

# School inspection report

11 to 13 February 2025

## Heath Mount School

Woodhall Park

Watton At Stone

Hertford

SG14 3NG

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 maintain appropriate oversight of school activities, issue effective challenge to leaders and, as a result, are successful in ensuring that the Standards are met.
2. Leaders have developed and provide a rich and varied school curriculum of academic, creative and sporting activities. This is enhanced by a diverse co-curricular programme of additional opportunities so that pupils continuously identify, practise and develop their particular individual skills and talents.
3. Rigorous auditing by leaders and teachers ensures that the school celebrates the successes of every individual on a regular basis. This results in all pupils being able to identify the areas of school life at which they excel. As a result, they maintain high levels of self-knowledge, self-esteem and self-confidence which successfully confirm their general sense of worth and purpose. The school is effective in perpetuating a culture of high levels of achievement in all subjects, reflected in the results of external assessments which facilitate the next stages of pupils' education at a range of selective senior and secondary schools. These include the wide variety of scholarship awards which are typically gained by the majority of the school's oldest cohort of pupils each year. This is a significant strength of the school.
4. Teachers have ambitious expectations for their pupils and enable them to make typically rapid progress. They provide an appropriate blend of challenge and support by delivering a programme of well-planned teaching informed by effective use of assessment data and expert subject knowledge.
5. The school ensures pupils achieve an appropriate balance of academic, creative and sporting activities to support their physical and mental health. The school's pastoral team and counselling service are effective at hearing, and responding to, any worries or concerns that may arise.
6. Leaders link the school's self-evaluation documentation to the development plan and the regular reports that they present to governors. Their effective decision-making ensures that the school is continually evaluated without complacency and developed appropriately.
7. The school effectively develops pupils' understanding of the difference between right and wrong. Pupils behave well and articulate how the school's values of integrity, industry, resilience, respect and acceptance not only inform their current lives but also help prepare them effectively for the future.
8. Pupils contribute to local, national and international society through the various entrepreneurial fund-raising activities that they undertake. They design, cost, advertise and deliver a range of enterprises to raise funds for good causes both within the United Kingdom and in Zambia, which some of them visit in order to donate goods purchased with their profits.
9. The school provides careers education both within the formal curriculum and through a programme of visiting representatives of a range of professions. However, this is of limited efficacy as pupils do not engage sufficiently thoroughly with the material covered for them to recall it in any detail.
10. Leaders and staff implement suitable safeguarding procedures, including carrying out all necessary pre-employment checks in a thorough and timely manner, training staff effectively, and responding to concerns appropriately.

## 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 careers guidance provision so that it better engages pupils and develops their knowledge of possible future pathways more effectively.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. Leaders have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform their duties effectively. Ambitious for all pupils in the school to have a happy and fulfilling education, they have successfully developed a common understanding amongst all staff that the promotion of all aspects of pupils' wellbeing is the key focus of the school's provision. Leaders ensure that staff understand and implement the school's policies and procedures effectively.
12. Leaders engage in an effective process of continuous review. A thorough and detailed self-evaluation, which incorporates parents' and pupils' viewpoints, results in the formation of a school development plan that includes explicit and effective consideration being given to unintended consequences of any initiatives. Leaders take effective action when required. For example, the school now provides sanitary products in female pupils' lavatories as a direct consequence of a suggestion made by pupils. The development plan informs reports submitted to governors, who challenge leaders appropriately to ensure that the school meets the Standards.
13. Leaders, teachers and governors emphasise the five Heath Mount values of integrity, industry, resilience, respect and acceptance throughout their work at the school. This results in a hard-working, mutually supportive community where pupils typically enjoy the learning process, achieve high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, are physically and mentally healthy and understand their responsibilities to make positive contributions to society.
14. Leaders and governors have a shared understanding of the risks facing the school and implement effective measures to counteract these. Staff undertake appropriate training in risk assessment and regularly review documentation relevant to their responsibilities to ensure it is up to date so that procedures to mitigate identified risks are carried out efficiently. A comprehensive risk assessment for boarding is implemented effectively.
15. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school and challenge leaders appropriately about their decisions and actions. Through a programme of visiting the school regularly, scrutinising key pieces of documentation such as the single central record of appointments, meeting in focused committees such as those for finance and strategy, reading reports from leaders and watching presentations by teachers, governors are effective in ensuring that the Standards are met and that the school promotes pupils' wellbeing successfully.
16. The school meets the requirements of the Equality Act (2010). Leaders implement a detailed and comprehensive accessibility plan, which includes measures to accommodate a range of physical and cognitive conditions. They monitor the provision to ensure that no pupils are subjected to any form of discrimination.
17. Leaders of the early years settings make effective use of the school's indoor and outdoor environments to promote children's learning. They train staff well through regular professional development meetings for support and coaching and, as a result, the provision made available to children is constantly developing.
18. The school provides all required information to parents and prospective parents, much of it through the school's website. Parents receive regular reports about their child's progress and learning.

