

School inspection report

20 to 22 January 2026

St John's School

Broadway

Sidmouth

EX10 8RG

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. The proprietor and leaders ensure that the Standards are met.
2. At the start of the inspection, the required contact details for the proprietor and some previous inspection reports were not provided to parents on the school website. Leaders rectified this before the end of the inspection.
3. Leaders have established a curriculum with a range of subjects that meets the needs of all pupils, including those who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The curriculum is designed to ensure that pupils develop their knowledge in core areas of literacy, numeracy, technological and scientific fields, as well as their creativity and social awareness. A range of recreational activities allows pupils and boarders to learn or to develop new skills after school. Teachers typically plan lessons incorporating a range of methods and activities that enable pupils to develop their knowledge and understanding across all areas and make good progress. However, in some senior school lessons, teaching is less well matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment and so does not further their learning as effectively as possible.
4. Policies for behaviour management and to reduce the risk of bullying are thorough and understood by pupils. Any breaches of expectations in these matters are managed appropriately by leaders in line with the policies. Pupils develop self-confidence and self-assurance, supported by staff who know them well.
5. The curriculum ensures that pupils' physical health is promoted and that pupils understand the importance of exercise and a healthy lifestyle. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme effectively supports pupils' emotional development. It includes suitable relationships and sex education (RSE) lessons which are taught in age-appropriate ways. However, when the inspection commenced, the RSE policy did not provide parents with all the required information relating to this subject. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
6. The premises are well maintained and clean, and health and safety and fire safety arrangements are effective. However, leaders do not review health and safety issues and fire evacuation drills as systematically or effectively as possible.
7. The curriculum is effective in educating pupils about the way in which societies and cultures across the globe develop over time. Leaders help pupils to understand that everyone is worthy of respect, regardless of background and differences. Teaching educates pupils on core values of British society, including democracy.
8. A well-planned careers programme provides pupils with clear, unbiased advice and support for the next stage of their education and future careers. The careers programme and lessons on financial management help to prepare pupils well for their future lives.
9. There is a robust culture of safeguarding, supported by governors' constructive oversight. Members of the safeguarding team are suitably trained for their role and ensure that all staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. Procedures for staff recruitment are thorough, and safeguarding records are maintained as required.

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

The proprietor should:

- strengthen the monitoring of health and safety issues, including fire drills, to better determine the effectiveness of procedures
- ensure that the school's website consistently contains all required information for parents, including previous inspection reports
- ensure that the policy for relationships and sex education (RSE) consistently provides all required information for parents
- strengthen the quality of teaching in the senior school so that it is consistently well matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment to better promote their learning.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Leaders have the skills and knowledge required to undertake their responsibilities so that the school meets the Standards and so that pupils' wellbeing is consistently and effectively promoted.
11. Leaders typically provide parents of current and prospective pupils with the required information. However, when the inspection commenced, the school's website did not contain contact details for the proprietor, nor all previous inspection reports that were required. Leaders rectified this during the inspection.
12. Leaders have an appropriate approach to risk assessment in such matters as careful management of vehicle movements on site. Appropriate risk assessments for the site and activities undertaken by pupils are in place. Staff take appropriate action to mitigate the potential risks that have been identified.
13. Leaders have an appropriate complaints policy. Complaints are managed in line with the policy.
14. Leaders maintain positive and helpful links with other agencies to support the wellbeing of pupils. For instance, they liaise effectively with the local authority about attendance and when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
15. The proprietor and senior leaders conduct appropriate evaluations of the school's successes and areas for development. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing in their strategic planning. For example, leaders review of local traffic flow has resulted in effective action to reduce risk to pupils when arriving at, and departing from, school.
16. There is a suitable accessibility plan, created by reviewing a range of information, including from discussions with staff and pupils. Leaders seek the guidance and perspectives of pupils who have SEND when considering adaptations and other factors to improve pupils' access to classrooms and learning. The proprietor ensures that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.
17. Leaders focus on the school's ethos and aims when making decisions. They ensure that the ethos is known and is reflected in the way staff approach their pastoral work with pupils as well as in the classrooms. As a result, leaders have created an environment in which pupils' self-confidence is nurtured.

