during such discussions. Pupils develop their understanding of democracy in practical ways when carrying out elections at school, such as voting for members of school council. Topics about ethical issues, such as the relationship between crime and punishment and how these have changed through the ages, enable pupils to reflect on how these areas are managed in today's society and why it is important to understand the difference between right and wrong. Pupils build on this understanding when engaging in discussions about ethical themes, such as considering if making a bad choice of behaviour makes you a 'bad person'.
43. Pupils are well prepared for transitions in their education. Pupils attend taster sessions in their next year's class, so that they can feel comfortable and confident about the year ahead. Year 6 pupils attend transition lessons for secondary school, to develop awareness and resilience for any emotional and social changes they may experience as they move to their next schools. The curriculum prepares pupils thoroughly for the process of applying and transferring to secondary school, with many scholarships gained during these applications.

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

44. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

45. The safeguarding team has thorough knowledge to enable them to be effective in their roles. They know how to report concerns and apply attention to detail when working with external agencies to protect pupils from harm. They have a thorough understanding of safeguarding protocols and practices in their own policies and those required by current statutory guidance. In this way, pupils benefit from a well-informed staff who consistently act in their best interests. Pupils are knowledgeable about who are the members of the safeguarding team and are confident that they could approach them, or any other adult at school, if they have a concern.
46. The safeguarding team ensures that all staff, including governors, receive effective safeguarding training and regular updates. This enables them to understand their role in supporting the school's robust safeguarding culture and ensuring that any safeguarding concerns receive a suitable response. Staff understand how to report and record any concerns about pupils. Staff also have an appropriate awareness of the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing procedures and how to record and report low-level or more serious concerns about adults working with children.
47. The online filtering and monitoring systems are robust and effective Measures to teach pupils how to keep safe online include online safety lessons in computing and PSHE lessons, and themed activities such as 'safer internet day'. The pupil digital leaders are active in the process of educating other pupils through activities such as leading safer internet assemblies and launching a poster competition about the topic.
48. Leaders have secure knowledge of necessary safer recruitment procedures. They ensure that all required pre-employment and safeguarding checks are carried out on adults before they commence working at the school. These checks are then recorded accurately in a single central record of appointments. This ensures that adults at the school are suitable to work with children.
49. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements, including the safer recruitment procedures. Their training is up to date and provides them with suitable knowledge and understanding of safeguarding. The designated safeguarding governor visits the school regularly to meet with leaders to ensure that the safeguarding policies and procedures are implemented effectively.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

50. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Sacred Heart School
Department for Education number	845/6020
Registered charity number	252878
Address	Sacred Heart School Mayfield Lane Durgates Wadhurst TN5 6DQ
Phone number	01892 783414
Email address	admin@sacredheartwadhurst.org.uk
Website	www.sacredheartwadhurst.org.uk
Proprietor	Governing Body of Sacred Heart School
Chair	Mrs Hilary Blake
Headteacher	Mrs Johanna Collyer
Age range	2 to 11
Number of pupils	143
Date of previous inspection	1 to 4 March 2022

Information about the school

51. Sacred Heart School is an independent co-educational Catholic day school located in Wadhurst, East Sussex. It was established in 1938 by the Sisters of the Order of Notre Dame to provide an education to the children of local Catholic families. Pupils, including children in the early years are accommodated in a range of buildings in close proximity to each other. The school is governed by the Arundel and Brighton Diocesan Trust. Since the previous inspection, the trust has appointed a new chair of governors, who took up her role in September 2024.
52. There are 39 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class.
53. The school has identified 41 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
54. The school has identified English as an additional language for eight pupils.
55. The school states its aims are to provide a happy, safe and secure environment in which every child is encouraged to achieve their full potential, within an inclusive community which is centred on Christ's teachings and shared Gospel values, and through a broad, balanced and relevant curriculum that promotes the spiritual, moral, emotional and physical development of each child. The school intends to recognise the unique gifts of each child and aims to instil a strong sense of self-worth by celebrating personal achievements and strengths.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 March 2025

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

57. 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.

58. 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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