19. A very small number of pupils have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). At the time of the inspection these had not been running for sufficient time to make progress and financial reviews appropriate. However, leaders are aware of their responsibilities in this area and have planned to implement such procedures in due course.
20. Leaders maintain effective links with relevant external agencies, including professional associations, the local authority and advisory groups. Appropriate use is made of these when questions arise or pupils' education can be enhanced.
21. The boarding environment is led by suitably trained and experienced leaders who communicate with pupils and parents well, maintain appropriate records and act promptly whenever it is necessary to do so. Boarding leaders and staff continually converse with teachers to ensure pupils' needs are met.
22. Leaders implement an appropriate procedure for the handling of complaints effectively. This includes maintenance of suitable records of complaints and the school's responses to matters that are raised. Clear communication with parents that encourages concerns to be voiced at an early stage enables effective, comprehensive resolutions to be reached.

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

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

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

24. Leaders have developed a broad and diverse curriculum and an efficiently structured school day that enables pupils to learn about a large range of subjects effectively. Physics, biology and chemistry are taught weekly to the upper school. Leaders and staff plan subjects to take effective advantage of learning opportunities present in the outdoor environment. Pupils participate in a wide range of sporting pursuits, and a range of subject choices and options facilitates the development of individual interests and passions in areas such as ceramics, textiles, food technology and fine art. Pupils typically experience a wide range of different activities on a daily basis, so that individuals find opportunities to hone and develop their specific interests and skills, through a curriculum that goes beyond the age-related expectations of the national curriculum.
25. Teachers use an effective assessment framework to monitor and track pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding regularly using a variety of different formal and informal measures. They use the resulting data appropriately to structure future learning and identify any additional help or assistance that particular individuals need.
26. Lessons are characterised by teachers' desire for pupils to achieve well, make good progress and surpass their expectations of themselves by doing more than they previously thought possible. Teachers combine expert subject knowledge with the insights they gain into pupils' current levels of achievement to plan appropriate activities which extend understanding through a mixture of instruction, discussion and practical work which uses resources of high quality. They use appropriate teaching methods that develop pupils' understanding sequentially and comprehensively. Teaching typically motivates and engages pupils so that they respond well to what they are being asked to do, settle to work quickly, and focus on the subject matter at hand. Teachers pace the lessons well to pupils' needs. Teachers provide pupils with clear feedback about how they could improve their work further and pupils implement the advice that they receive. As a result, pupils make rapid progress and secure thorough understanding of material covered in lessons. Leavers from the oldest year group are successful in their entrance examinations to a range of senior schools, with the majority typically achieving a wide variety of scholarship awards.
27. Teachers make effective use of pertinent resources to promote pupils' learning. For example, the use that they make of electronic devices enables pupils to develop their investigation, research and presentation skills.
28. Teachers provide pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) with timely and effective support that facilitates them making good progress in relation to their starting points. Each 'Pupil Passport' identifies the specific provision, such as devices and resources, additional explanations and alternative forms of delivery for teachers to implement in lessons. These are then transferred into lesson planning and become utilised as a matter of course. Additional small group support in 'core skills' is also provided for pupils as necessary to secure their progress and understanding.
29. A very small number of pupils speak English as an additional language. They are provided with additional help by teachers, including individualised support as necessary to develop their English skills and comprehension.