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. Leaders structure the curriculum to provide a range of subjects appropriate for the pupils. The curriculum for children in the early years provides suitable coverage of all the areas of learning. The curriculum provides pupils with a solid foundation in sciences. Art, music and drama lessons are part of the curriculum for all pupils up to the end of Year 9. The range of subjects taught to GCSE level is appropriate for pupils of all abilities. The curriculum focuses on the core subjects of English, mathematics and sciences while including humanities subjects, so that pupils are well prepared for future studies.
20. Children in the early years develop their communication skills in meaningful conversation with teachers and classmates. They re-tell stories confidently and become immersed in role play, acting out characters from these. Their understanding of phonics develops well and by the time they are in Reception they can read and write short words. Older pupils develop the ability to express themselves clearly both orally and in writing, using mature vocabulary.
21. Numeracy skills develop well. Children in Reception develop counting skills. Older pupils apply their mathematical knowledge in other lessons such as business studies, science and geography. Pupils' understanding of, and confidence in using technology is developed in information and communication technology (ICT) lessons.
22. Leaders use a range of information to accurately identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Specific strategies to support pupils are created by the leader of provision for pupils who have SEND and shared with staff. Teachers use this information to provide effective support to pupils. Additional support in small groups is provided for some pupils, as necessary. This enables pupils who have SEND to learn well and achieve high standards.
23. The majority of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) are boarders joining the school for a short time. Most pupils have sufficient linguistic skills and competence to participate fully in lessons with minimal support, such as further explanation of subject specific terminology. The few pupils who are in the early stages of learning English are supported effectively in class. Pupils who speak EAL access the curriculum effectively, develop their understanding of spoken and written English and achieve well.
24. Teachers have good subject knowledge. They know their pupils well, build positive relationships with them and take pupils' specific needs into account when planning lessons. They manage classroom behaviour well, so that there is a positive atmosphere conducive to learning.
25. Early years staff plan activities that draw on individual children's interests, both in adult-led and child-initiated sessions. Teachers in the junior school plan methodically. They consistently use a range of teaching approaches and activities that stimulate pupils' interest and support their good progress.
26. Teachers in the senior school use a range of teaching methods effectively. On occasion, lessons are less clearly structured and teaching activities are less well matched to pupils' needs and prior attainment. For example, in some lessons, teachers' explanations are unclear and their questioning does not always check pupils' understanding, with the result that pupils' learning is not promoted as well as possible. There is inconsistent use of the school marking policy and teachers do not always provide pupils with guidance on how to improve further.

27. Teaching encourages pupils to be motivated, responsible and keen to learn. They work hard in class and settle down swiftly to set tasks. They can think for themselves and form their own opinions.
28. There is a coherent system for tracking and monitoring pupils' progress. Leaders' monitoring allows for early identification of any pupils who need extra help and supportive measures are swiftly put in place. As a result, pupils, including children in the early years, make good progress. Parents receive regular and helpful reports on their child's progress. Pupils achieve well at GCSE and are successful in achieving places on further education courses, training or employment, in line with their abilities, interests and aspirations.
29. There are suitable after-school clubs, including creative and sporting activities. Boarders have a suitable range of recreational opportunities in the evening, with access to cooking, sporting and music facilities. They enjoy trips to local attractions, and locations which are further afield, at the weekend, helping their appreciation of British society and culture. Boarders are able to seek additional help in the evening from the residential and academic staff on boarding duty.

