

# School inspection report

12 to 14 November 2024

## **Exeter School**

Victoria Park Road

Exeter

Devon

EX2 4NS

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. Governors provide robust oversight of the running of the school, ensuring that leaders actively promote pupils' wellbeing. Leaders have an accurate understanding of the school through their effective self-evaluation. They use this to identify areas for development and put plans in place to promote continual improvement.
2. Parents are provided with all the required information, including regular updates on their child's academic progress. At the start of the inspection, some of the required information on the school's website was out of date. This was corrected while the inspectors were on-site.
3. Leaders have planned a broad and balanced curriculum which enables pupils to make good progress across a range of subjects. Academic leaders in the junior and senior schools work closely together to ensure that the curriculum is taught in a logical and consistent way as pupils move through the school. This boosts pupils' academic confidence and supports them to achieve well. Beyond the academic curriculum, pupils take part in a wide range of sporting, creative and recreational activities, developing a wide range of skills and interests.
4. Teachers plan interesting, challenging lessons which they teach using a range of techniques to develop pupils' understanding. They encourage pupils to communicate their thoughts clearly and effectively. The school's comprehensive assessment system ensures that teachers know pupils' current levels of attainment. Teachers adapt their lessons to match pupils' next steps, which helps pupils develop their skills successfully.
5. Leaders are quick to identify and support those pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Staff with responsibility for these pupils draw on specialist training to give individualised support where necessary. Teachers are provided with clear information and teaching approaches to best support pupils who have SEND. However, in the senior school, not all teachers consistently use the support strategies that they should to help pupils who have SEND access the curriculum and learn effectively.
6. Pupils experience a broad and relevant programme of character education through the personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum. Pupils learn to value themselves and each other. They develop high levels of respect, including for those with different cultures or backgrounds. Pupils in the senior school are taught an appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum which covers the required content. However, in some instances topics are not always presented or revisited in ways that best match pupils' learning needs.
7. Pupils understand the importance of service to the community and take part in a wide range of voluntary and charitable activities, both within the school and in their local community. Through this, and the broad programme of assemblies and off-site trips, pupils gain an understanding of the wider world and are well prepared for life beyond school.
8. Leaders have established an effective safeguarding culture underpinned by robust procedures and record keeping. Effective staff training, combined with the warm relationships between staff and pupils, means that pupils are confident to raise any concerns they may have. They know that staff will respond promptly and effectively if they do so. Where necessary, leaders liaise with external safeguarding partners to keep pupils safe from harm.

## 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:

- the school website includes up-to-date versions of all required information so that it gives a clear and accurate picture of the school
- teachers in the senior school consistently use the information and teaching strategies that leaders provide to support pupils who have SEND so that these pupils learn as well as they should
- the content in the RSE curriculum is taught and revisited appropriately so that pupils develop a sound understanding of healthy relationships.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

9. Governors maintain close scrutiny of the school's activities and the impact of these on pupils' outcomes. Governors meet regularly with senior leaders to scrutinise leaders' reports and relevant data. These meetings are supplemented by visits to the school where governors speak with pupils and a range of staff to check the implementation of school policies and procedures. Governors provide effective support and challenge to school leaders so that leaders fulfil their responsibilities.
10. Governors and leaders share an ambitious vision for a curriculum rooted in character education where pupils learn to challenge themselves, work well with others and serve their community. The curriculum is co-ordinated effectively across the junior school, senior school and sixth form. It builds pupils' skills and knowledge so that they make consistently good progress as they move through the school.
11. Leaders have created an ethos that places pupils' wellbeing at the heart of the school's activities. Leaders' clear expectations for how everyone in the school should treat each other results in a positive environment where pupils feel valued and their wellbeing is actively promoted.
12. The school's reflective culture is evident throughout the school. Leaders at all levels consider how they can improve the quality of education. Leaders include pupils' views in their decision making through school councils and regular surveys.
13. Leaders have a comprehensive and strategic approach to risk management. They identify any potential risks to pupils and take appropriate action to mitigate these risks. Governors keep a close eye on risk management. This robust approach enables the school to keep pupils safe whilst providing pupils with a wide range of adventurous activities including the Ten Tors, Combined Cadet Force (CCF) camps and Duke of Edinburgh's Award (DofE) expeditions.
14. Leaders take an inclusive approach in all matters and act in accordance with relevant legislation, including fulfilling the school's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. They maintain a relevant accessibility plan that sets out the adjustments made to improve access for all pupils.
15. Leaders notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times. The accounts relating to pupils wholly or partly funded by the local authority are submitted annually as required. Parents receive regular updates on their child's progress. The school's website provides parents with the required information. However, at the start of the inspection some of this information was out of date. This was remedied during the inspectors' on-site visit.
16. Leaders maintain close relationships with local agencies including those focused on supporting pupils who have SEND and local safeguarding partners. Leaders seek the advice of external specialists when required.
17. The school's complaints policy is in place and followed by school leaders. When complaints do occur, leaders respond promptly to address any issues. Governors review the complaints logs regularly and take action in response to any emerging patterns and trends.