30. Teachers share pupils' performance appropriately with their parents on a termly basis, either through a full written report, which is produced on two occasions each year, or a grade card which informs a subsequent parents' consultation evening.
31. Teaching enables children in the early years to learn successfully. They respond well to teachers' individual attention and guidance and to the effective use made of stimulating activities within the indoor and outdoor environments. As a result, they become enthusiastic, engaged and absorbed in their learning. Children communicate well with both their peers and with staff, who model accurate use of appropriate language. Teachers provide children with effective guidance about letters and the sounds they represent regularly throughout each day, both within and outside formal reading lessons, in order to develop secure literacy skills.
32. The school provides a suitable recreational programme. Pupils develop a diverse range of skills through a wide assortment of optional clubs that range from classical music appreciation and pottery to yoga and cheerleading. They develop their musical skills and confidence in the school's choirs and orchestras.

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

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



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

34. Leaders are successful in identifying individual pupils' specific interests and skills, which are then developed and refined through extended opportunities, coaching and practice. Leaders celebrate pupils' achievements in front of their peers and audit the rewards systems rigorously to ensure that all pupils receive regular public praise and recognition of their effort, progress and achievement. As a result, pupils develop their self-knowledge and enjoy high levels of self-esteem and self-confidence, which in turn positively affect their performance in all areas of school life.
35. The school succeeds in combining a culture of high expectations for each pupil's achievement with appropriate emphasis on physical and mental health. Leaders facilitate effective use of the open space around the school to support pupils' physical activity and provide opportunities for peaceful reflection. When they wish to do so, pupils can request particular assistance from the schools' counselling service or spend time with the nurture dog.
36. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme contains appropriate content which enables pupils to make informed decisions about how they can optimise their physical and mental health. This includes concepts such as healthy eating, the importance of being active and various procedures that they could use to manage their emotions effectively.
37. Leaders enter into appropriate consultation with parents as they develop and revise the school's programme for relationships and sex education (RSE). They also welcome the views of pupils and respond to these. For example, additional lessons about the onset of puberty became incorporated when pupils expressed the opinion that it would be beneficial to have these at a younger age than had previously been the case. Teachers lead age-appropriate discussions that use the established school values as their starting points. They encourage pupils to ask questions and voice concerns so that outcomes are relevant and purposeful. As a result, pupils understand how to form and maintain effective relationships. They appreciate the importance of consent and know that friendships involve responsibilities.
38. Pupils' spiritual development is fostered effectively through lessons in theology, philosophy and religion (TPR) which encourage pupils to empathise with people of various different backgrounds, beliefs and faiths. Leaders also encourage pupils to appreciate various forms of creative endeavour including classical music, drama and fine art.
39. The team of specialist physical education teachers deliver a wide-ranging programme for pupils to develop their skills and techniques in sports such as hockey, football, netball, rugby, cross-country, athletics, cricket and swimming. The school provides regular opportunities for pupils to represent their school in competitive matches. This provision is complemented by a programme of alternative sports that enables pupils to develop skills in areas such as kayaking, rock climbing and archery, for those who prefer it. Additional bespoke coaching, which includes work in the school's strength and conditioning room, is provided both for those pupils who are preparing for a sports scholarship to a senior school, and for others who are developing their skills and proficiency in this area.
40. Pupils understand the consequences which ensue from any misdemeanours because teachers implement the comprehensive behaviour policy effectively and enable pupils to understand the differences between what is appropriate behaviour and what is not. Leaders resolve any incidents of

inappropriate conduct effectively so that they typically do not reoccur. Leaders maintain suitable behavioural records and monitor the management of behaviour measures effectively through weekly welfare meetings in which concerns are discussed and any emerging trends are identified so that they can be resolved. As a result, leaders are successful at implementing an effective anti-bullying strategy, as matters are settled before they can escalate.

