

School inspection report

3 to 5 February 2026

Dorset House School

The Manor
Church Lane
Bury
Pulborough
RH20 1PB

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 fulfil their responsibilities to promote pupils' wellbeing effectively. Governors are rigorous in their oversight of the implementation of school policies so that pupils' welfare is promoted consistently. Leaders manage potential risks to pupils' health and safety competently.
2. Pupils experience a suitably broad and balanced curriculum. Their educational experience is enhanced by an extensive extra-curricular programme including clubs, performances in music and drama, sports fixtures, educational visits and visiting speakers.
3. Staff in the early years provide teaching that builds effectively upon individual children's needs and interests and enables them to make good progress. Children flourish in the early years as a result of the culture of care within the school which actively promotes their wellbeing.
4. Pupils typically make good progress in their work due to the expertise and enthusiasm of the teaching they receive in lessons. However, teachers provide pupils with inconsistent guidance and feedback, including through marking. This means gaps in pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are not being consistently identified or addressed effectively.
5. Pupils develop high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. Leaders reinforce the school's core values in lessons, breaktimes and assemblies. Older pupils act as positive role models and set a consistently appropriate example to their younger peers.
6. Leaders and staff effectively promote boarders' emotional wellbeing due to their vigilance, dedication and consistent care. Leaders have arranged for an appropriate independent person to be available for boarders, if required. However, boarders are not provided with sufficiently clear information informing them how to contact the independent person. Leaders addressed this oversight during the inspection.
7. The premises and daytime and boarding accommodation are maintained to a high standard. The premises provide suitable facilities, including for the provision of medication and first aid.
8. The school fosters a culture of tolerance and understanding towards people representing diverse cultures and backgrounds. Pupils deepen their awareness of intolerance and the consequences of discriminatory actions through discussions in personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons and the wider curriculum.
9. The school prepares pupils thoroughly for the next stages of their lives. Leaders support pupils' transition between year groups effectively and prepare pupils well to move to their chosen senior schools. Pupils understand the value of prudent financial management and explore different career paths they might follow. They support their school community in a variety of ways, such as through participating in pupil forums or taking on positions of responsibility as prefects.
10. Safeguarding arrangements are thorough. Leaders and staff receive suitable training to enable them to respond to safeguarding issues appropriately. The safeguarding team access timely advice and support from relevant external agencies, when required. Pupils have effective mechanisms for reporting any concerns they may have. Leaders respond promptly to any concerns raised by pupils.

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:

- provide clear information to boarders so that they can easily contact the independent person, if required
- ensure that teachers' feedback to pupils, including through marking, consistently provides pupils with clear guidance about the steps they should take to improve their work.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing and ensure this is central to the school's aims and values. Pupils' wellbeing is promoted through a highly individualised understanding of each pupil's academic, pastoral and emotional needs.
12. Senior leaders and governors work closely together to identify the school's strengths and areas for development. Leaders consider the views of pupils, parents and staff when revising the school's development plan. Leaders enable pupils to share their ideas and views in a variety of forums, such as through the school council. This results in positive improvements to pupils' school experiences, such as adjusting the catering arrangements following discussions with school council members.
13. Leaders in the early years provide a stimulating and varied curriculum for children. They ensure that children's progress is carefully assessed and monitored. Leaders communicate regularly with parents and staff so that children's individual needs are supported effectively.
14. Governors provide leaders with appropriate support and challenge. They visit the school to evaluate how effectively leaders and staff implement the school's policies and procedures and to assure themselves that the Standards are met. Leaders access advice from external agencies appropriately, particularly to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and when addressing safeguarding concerns.
15. The school's approach to managing risk is effective. Leaders implement appropriate risk assessments that carefully consider areas of higher risk on the school premises and activities undertaken off site. Leaders' considerable knowledge of pupils enables them to mitigate risks that are specific to pupils' individual circumstances.
16. Boarders develop and progress well due to the committed leadership of the boarding staff. Boarding staff receive appropriate training in order to be able to fulfil their responsibilities. Leaders ensure that boarding accommodation is secure. Boarders enjoy the activities available to them and are well looked after by caring, supportive staff.
17. Parents are provided with required information, including policies and previous inspection reports, through the school's website. Parents receive written reports that include relevant information about their child's progress and learning. The school provides appropriate information to external agencies, when required. For example, they inform the local authority appropriately about pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including financial information required as part of the annual review. Leaders also inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
18. The school's complaints policy outlines appropriate procedures for parents to follow should they wish to submit a complaint. The policy is rigorously adhered to whenever parents raise an issue. Leaders encourage parents to raise concerns promptly and proactively work with them to understand their concerns.
19. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. Leaders successfully promote equality of opportunity at the school. They seek to identify ways in which the site and school curriculum can be made more accessible to pupils, including through the implementation of a suitable accessibility plan.