## 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 is well thought through with clearly articulated expectations for pupils' learning and progress. In the junior school, pupils learn a wide range of subjects, developing skills in core academic subjects alongside creative and technical disciplines. In the senior school, pupils maintain a broad curriculum up to the end of Year 11, before specialising in sixth form. The logical progression of the curriculum content that begins from the start of junior school ensures that the curriculum builds pupils' skills and knowledge and supports their good progress. As a result, pupils score highly in public examinations across subjects.
20. Teachers use their secure subject knowledge to plan lessons that engage pupils and challenge them to learn successfully. Lessons typically involve careful questioning that encourages pupils to discuss what they have learned and draw links between different areas of learning. Teachers make sure to involve all pupils, who develop their linguistic and oral skills very well as a result. Teachers' awareness of their pupils' needs enables them to pre-empt common errors, for example when solving mathematical problems or structuring economics essays.
21. The system put in place by leaders to track pupils' progress across the school allows subject leaders and teachers to identify pupils who may need additional support. This is complemented by regular testing and checks during lessons which enable teachers to adapt their teaching plans to match pupils' needs, including revisiting previous learning where necessary. Form tutors monitor pupils' progress across their subjects and support their broader academic development, for example in the junior school by suggesting appropriate choices when pupils change their reading books.
22. During lessons, teachers provide regular feedback in the majority of subjects, which enables pupils to understand what they do well and what they need to improve. The positive relationships between pupils and teachers result in open, reflective conversations about pupils' work. Pupils listen carefully to their teachers' guidance and act upon the clear support they receive. Written feedback is precise and timely, enabling pupils to quickly learn from their mistakes. Occasionally, in the senior school, teachers do not give pupils the specific guidance they need to address their errors and improve their work.
23. Leaders identify pupils who have SEND through various assessments as well as through concerns raised by teachers, parents or pupils themselves. When necessary, additional support is put in place including individual help and advice from external specialists. Leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND work with classroom teachers across the senior and junior schools to ensure effective transitions for these pupils as they move from Year 6 to Year 7. Individual 'strategy sheets' provide clear guidance for teachers on how to support pupils. However, in the senior school, not all teachers consistently follow this guidance, nor do they always provide pupils who have SEND with the specific support they need.
24. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are well supported during lessons. Teachers put further appropriate support in place if required. Leaders check that this additional help enables these pupils to make progress and achieve well.
25. Pupils have ample opportunities to take part in a wide variety of sporting and physical activities through regular physical education (PE) lessons and games afternoons. They gain skills in a range of competitive and non-competitive sports. Pupils make good use of fitness facilities, including the gym

and fitness suite. They follow personalised training programmes which enable them to build their strength and fitness. These sporting opportunities are complemented by a wide selection of recreational clubs and societies, ranging from crochet to Warhammer, which develop pupils' physical, intellectual and social skills.

26. Many creative opportunities are available to pupils both within and outside the curriculum. The junior school arts programme gives pupils a wide range of opportunities to develop creative skills including playing blues music, drawing and painting, and performing poetry. These opportunities continue into the senior school where pupils take part in the senior school plays and a range of concerts, in addition to their studies in lessons.