41. Pupils are supervised appropriately at all times by members of staff who maintain effective oversight, including in the early years, where suitable staff-to-child ratios are always maintained.
42. Leaders ensure that first aid and medical care is administered appropriately through providing effective training for staff, including in paediatric first aid for those working in the early years, and specific accommodation that enables ill or injured pupils to be suitably treated.
43. Health and safety and fire safety arrangements are effective. Regular checks and servicing take place to ensure that the premises are well maintained, and effective systems are in place to deal with any repairs required or defects that come to light. The school maintains, and acts upon, regularly reviewed fire risk assessments. Staff conduct regular fire evacuation drills both during the day and in boarding time.
44. The school maintains admission and attendance registers appropriately and in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders notify the local authority as required when pupils leave and join the school at non-standard transition points.
45. Staff in the early years make effective use of the school's outdoor environment to engage children in activities which support physical development, such as stepping, climbing, digging and cycling. Staff maintain tranquil indoor classroom spaces and utilise routines and music effectively to help promote emotional security. Children are given choices, such as whether they want to sit on a chair or on the carpet, which encourage their independence and growing understanding that actions have consequences.
46. The school provides good quality and suitable boarding accommodation. Boarders are suitably supervised according to age and gender. They access appropriate food, drinks and health care. The school provides boarders with an effective induction programme and ensures that they can always find staff to support them or to whom they may express any worries or suggestions.

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

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

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

48. Leaders and staff frequently refer to the school's core values of respect, integrity, industry, resilience and acceptance during lessons, clubs and assemblies when concepts such as democracy, the rule of law, equity and the importance of respect are constantly emphasised. Pupils learn how casting votes enables a community to make democratically agreed decisions, and how this is relevant to their school and to Parliament and government. Similarly, they understand how expressing and demonstrating mutual respect guards against prejudice and discrimination. Consequently, they appreciate and can articulate how these are fundamental to living optimal lives not only in contemporary British society but also in the future. They understand that they all share a collective responsibility towards making the world the best place that it can be and recognise how the values which they hold are integral to achieving this.
49. The school successfully combines the promotion of a sense of responsibility towards others with a carefully structured programme of opportunities to develop entrepreneurship. Pupils' financial understanding grows from counting coins and role-playing shopping in the early years, through to older pupils who set their own budgets for activities and decide on suitable prices to make profits and avoid losses. They create, advertise, cost and deliver their own enterprises that range from stalls in fairs, sales and coffee mornings through to manufacturing industries in which they sell products such as jewellery and cushions that they have designed and produced themselves. Staff provide appropriate oversight of all activities, but leaders expect pupils to be accountable for selecting raw materials and maintaining appropriate budgets. These responsibilities extend into other aspects of school life, such as the tuck shop for older pupils which is operated by prefects.
50. Profits from pupils' enterprises and other school fund-raising activities are donated to charities. Those which are local to the immediate school environment, such as a homeless shelter in a nearby town, or national, like an initiative to provide breakfasts in schools, are selected by the pupils themselves through democratic vote. Internationally, pupils have the opportunity to visit hospitals and schools in Zambia on a residential visit during which they donate items such as stationery, clothing and toys that have been purchased using the proceeds from their fund-raising activities.
51. The school takes appropriate steps to ensure that balanced perspectives are presented when any controversial topics or political issues are discussed. Activities, including those in theology, philosophy and religion (TPR), are successful in promoting an understanding of how contrasting views in a debate or discussion, such as the merits or demerits of plastic or whether miracles exist, should all be respected. Pupils appreciate the importance of individuals considering all opinions before reaching their own personal conclusions.
52. Older pupils are introduced to a range of different possible future careers through various activities within the curriculum and a programme of visiting speakers in assemblies. However, the efficacy of this is limited as matters are not discussed or considered at length. Consequently, pupils do not have useful recall of what they have experienced and the provision is ineffective in encouraging them to develop enthusiasm towards particular professions, occupations or callings.
53. In the nursery and pre-prep, a clear focus on children's social development is evident. Their social skills are fostered through structured activities which involve turn-taking, sharing and listening. As a

result, children learn how to interact with each other successfully, co-operate, collaborate and share resources for mutual benefit.