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

20. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The school provides a well-balanced, engaging curriculum that is matched appropriately to pupils' abilities and includes a suitable breadth of subjects. Leaders and managers work effectively together to identify opportunities to link learning, enabling pupils to apply their knowledge across subject areas. Pupils typically acquire secure knowledge and skills and apply what they learn confidently, such as when they undertake science experiments, solve mathematical problems and complete writing tasks. Pupils' speaking and listening skills are well developed due to the many collaborative activities they undertake and the regular opportunities to participate in performances. For instance, pupils learn challenging poems from memory and perform them to an audience. Pupils learn about inclusion and respect through different subjects, such as when discussing different kinds of families in PSHE lessons.
22. Teaching is well planned, structured and sets clear routines and expectations. Staff ask probing questions that help and support pupils to deepen their thinking and language development. Effective teaching enables pupils to make good progress across all subjects. Staff use an appropriate and varied range of teaching methods to deliver clear lesson objectives. Teachers deploy a range of resources to support pupils' learning and help them to make progress. Older pupils, for example, develop their ability to think for themselves and synthesise information from several sources when undertaking independent research projects. Pupils use digital devices competently which support them to achieve high standards in French. Enthusiastic and expert teaching helps pupils to widen their knowledge and skills in the visual arts and physical education (PE). Pupils typically gain places at senior schools with competitive entry requirements.
23. Planning is often informed by suitable assessment and builds on pupils' prior knowledge, ensuring progression and appropriate challenge for pupils. For instance, the effective tracking of children's acquisition of early reading skills in the pre-prep enables staff to identify starting points, monitor progress and inform future planning. However, the quality of teachers' feedback to older pupils about their work, including through marking, varies in its consistency across subjects and year groups. As a result, pupils are not always provided with sufficiently clear guidance that informs them how they can improve their knowledge, skills and understanding.
24. Children in the early years make good progress from their starting points across all areas of their learning. Teachers plan lessons carefully, use resources effectively and provide children with individual support. Early years' staff are effective in supporting the development of children's communication skills due to their skilful use of questions and the consistent reinforcement of phonics skills across different areas of learning.
25. Leaders identify the individual needs of pupils who have SEND and cater for them effectively, enabling them to make good progress. Teachers use a range of adapted resources and strategies, if required, to support these pupils carefully and consistently. For example, pupils are provided with writing slopes, pencil grips and cushions adapted to enhance pupils' concentration.
26. Pupils' interest in learning is enhanced through the school's wider educational programme. They participate in a range of clubs, including archaeology, chess, drama and fencing, building their skills in these areas as they do so. Pupils attending art enrichment sessions produce high-quality work because of teachers' expertise and the opportunities they are given to develop their own ideas. In information and communication technology (ICT) enrichment sessions, pupils make good progress in

their understanding of how to code effectively due to challenging questions asked by teachers. Boarders are provided with an appropriate range of recreational activities. The programme of educational visits and residential field trips enriches pupils' interest in learning and develops their knowledge and skills.

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. Pupils develop high levels of emotional wellbeing and self-esteem as a result of the effective promotion of the school's values and the encouraging and supportive relationships between pupils and staff. Children in the early years are well supported and cared for by staff which enables them to settle quickly at school. Pupils' responsible behaviour and achievements are regularly celebrated in assemblies and school publications which contributes towards their secure self-esteem and confidence.
29. Pupils' boarding experience is positive due to the kindness and empathy they receive from staff which supports their high levels of wellbeing. Boarding prefects and 'dorm reps' contribute towards the positive wellbeing of their fellow boarders, for instance by organising highly anticipated termly boarding parties. Boarders' growing independence is supported by the requirement for pupils to take responsibility for their laundry and the tidiness of their rooms. Boarders have appropriate access to food and snacks and suitable arrangements for storing their personal items.
30. Pupils' self-knowledge and mental health is supported effectively by teachers' skilful delivery of an age-appropriate PSHE programme. In addition to the well-structured scheme of work, PSHE lessons are adapted, when required, to address pupils' particular needs and linked effectively to other subject areas, such as science and ICT. Teaching across a range of subjects develops pupils' understanding of why discrimination against people based on their faith, race, sex or other aspects of their identity, appearance or background is unacceptable. As a result, pupils demonstrate high levels of respect and tolerance towards others. Children in the early years are effectively supported in learning how to regulate their emotions. The emotional wellbeing of pupils in Years 5 and 6 is enhanced through regular opportunities to practise mindfulness and meditation.
31. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme reflects current statutory guidance. Staff who teach the RSE curriculum receive appropriate training to deliver lessons effectively. The programme is relevant to pupils' needs and enables them to gain a well-developed understanding of factors that contribute towards healthy relationships. Older pupils receive suitable guidance and explore topics such as the onset of puberty, adolescence and consent.
32. The school promotes pupils' spiritual and moral understanding effectively. The theology and philosophy (TaP) programme teaches pupils about different world faiths which are explored further during talks delivered by visitors who represent different faiths and beliefs.
33. Pupils throughout the school are well behaved both in lessons and in less structured times such as during breaktimes. Leaders and staff apply suitable rewards and sanctions consistently and fairly and motivate pupils to make positive choices in the way they behave. Pupils gain a well-developed understanding of different forms of bullying. They explore the consequences of unkind behaviour and develop strategies to know how to respond should any bullying occur.
34. Pupils learn about the health benefits to be gained from physical exercise and healthy eating during PSHE, PE and science lessons. Pupils' regular participation in a range of physical activities in lessons, competitive fixtures and activities enables them to develop their levels of fitness effectively. Pupils have a clear understanding of healthy food choices and regularly eat fruit at school. Pupils learn

