

School inspection report

8 to 10 October 2024

Heartwood House

13 Kenton Road

Harrow

Middlesex

HA1 2BW

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 have established a clear ethos that places pupils' wellbeing at the heart of their provision. The leadership team enables all staff to understand and promote the school's aims and ethos. Trustees provide effective governance.
2. A culture of effective communication and information sharing is in place. This is achieved through daily debriefs, weekly reports within the centres, and sustained communication with local authorities, external agencies and educational professionals working in partnership.
3. The highly bespoke curriculum is flexible and meets pupils' needs and interests. Teachers know about pupils' capabilities and are well informed about their medical and mental health needs, and how these can have an impact on their learning.
4. Leaders ensure pupils are able to study any course or subject they choose. Specialist tuition is provided where needed to enable this. Staff use a variety of teaching strategies effectively to encourage and enable pupils to stay on track and work towards any planned qualifications to achieve their life goals.
5. Staff use a range of approaches to assess pupil attainment, identify learning targets and track progress against those targets. However, these do not enable leaders to compare pupils' achievements and needs across different subject areas as effectively as possible in order to help foster pupils' motivation to learn.
6. Leaders have a very insightful understanding of how an individual's behaviour and attendance can have an impact on their learning. Staff consider changes in and improvements to attendance, behaviour and academic achievement when assessing each pupil's progress. Appropriate admission and attendance procedures are in place. However, at the start of the inspection, the attendance policy was not updated to reflect current statutory requirements.
7. The school's very well planned and highly effective preparation of pupils for transition into life after Heartwood House through career guidance is a significant strength. This is particularly because it is highly effective in achieving positive outcomes for pupils who have typically experienced substantial disruptions to their education and gaps in their learning. Pupils receive very effective and customised individual support on potential career pathways. Consequently, pupils are very well prepared for further education and work.
8. The pupils start at the school with limited or no ambitions about what they may do when leaving. A successful outcome is that almost all pupils achieve further education, employment or training, including apprenticeships.
9. Pupils are respectful, inclusive and tolerant of each other's differences. They celebrate together the achievements each pupil has made every week. This develops confidence and self-esteem, enabling pupils to be well prepared for life in modern British society.
10. Pupils feel safe when learning, whether on or off-site. Safeguarding procedures are effective and meet current regulatory requirements.

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 the tracking of pupils' progress to enable leaders to identify and respond to pupils' needs in order to foster their motivation to learn as effectively as possible
- ensure the attendance policy is updated in line with any changes to current statutory guidance.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders are passionate about supporting pupils individually to achieve their full potential. They ensure pupils' emotional health and wellbeing are nurtured alongside their academic growth. Whether pupils are educated off-site or in the two centre-based buildings, leaders ensure that each pupil's needs are met. Policies and procedures are implemented effectively and reviewed regularly with checks to ensure that staff members apply them consistently. Consequently, the three educational settings are a unified organisation with shared practices, ideals and ambitions.
12. Leaders use their good knowledge and skills to ensure an effective provision that allows pupils who have suffered much previous disruption to their education to catch up on missed learning. Leaders ensure that the school adheres to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 and caters well for any physical or mental health impairment needs that pupils may have. Leaders maintain up-to-date accessibility plans related to the two buildings and appropriate risk assessments for pupils' attendance for physical education (PE) at a local school.
13. Senior leaders maintain co-operative relationships with external agencies. They communicate frequently with centre-based staff, mentors and off-site tutors, including through daily briefings and weekly reports on wellbeing and progress.
14. There is a culture of assessing risk, and staff are appropriately trained. Risk assessment procedures are robust and effectively implemented. Potential risk of harm is mitigated through a wide range of risk assessments, including for each room. Leaders and staff recognise that pupils could face the most severe risks online and work with pupils so that they can manage some level of risk themselves. Staff take effective action to reduce identified risks during activities such as cooking, community visits and creative projects.
15. Leaders support staff well and provide them with appropriate professional development on themes such as pupils' motivation and engagement. The recent introduction of an initiative to become a 'thinking school' was followed by useful training for staff. Recently introduced strategies relating to this initiative are beginning to show signs of impact on pupils' progress.
16. Leaders regularly evaluate all three settings to generate actions designed to lead to improvements. For example, implementing staff briefings at the end of each day has enabled staff to share the successes and concerns of each pupil openly and constructively. Where concerns are raised, whether pastoral, academic progress or safety, subsequent meeting time is used to discuss strategies to provide additional support. Trustees and senior leaders are engaged in a constant cycle of review and actions designed to improve the school. They evaluate the most successful aspects and any areas for improvement across all three settings. The resultant development plan is detailed, contains measurable targets and is frequently monitored by trustees.
17. Trustees provide strategic direction for each setting and monitor its performance effectively through a purposeful balance of support and challenge. They visit often and rigorously hold centre-based and off-site leaders accountable to assure themselves that the Standards are met. Trustees ensure that the responsibilities of leaders are fulfilled effectively. They share leaders' moral imperative to do their best to provide an education where the wellbeing of pupils is consistently at the heart of all decision making.