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

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

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

31. At the start of the inspection, the RSE policy did not provide parents and pupils with the required information about parents' rights related to the withdrawal of pupils from sex education lessons. Leaders updated the policy during the inspection.
32. Staff are trained in first aid and paediatric first aid. Facilities for the short-term care of day pupils who are ill or injured are suitable. Medicines are stored safely and records kept of their administration. Parents are informed as necessary. Leaders take effective practical action to provide boarders with medical care.
33. Leaders successfully create a caring environment in which pupils respect each other and grow in self-confidence. Pupils are welcoming and inclusive in their approach to others, including short-stay international pupils. Pupils' self-esteem develops as a result of the positive, supportive atmosphere created by staff who know them and care about their wellbeing.
34. Lessons encourage pupils to reflect on moral and ethical issues. In religion, philosophy and ethics (RPE) lessons, older pupils are challenged to consider difficult philosophical concepts such as the nature of reality. Pupils learn about major world faiths, considering the common elements as well as the differences between belief systems. Assemblies mark festivals from different faiths such as Christmas and Diwali. Arrangements are made at weekends for boarders to attend places of worship if they wish. Children in the early years develop a sense of the wonder of the natural world in lessons in the outdoor environment. The curriculum supports pupils' appreciation of spirituality and the non-material aspects of existence.
35. Physical education (PE) forms an integral part of the curriculum. Children in the early years develop their gross motor skills in PE lessons as well as in the outdoor areas with equipment that encourages climbing, balancing and physical co-ordination. All pupils have weekly PE and games lessons, including swimming, football, rugby, and athletics. Lessons are inclusive and PE teachers encourage pupils to be proud of their developing skills. Many pupils participate enthusiastically in competitive fixtures.
36. There is an appropriate PSHE curriculum in place that provides the required coverage of RSE. Pupils learn about topics such as how their bodies change in adolescence and, at age-appropriate times, about contraception and sexual health. They also learn about the importance of exercise for their physical and mental wellbeing. The youngest children are taught about the importance of good dental hygiene. As they get older, pupils are taught to understand the risks of smoking and of drug or alcohol misuse. They learn that eating healthily and getting enough sleep are important for their physical development.
37. Children in the early years are helped to understand and to regulate their emotions. They learn to reflect on the importance of families and of kindness in friendships. In RSE lessons they receive age-appropriate guidance on respecting their own and others' bodies.
38. Leaders have established appropriate policies and procedures for behaviour. Staff have high expectations of pupils' behaviour in the classrooms and in the boarding house. Pupils understand

these. Leaders and staff implement the sanctions and rewards systems fairly. Pupils' behaviour is sensible, courteous and respectful.

39. Leaders have effective approaches against bullying. They stress that bullying in any form, including cyber-bullying, is always unacceptable. Pupils understand the harm that bullying can cause. Leaders manage the rare incidents of bullying effectively and clearly in line with the policy.
40. There is suitable supervision of pupils and boarders, including the youngest children. Arrangements for the supervision of children while they are eating are thorough.
41. Measures to ensure that the premises are suitably maintained are well established. Effective measures to minimise the risk of fire are in place. However, while there is discussion between leaders and relevant staff after routine fire drills or any health and safety issue that has arisen, these are not reviewed as systematically or effectively as possible.
42. The admission and attendance registers are suitably maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Those responsible for safeguarding monitor attendance levels carefully and work supportively with families should a pupil find attendance difficult.
43. Boarding accommodation is comfortable, well maintained and clean. Boarders are provided with a choice of nutritious meals. They can make snacks for themselves in the evening. There are always staff available in the boarding house overnight so that boarders can seek help if needed.

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

- 44. Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.**

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

45. Leaders implement a curriculum which encourages pupils to think about the wider world and to learn about different societies and cultures. For example, the school provides rich international exchange opportunities. Visits from international pupils who arrive as short-term boarders enrich the pupils' understanding of diverse cultures. The exchange programme also provides opportunities for pupils to spend time in a school in another continent, further enriching their global awareness.
46. Children in the early years develop their social skills in activities that encourage them to co-operate and share. They learn the importance of taking turns, compromising and listening to others' views in classroom tasks as well as in their self-directed play.
47. Leaders encourage pupils to reflect on how societies have developed and the environmental and cultural factors that influence social changes. For example, while studying literature, pupils consider how attitudes to racial and gender equality have changed over time. They discuss the problems governments face because of population changes and global inequalities. In these discussions, pupils' comments demonstrate their understanding of British values such as everyone's right to personal belief and respect.
48. The careers programme is well planned, drawing upon nationally recognised effective practice. In PSHE lessons, younger pupils start to think about what careers they might like to pursue as adults. Teachers encourage pupils in the senior school to think about their own aspirations and interests, linking these to potential career paths. Pupils are encouraged to think about their hopes for their future careers when choosing GCSE options or applying for further education. Careers guidance is impartial and responsive to pupils' requests, providing information on apprenticeships and vocational courses as well as on academic routes for the future. Careers teaching is supported by talks from a wide range of professionals including engineers and healthcare workers. Pupils undertake work experience in Year 10, enriching their understanding of the world of work and also developing their self-confidence in preparation for the next stage of their lives.
49. Leaders implement a curriculum which teaches financial awareness from an early stage. Adults use mathematics lessons in the early years to encourage pupils to recognise the values of coins and incorporate these in their role play. For older pupils, lessons in PSHE introduce pupils to issues of money management and personal budgeting. This is extended and enhanced in business studies lessons, so that pupils understand, for example, how income tax and national insurance can affect income.
50. Talks from visitors extend pupils' understanding of important British services and social structures, such as the roles of the military, the police and the national health service. Pupils understand that Britain is a democratic society and learn what this means through practical activities in school. For instance, children in the early years have a vote each week on topics such as which fruits they will have as a snack or which book to read.
51. Pupils apply for posts of responsibility, including membership of the school council. Leaders take the suggestions of the council seriously and pupils see the effectiveness of using their voice to bring about change in leaders' response to the council's requests. Other positions of responsibility include being playground buddies, members of the eco-committee and house captains.