### **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 approach that leaders take to character education emphasises a range of virtues through a structured programme of assemblies, form time and specific lessons. In the junior school, the virtues of kindness and respect are emphasised. In the senior school, lessons focus on more sophisticated concepts around kindness and integrity. These lessons challenge older pupils to think more deeply about respect, for example by considering whether respect should be earned. Such reflections support pupils to respect and value each other.
29. Teachers' high expectations for pupils and the school's clear behaviour policy result in pupils' positive behaviour throughout the school. Pupils are well supervised at all times. Staff welcome pupils at the start of the school day and calmly intervene to support pupils and encourage positive relationships. In the senior school, there have been a few inconsistencies in staff expectations about how pupils should behave. This has been quickly recognised by leaders who have taken appropriate action to ensure that staff are more consistent, and that pupils understand the expectations more clearly.
30. Teachers emphasise the importance of self-respect, which leads to pupils developing self-confidence and self-esteem. Pupils in the junior school learn how to deal with any unwelcome behaviour from others through the 'three-step' rule. Pupils are confident to raise concerns about unkind behaviour with staff, either by talking to their teachers or using an online reporting tool. Where concerns are raised, pastoral staff take prompt and effective action, including in any rare cases of bullying. Pastoral logs are detailed and well maintained. This enables leaders to support pupils and respond to any trends, for instance by addressing specific issues during form time or assemblies.
31. RSE lessons reflect current statutory guidance and cover key themes such as families, respectful relationships, being online and staying safe. This curriculum builds on the knowledge and understanding that pupils learn in the junior school. For example, the concept of 'saying no', introduced to younger pupils, develops into a more sophisticated understanding of consent in sexual relationships for older pupils, including pupils' understanding of relevant legislation. The curriculum is adapted in response to national issues and pupils' feedback, for example when particular topics are taught to different year groups. However, this has led to some disjointed teaching. In some cases, topics are introduced earlier but not revisited or further developed in a logical way. Some pupils forget what they have been taught and this reduces the effectiveness of the curriculum in helping pupils to secure their understanding.
32. The emphasis on virtues provides a shared language for pupils and staff to discuss moral issues. Pupils' spiritual and moral understanding is further developed by regular services in the chapel. These services are inclusive and recognise the diversity of faiths present within the school. This enables pupils from all backgrounds to develop respect and understanding for others of different faiths.
33. The importance of staying physically and mentally healthy is woven into the curriculum. Pupils learn how to exercise and eat healthily. They make healthy food choices independently from a young age. The warm relationships between staff and pupils enable open and positive discussions about mental health and pupils learn to keep themselves healthy in 'character and practical wisdom' lessons. Pupils readily access support in dedicated rooms in the junior school and senior school. Experienced

staff ensure that pupils with emotional and mental health needs are supported. By embedding these experiences into everyday school life, pupils are equipped with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.

34. The school site is well maintained by staff who take a robust approach to monitoring the grounds so that they promote safety and meet legal requirements. All staff undergo regular training in health and safety. They are knowledgeable and confident to identify concerns, which are quickly reviewed, and action is taken if appropriate. This has been particularly effective in the light of recent refurbishments where issues were resolved promptly as new spaces came into use.
35. There is a well-equipped medical room on the school site. Suitably qualified staff make sure that pupils receive appropriate treatment should this be required. First aid is administered in a timely manner and comprehensive records are kept.
36. Pupils' attendance is carefully recorded and monitored on a regular basis. Leaders consider attendance rates for groups and individual pupils, checking for any patterns including for pupils who have SEND. Leaders take swift action to improve pupils' attendance if this is a cause for concern.

### **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. The virtue of service is integrated into the character education programme and is apparent in all phases in the school. Older pupils support younger pupils. Year 6 pupils act as 'buddies' for newly arrived Year 3 pupils. Senior pupils organise and run chess club and assist with cooking and arts clubs in the junior school. Pupils take part in a wide variety of volunteering activities in the local area. They help pupils from local primary schools through the Exeter School Music Partnership and work with the local hospice through the Young Changemakers programme.
39. Pupils in the senior school take part in a structured programme of activities including the CCF and DofE, through which they gain skills in leadership and independence, as well as working together and supporting others. Leadership is also emphasised in the junior school, for example when pupils take on responsibility as form captains or as members of the school council. Through these activities, pupils are well prepared for the next steps in their education journey.
40. Pupils learn about different cultures through the history and geography curriculums, assemblies and a wide range of clubs and societies. The programme of visiting speakers exposes pupils to different and diverse perspectives. Early in the junior school, pupils are taught that everyone is unique. This develops into an understanding of individual rights and mutual respect as pupils move through the school.
41. Teaching plans throughout the school include the discussion and promotion of British values. For example, Year 7 pupils study the role of propaganda in democracy when studying World War 2 journal entries, and Year 11 pupils discuss the concept of the rule of law in *Lord of the Flies*. Specific teaching is supplemented by a range of co-curricular activities such as external speakers and mock elections where pupils are given an impartial and balanced insight into modern politics.
42. Economics education is integrated into the curriculum in the junior school and taught through the 'practical wisdom' course in the senior school. Year 6 pupils learn about loans and entrepreneurship through the 'Make £5 grow' project. This knowledge is further developed as pupils move through the school and learn about banking and taxes. Older pupils undertake practical financial exercises linked to savings and bank accounts. They create budgets for their post-school living costs. This supports pupils to be equipped for life after school.
43. In the senior school, a programme of careers education is integrated into the curriculum, form time and assemblies. In the sixth form, dedicated 'futures' lessons cover university applications, careers and employment skills, all overseen by a specialist careers advisor. Pupils gain detailed, impartial advice through a range of external speakers and careers fairs. These experiences seek to break down any pre-existing expectations, such as gender stereotypes, and inform pupils of less common pathways such as degree apprenticeships.