18. The centre's website provides policies and information as required for parents and prospective parents. Leaders provide the relevant local authorities with the required information about the pupils they fund.
19. An appropriate complaints procedure is in place. It includes clear timelines and a suitable three-stage process. Leaders maintain an appropriate record of complaints, though no complaints have been received since the previous inspection.

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. Centre leaders ensure pupils' effective personalised education and wellbeing through a bespoke pupil-centred programme of learning tailored age-appropriately to their interests and needs. Younger and new pupils start as off-site learners with home tutors or remote online access. This develops their confidence to express their own views about learning and make progress with their chosen interests. Older pupils increasingly attend one of the two learning centres, starting with part-time activities that lead to full-time participation. They learn how to communicate purposefully with adults and classmates. As a result, they develop social and teamwork skills. Two-thirds of the pupils attend the centres, most in Years 10, 11, and post-16.
22. All pupils focus on a core curriculum of literacy, numeracy, science, technology and creative arts, alongside chosen subjects covering indoor and outdoor interests, such as creative media, horse riding and construction. Subject interests and recreational activities develop pupils' various skills and aptitudes alongside their increased knowledge and understanding. Specialist tuition is provided where required. Person-centred plans (PCPs) start with education, health, and care (EHC) plans and are developed in consultation with pupils, parents and specialists in special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). They enable pupils to catch up with their peers in mainstream schools.
23. Well-planned lessons are broken down into graded steps of difficulty, and each step is sensitively explained to the pupils. Teachers use effective methods to identify pupils' strengths and weaknesses and implement strategies to ensure pupils' progress relative to their specific needs. For example, they use careful questioning to check pupils' understanding and expand their knowledge.
24. The language needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are identified carefully, and they are provided with specific speech and language support should this be required. As a result, they make good progress in their English.
25. Teaching models British values, such as mutual respect, and staff are creative and resourceful in implementing personalised provision in a considerate and respectful manner. Teachers' subject knowledge and effective use of teaching methods are appropriately matched to pupils' capabilities. Expectations are always made clear, and staff always provide encouragement and positive feedback on how well pupils respond in lessons and what they need to do to improve. Staff make effective use of strategies such as 'circle time' to include all pupils and enable them to feel safe and confident to express feelings, develop social skills such as listening and empathy, and increase their self-motivation for learning. Through collaborative activities, pupils enhance their self-awareness and strengthen their sense of community and trust with peers.
26. Pupils make good progress from their different starting points despite many experiencing previous and often substantial periods of disruption to their learning. This is because challenging academic and wellbeing milestone documents build catch-up time into every pupil's timetable to ensure that gaps in their knowledge are bridged effectively. Support from personalised learning mentors and their positive relationships with pupils and their families are instrumental in enhancing pupils' progress.
27. Pupils choose the work that exemplifies what they have achieved the most each week. They collate these examples with photographs, writing and artwork in scrapbooks relating to personal achievement. Individual attainment is celebrated weekly by all staff and pupils and displayed in the