52. Pupils who perform the role of 'charities prefect' work with staff to decide which charities the school will support. Annual activities include creating food parcels for distribution at Harvest Festival and Christmas. Pupils join in national charity drives such as Red Nose Day or Children in Need by organising activities such as food sales.

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

53. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

54. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are appropriately trained for their role. They respond promptly and effectively to concerns raised about pupils. The safeguarding team maintains meticulous and confidential records, noting the actions taken and the rationale for these. Leaders routinely review the effectiveness of safeguarding procedures. They engage positively and proactively with local agencies, such as local children's services and the police, to seek support for pupils and their families as necessary. Safeguarding policy and practice are subject to advisory governors' oversight, leading to helpful discussion and challenge to safeguarding leaders.
55. Staff understand their responsibilities to safeguard pupils. Staff are trained effectively when they first join the school. This training is supported by annual safeguarding updates and regular weekly reminders or updates. Staff undertake additional online training courses on issues such as radicalisation to enhance their understanding of potential risks to pupils. Staff know their pupils well and are alert to changes in behaviour that might indicate a concern. They take swift action when they have worries about a pupil's wellbeing. Staff understand their responsibilities to report low-level concerns or allegations about adults who work with pupils.
56. Processes for staff recruitment are thorough. All required checks to ensure that individuals are suitable to work with children are completed before they are allowed to start work at the school. Information relating to these checks is entered on a single central record of appointments (SCR). Governors provide regular oversight of the accuracy of this record and the thoroughness of the recruitment process.
57. Leaders have thorough internet monitoring and filtering systems in place. Leaders act swiftly and appropriately when any alerts about potential breaches are raised. The proprietor receives regular reports on its effectiveness.
58. Pupils are well educated in how to keep themselves safe, including when using the internet and the importance of being alert to potential scams or misinformation. Pupils know who the leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are and that they can go to any member of staff for help. Boarders also know how to contact an independent person appointed to listen to their concerns.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	St John's School
Department for Education number	878/6018
Address	St John's School Broadway Sidmouth Devon EX10 8RG
Phone number	01395 513984
Email address	contact.stjohns@iesmail.com
Website	www.stjohnsdevon.co.uk
Proprietor	Mr Bryan Kane
Headteacher	Mr Bryan Kane
Age range	2 to 19
Number of pupils	182
Number of boarding pupils	9
Date of previous inspection	1 to 2 February 2023

Information about the school

60. St John's school is an independent co-educational day and boarding school located in the town of Sidmouth in Devon. It comprises an early years provision, a junior school and a senior school. At the time of the previous inspection, the school was owned by International Education Systems Limited. The legal proprietor changed in October 2024 when the headteacher of the school was named as the sole proprietor. However, the school remains part of the network of schools overseen by International Education Systems Ltd, although they are no longer the legal proprietors. The headteacher is supported by local advisory governors.
61. There is a single boarding house located on the school site, accommodating boarders aged 9 to 16 years.
62. There are 27 pupils in the early years, comprising one Nursery and one Reception class. The early years provision is located on the school site.
63. The school has identified 48 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. No pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
64. The school has identified English as an additional language for 12 pupils.
65. The school states its aims are to help pupils grow into collaborative, communicative, enquiring, respectful and creative individuals. It sets out to offer opportunities that encourage pupils to integrate into local, national and international communities.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 January 2026

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

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and assemblies
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the proprietor and advisory 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.

68. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.

ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.

ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.

For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

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