### 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. Leaders have established a robust safeguarding culture at the school and their systems fulfil the requirements of current statutory guidance. Staff with responsibility for safeguarding have a thorough understanding of their responsibilities, which they maintain through regular training with external experts. This means that the safeguarding team understands national trends and local contextual issues and liaises with local safeguarding partners effectively.
46. Governors maintain close oversight of safeguarding arrangements through regular visits to the school in which they meet with staff and pupils. The governing body receives regular safeguarding reports, enabling it to scrutinise trends carefully and ensure that policies and procedures are appropriate to the needs of pupils in the school.
47. Staff receive regular training regarding the school's safeguarding procedures through specific training sessions and more regular 'drip-feed' sessions on pertinent issues, including recent local trends and Prevent. This means that staff are confident to enact the procedures effectively. Leaders have created an environment in which pupils are confident to raise concerns, and this is further enhanced by the warm and trusting relationships between pupils and staff.
48. Where safeguarding concerns are raised about pupils, the safeguarding team respond promptly, working effectively to support pupils and liaise with the police and children's services when necessary. Pupils are well supported as they transfer from one phase to the other because of leaders' thorough integration of safeguarding procedures between the junior and senior schools. This also enables continued support for pupils' families or friendship groups which stretch across the two phases of the school.
49. The safeguarding team maintains detailed records of any safeguarding concerns, and records any follow-up actions and associated decision making. Staff are quick to provide information to the safeguarding team, which is recorded in detail. This gives leaders a clear picture of concerns and how best to provide both internal and external support to pupils affected by any safeguarding issues. This robust approach also ensures that staff are alert to any additional vulnerabilities of different pupil groups, including pupils who have SEND.
50. There are appropriate procedures in place for responding to any allegations against staff, including recording and monitoring any low-level concerns. Where necessary, leaders liaise with local safeguarding officers.
51. Pupils learn how to stay safe, including when online, during form time, PHSE lessons, information and communication technology (ICT) lessons and assemblies. The school implements effective filtering systems regarding pupils' access to the internet, and logs are monitored daily to identify any individual or group trends.
52. The necessary recruitment checks are completed for staff, volunteers and governors. These are recorded appropriately in a single central record of appointments.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Exeter School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	878/6033
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1093080
<b>Address</b>	Exeter School Victoria Park Road Exeter Devon EX2 4NS
<b>Phone number</b>	01392 307080
<b>Email address</b>	head@exeterschool.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.exeterschool.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Exeter School
<b>Chair</b>	Ms Gillian Hodgetts
<b>Headteacher</b>	Ms Louise Simpson
<b>Age range</b>	7 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	954
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	27 March 2023

## Information about the school

54. Exeter School is a co-educational day school located in Exeter, Devon. The school consists of a junior school for pupils aged 7 to 11, a senior school for those aged 11 to 16, and a sixth form. It is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the school's previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in July 2024.
55. The school has identified 221 pupils as having SEND. A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
56. English is an additional language for 44 pupils.
57. The school states that its aims are to enable pupils to develop their potential to live fulfilled lives, both in school and beyond. The school seeks to achieve this through a virtue-based character education programme which develops the intellectual virtues of inspiration and challenge, the moral virtues of kindness and integrity; the civic virtues of welcome and service; and the performance virtues of endeavour and collaboration.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

12 – 14 November 2024

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

59. 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 head, 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.

60. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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