community areas of each centre. Staff use these individual achievements to review pupils' progress against their 'milestone charts'. They use this information alongside other assessment methods to track progress towards qualifications for Year 11 and post-16 pupils. In 2023, these typically consisted of English, mathematics and science alongside other GCSEs for most pupils, and gaining functional skills or BTEC qualifications for others. However, the current system for tracking pupils' progress is not as effective as possible in enabling leaders to identify and respond to pupils' needs in order to foster their motivation to learn.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and science programmes are adapted to meet pupils' needs while containing appropriate content. For example, pupils might first learn to identify the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships before determining what they want from relationships. Therapeutic activities enhance and complement the curriculum. They create beneficial opportunities for pupils to express themselves, for example, through art, music or literature. Pupils who have been out of education for some time find this very helpful. Therapists and staff work well together towards achieving the best possible pupil outcomes.
30. At local equine centres and a local school used by the pupils, recreational activities such as outdoor pursuits and PE support pupils' development of life skills and physical fitness. Positive staff and pupil relationships ensure pupils feel confident using their voices. Pupils' achievements in their chosen subjects contribute to developing their self-confidence and resilience. In addition, pupils have several areas of comfort and security to use to help them if they feel overwhelmed and want time alone.
31. Leaders ensure that the premises are clean and well organised. They manage and maintain the health and safety of the premises effectively and methodically. Appropriate actions are taken where required. For example, science rooms contain a locked cabinet for hazardous chemicals, and centre kitchens used by pupils for cooking activities have appropriate signage and safe storage for knives. Fire safety arrangements are effective. Fire exits are marked and clear of obstructions in both main buildings, and extinguishers are properly maintained. Many staff are designated and suitably trained fire wardens.
32. All staff members are trained in paediatric first aid for pupils who feel unwell or need medical attention. Records are maintained for recording accidents and illness and the school's responses to these. Appropriate procedures for administering medication or first aid and suitable medical accommodation are in place.
33. Leaders consistently communicate their expectation that pupils should show kindness and mutual respect regardless of age, sex, belief or religion. All adults work well as a team to manage behaviour. Their consistent messages ensure that pupils know what good behaviour means and why it is important to behave well in the centre, during off-site activities and when learning at home. Tutor time at the end of the day is used to check in on each pupil, celebrate what they enjoyed about the day, and identify any concerns that might need to be followed up. This contributes to building positive relationships with their pupils based on mutual trust and respect.
34. An effective anti-bullying strategy is in place. Pupils are taught effectively about the various types of bullying. The warm, inclusive culture means bullying or other incidents rarely occur. When dealing with misbehaviour or bullying, leaders promote communication between those harmed by actions as victims and those responsible as perpetrators. Staff are highly skilled in helping pupils rebuild relationships through unconditional positive regard. This promotes attitudes of spiritual love for oneself and others, and moral development through the sharing of thoughts, feelings and behaviours during therapy sessions.

35. Leaders understand how individual pupils' behaviour and attendance can have an impact on their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing. Admission and attendance registers and procedures align with current statutory guidance. Staff's effective one-to-one support for pupils' needs and participation helps secure improved rates of attendance soon after pupils' arrival into the school. Leaders inform the local authority of leavers and joiners to the centres at non-standard transition points. However, at the beginning of the inspection, leaders had not updated the attendance policy to reflect recently introduced statutory requirements. This was rectified during the inspection.