about how to support their physical health, and the health of others, during talks by medical practitioners.

35. Children’s physical development in the early years is embedded through planned gross and fine motor activities and PE and outdoor learning opportunities in school woodlands, enabling children to develop strength, coordination and control. Food and nutrition arrangements in the early years adhere to statutory guidance and safer eating practice is well embedded.
36. The school premises are suitably maintained. Leaders ensure that prompt repairs are carried out, when required, in both day and boarding facilities. Boarders are provided with comfortable and well-equipped accommodation. Health and safety, site security and fire safety arrangements are effective. Leaders ensure that required checks and maintenance are undertaken regularly and, when appropriate, by external experts. Staff receive thorough training in health and safety and fire safety procedures. Fire evacuation drills are undertaken regularly and evaluated rigorously to identify areas for improvement. Pupils, including children in the early years and boarders, are appropriately supervised both on and off site. Arrangements for first aid and medical care of both day pupils and boarders are effective. A suitable number of staff undertake first aid training, including paediatric first aid training for those who work in the early years.
37. The school maintains suitable attendance and admission registers. The attendance policy is clearly written and identifies the school’s senior attendance champion. Leaders take appropriate actions to promote high levels of pupils’ attendance.

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

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

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

39. Pupils' social development is promoted well by staff and supportive older pupils, who act as positive role models to younger pupils. Year 8 pre-prep prefects regularly organise special events for their younger peers, such as a pyjama day in which the prefects help younger pupils understand the importance of sleep. Pupils acquire well-developed social skills and build positive relationships due to collaborative activities that feature regularly in lessons and breaktimes interactions. Pupils who join the school settle quickly due to the attentive support they receive from new friends and 'buddies'. Older pupils are prepared thoroughly for their senior school entrance examinations and gain confidence and independence when undertaking meaningful positions of responsibility.
40. The values that underpin British society are promoted across different subjects such as PSHE and TaP, as well as in assemblies. Pupils gain a clear understanding of democratic principles. They learn to respect the right of others to hold opposing viewpoints when engaging in class discussions, such as when pupils in Year 5 debate whether workhouses have their place in Victorian society. Pupils learn about how government works in the United Kingdom during PSHE lessons. Staff ensure that any discussions that include political themes or content are conducted impartially and in an unbiased manner, such as when senior pupils discuss the current political situation in Iran. Pupils develop a clear sense of the consequences of right and wrong choices through discussions about class rules and during talks by the police service about the dangers of drug taking within society.
41. The curriculum promotes pupils' understanding of diversity and respect for different multicultural groups living in Britain. Pupils explore why fair treatment and equality are important. They learn about different forms of discrimination and prejudice and the importance of respecting people's gender, background and identity. In PSHE, for instance, pupils learn about how to challenge prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. In History they study the impact of the slave trade. The school fosters a culture of tolerance and understanding towards people representing diverse cultures and backgrounds.
42. Pupils learn about different institutions and services that contribute towards British communities. Children in the early years learn about the work of the emergency services such as during visits by the fire service and medical profession. Older pupils attend presentations given by members of the police and lifeboat services and are taught how to perform cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) by members of the medical profession.
43. Leaders effectively help pupils to develop a sense of responsibility and service towards others. Pupils organise fundraising events for a range of charitable causes, such as those that support serious illness and a local foodbank. For example, pupils in Year 7 raised funds through their business enterprise project to support a hospital specialising in corrective eye surgery.
44. From an early age, pupils learn how effective financial management can contribute to positive wellbeing. Children in the early years, for instance, learn the value of different coins when undertaking imaginary shopping trips in role-play activities. Pupils in Year 3 prepare a budget for a meal and buy ingredients in a local supermarket. Older pupils apply money management skills by calculating profit margins when selling products at stalls in a local farmers' market. Pupils in Year 8 apply the financial skills they learn in mathematics lessons when allocating a budget to plan an

imaginary round-the-world trip and investigate how much it typically costs to learn how to drive and to buy and maintain a car.