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

36. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

37. Leaders recognise that each pupil is an individual, and staff support pupils in being independent and equip them with the skills required to contribute positively to society. This includes developing their economic skills and understanding. Pupils work out the cost for particular scenarios, such as weddings and cinema trips. Budgeting activities include using public transport to purchase items on shopping trips for cooking back at the centre. These also help pupils develop the social skills needed to live independently, including taking the required care when crossing busy roads and learning how to prepare food. Such activities help prepare pupils effectively for future independent life.
38. Whole community events such as communal lunchtimes for staff and pupils and 'circle time' enable British values to be explored through conversations and stories provided by adults and pupils. Staff link underlying themes to the centres' values of respect, integrity, compassion and resilience. Thoughtfully considered lessons support pupils in exploring and discussing themes of fair treatment, equality and inclusion. They engage in role play scenarios during PSHE and explore these topics in therapy sessions. Pupils' views are listened to and heard throughout all aspects of the provision. As a result, pupils develop their understanding of issues relating to diversity, equality and inclusion, and their confidence in expressing views and ideas about them.
39. Pupils learn about democracy through discussions about the UK government and elections. They have also held mock elections by voting using a ballot slip and a ballot box. They celebrate Black History Month by studying important people across decades, both male and female, taking the opportunity to discuss their own heritage. They actively participate in 'International Day', representing and exploring different countries and cultures. Staff frequently model how to show respect for one another, including towards such things as people's age, disability, gender, race, and religion, generating a culture of kindness.
40. The decision of leadership to prioritise career guidance and pupil transition has led to highly positive outcomes. The pupils become motivated when they realise their aspirations can be possible. This careers guidance is a turning point in their educational pathway and prepares them well for further employment, education or training, including apprenticeships. The carefully organised careers programme for Year 7 upward is tailored to pupil interests and capabilities. Leaders ensure that on-site and off-site pupils receive up-to-date and impartial careers guidance, including through the use of visiting professionals at centre-based careers fairs. Careers guidance includes highly effective preparation and practice for interviews, work experience and college visits. Staff regularly communicate with pupils during work experience. They visit the workplace and follow up on the pupil's progress. As a result, pupils are very well prepared for further education and almost all pupils progress smoothly to the next stage of their development, whether in education, employment or training.
41. Leaders and staff are committed to improving the lives and chances of young people facing severe difficulties and trauma. Staff nurture warm relationships, de-escalate situations and expect pupils to focus on learning. They prioritise building trust, and communicate their expectations clearly and consistently. As a result, pupils treat others with mutual respect and dignity, and develop their understanding of right and wrong. Tutor group time emphasises developing knowledge and understanding about the rule of law, how teenagers can get into trouble with the police,

prosecutions and rehabilitation into society. Pupils learn to take responsibility for their actions, and their self-esteem grows because they participate much more effectively as a result.

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

42. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

43. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and highly prioritised. Leaders assess potential safeguarding risks thoroughly and carefully and ensure that staff are highly aware of the pupils' potential vulnerability. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities follow up on any safeguarding concerns promptly, including by communicating with and, when necessary, referring concerns to relevant external agencies. Records of concerns are maintained in line with the requirements of current statutory guidance.
44. Robust, safer recruitment checks are carried out on staff before they take up a post to ensure their suitability to work with children. These checks are recorded accurately in a single central record of appointments.
45. Staff and trustees receive the appropriate and up-to-date safeguarding training, including when they commence working at the school. This ensures they have the relevant knowledge and understanding of the school's safeguarding policy and procedures and can promptly identify and respond to any safeguarding concerns that may arise.
46. The school ensures that there are always adults on duty with whom pupils can share any worries. Pupils can name trusted members of staff to whom they can talk. The school teaches pupils about the dangers of online activity and strategies to adopt to manage risk when using social media or the internet. Appropriate filtering and monitoring of internet usage are in place.
47. Trustees receive appropriate safeguarding training. They maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding policy and procedures, including through regular meetings with leaders and scrutiny of regular reports.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Heartwood House
Department for Education number	310/6204
Registered charity number	1109947
Address	Heartwood House 13 Kenton Road Harrow Middlesex HA1 2BW
Phone number	020 8864 6433
Email address	info@heartwoodhouse.org.uk
Website	http://www.heartwoodhouse.org.uk
Proprietor	Heartwood House
Chair	Ms Geraldine Norris
Headteacher	Mrs Cathy Haysom
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	60
Date of previous inspection	14 March 2022

Information about the school

49. Heartwood House is an independent, co-educational day special school. It is a registered charity governed by a group of trustees. The school consists of a Kenton Road centre, a Roxborough Road centre and off-site provision. Since the previous inspection the school has changed its name from Red Balloon Learning Centre – Northwest London.
50. The school identifies 60 pupils as having SEND. All pupils have an EHC plan.
51. English is an additional language for five pupils.
52. The school states its aims are to provide a safe and welcoming space where emotional health is nurtured alongside academic growth. It intends that all in the community are treated as individuals, with learning tailored to their interests and needs. The school endeavours to ensure that wellbeing is the cornerstone of learning, and that pupils reflect on how they know and what they enjoy about learning.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

8 to 10 October 2024

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

54. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of tutor time
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair of trustees
- discussions with the executive head, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to therapy rooms and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

55. 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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