45. Pupils are provided with age-appropriate careers guidance that helps them to understand a range of future employment opportunities. Their understanding is supplemented by regular visits from a range of professionals, including pilots, bankers and entrepreneurs, who inform pupils about the work they do.

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

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

Safeguarding

47. Leaders are effective in maintaining a robust school culture that prioritises the importance of safeguarding. Staff understand that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility. Safeguarding leaders monitor pupils' wellbeing thoroughly and liaise regularly with staff, including pastoral leaders, boarding and medical staff and the leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND. The safeguarding policy reflects current statutory guidance and is implemented effectively.
48. Governors' oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements is effective. They liaise regularly with the school's designated safeguarding leaders to provide suitable support and challenge. Governors regularly meet with the safeguarding team to consider the school's safeguarding practices and procedures.
49. Safeguarding leaders and staff receive regular and appropriate safeguarding training. The safeguarding team provide updates to staff whenever current statutory guidance is revised. Staff also receive suitable training in how to identify and respond to signs of radicalisation. Staff are clear about the safeguarding issues that might affect pupils, including children in the early years. Staff clearly understand how to respond appropriately should a safeguarding concern arise. Children in the early years are cared for within a safeguarding culture that is secure and well understood.
50. Boarding leaders provide boarders with individual support and pastoral care. Boarders have access to support from a person independent of the school should they have a concern. However, they are not provided with sufficiently clear contact information to easily know how to seek support from the independent person. During the inspection, leaders improved the clarity of this information.
51. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding liaise effectively and promptly with relevant external agencies and local safeguarding partners. They refer safeguarding concerns onto them when appropriate. Safeguarding records are maintained in accordance with current statutory guidance, stored securely and accessed appropriately.
52. Pupils are confident in approaching adults about issues that are worrying them and trust that their concerns will be addressed effectively. Pupils are clear about who to approach with a safeguarding concern. Posters, displayed prominently around the school, remind pupils who they can talk to and they receive regular guidance and further prompts in lessons and assemblies.
53. An appropriate internet filtering and monitoring system is implemented and regularly reviewed. Leaders address any issues of potential concern swiftly and robustly. Staff in ICT lessons and external visitors to the school teach pupils how to stay safe online, such as by teaching them how to respond appropriately if contacted by an online stranger.
54. The school carries out all required safer recruitment checks before staff and governors commence working at the school. Rigorous oversight of the single record of appointments is provided by leaders and governors, who undertake regular checks to ensure all entries are completed accurately and in a timely manner. Leaders who are responsible for appointing new staff receive appropriate safer recruitment training.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

55. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Dorset House School
Department for Education number	938/6015
Registered charity number	1076483
Address	Dorset House School The Manor Church Lane Bury Pulborough West Sussex RH20 1PB
Phone number	01798 831456
Email address	info@dorsethouseschool.com
Website	www.dorsethouseschool.com
Proprietor	Lancing College Governing Body
Chair	Mr Martin Slumbers
Headteacher	Mrs Sarah Sutherland-Booth
Age range	4 to 13
Number of pupils	126
Number of boarding pupils	47
Date of previous inspection	15 to 16 March 2023

Information about the school

56. Dorset House is an independent co-educational day and boarding school situated in Pulborough, West Sussex. The school is a charitable trust. Governance and oversight of the school's work is provided by Lancing College. The current chair of governors was appointed in September 2025. The headteacher commenced her position in January 2026. The school is divided into two sections: the pre-prep, for children in Reception and pupils in Years 1 to 3; and the prep for pupils in Years 4 to 8.
57. The school's boarding accommodation occupies the upper floors of the manor house.
58. There are eight children in the early years comprising one Reception class.
59. The school has identified that 31 pupils have special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
60. The school has identified that no current pupils speak English as an additional language.
61. The school's guiding principle is for pupils 'to be the best you can be' and leaders intend this to define all aspects of school life. The school aims to balance academic excellence with emotional wellbeing. It endeavours that pupils reach their full potential and leave as independent, resilient learners ready for the next stage of their education.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

3 to 5 February 2026

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

63. 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
- visits to boarding houses accompanied by pupils and staff
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

64. 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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