54. Pupils are 'buddied' with peers three years older or younger than themselves and consequently, over time, they benefit from both having, and being, role models. Additionally, each of the school's four houses is subdivided into 'squadrons' of pupils of different ages, facilitating collaborative work and endeavour which transcends class and year divisions. Upper school pupils also undertake additional appropriate duties and responsibilities which include being pupil leaders of the school, members of the school council, librarians, captains of houses, music or sports, and prefects responsible for the tuck shop, the school animals and help in the pre-prep.
55. In the early years, principles such as the difference between right and wrong are introduced through visits from representatives of the police force and other emergency services, whilst older pupils engage in debates and discussions both within their TPR lessons and throughout the curriculum in which they explore ethical issues and dilemmas.

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

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

## Safeguarding

57. Leaders carry out all the required safer recruitment checks on adults before they commence work at the school. They record these checks in a meticulously maintained single central record of appointments. Regular scrutiny by governors ensures that the school's safer recruitment procedures are appropriate.
58. Thorough training on safeguarding matters, including about the 'Prevent' duty to combat extremism and radicalisation, is provided as part of the induction process before new members of the school team commence work. It is supplemented and extended with regular updates whenever necessary to ensure that all staff and governors remain suitably informed. The safeguarding team, including the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), undertake appropriate additional training. As a result, staff are knowledgeable about safeguarding requirements and demonstrate comprehensive understanding of how they should discharge their responsibilities in line with the school's policy.
59. The DSL leads the safeguarding team effectively so that the school responds to safeguarding concerns appropriately and provides suitable support for pupils affected. The school liaises effectively with, and seeks advice from, external safeguarding agencies, including the local authority designated officer, and refers safeguarding concerns to them when necessary. The DSL maintains thorough and suitable records of safeguarding concerns and how the school has responded to these.
60. Appropriate policies for staff behaviour are in place, including suitable whistleblowing procedures should any allegations or concerns be raised concerning adults who work at the school.
61. Boarding staff are aware of the additional safeguarding duties which are associated with their role. Suitable procedures are in place, such as daily record keeping and communication between staff.
62. The governor with particular responsibility for safeguarding holds regular meetings with staff, including the DSL and headteacher, to remain suitably informed of matters and provide appropriate oversight and challenge to ensure the school follows correct safeguarding procedures. Governors monitor the school's safeguarding arrangements effectively, including through scrutiny of annual safeguarding audits. Leaders and governors revise safeguarding policies and procedures to ensure that they reflect any updates to statutory guidance.
63. Pupils know that they can approach any member of staff if they have a worry or concern and want to discuss matters in person. Those who prefer to communicate in writing can use the school's 'worry boxes' or an electronic facility on the school's intranet.
64. The school teaches pupils how to keep themselves safe, both in the physical world and when online. Governors ensure that material accessed from the internet is appropriately filtered to ensure only appropriate content is accessed, and the DSL takes appropriate action should monitoring indicate that any unsuitable websites have been requested.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Heath Mount School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	919/6046
<b>Registered charity number</b>	311069
<b>Address</b>	Heath Mount School Woodhall Park Watton At Stone Hertford Hertfordshire SG14 3NG
<b>Phone number</b>	01920 830230
<b>Email address</b>	office@heathmount.org
<b>Website</b>	www.heathmount.org
<b>Proprietor</b>	Heath Mount School Trust Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Juliette Hodson
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Christopher Gillam
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	508
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	52
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	7 June 2024

## Information about the school

66. Heath Mount School is a co-educational day and boarding preparatory school founded in 1796 and located in Woodhall Park outside Watton At Stone, south-east of Stevenage in Hertfordshire. It is a registered charity, overseen by a board of governors who are also trustees of the Heath Mount School Trust. The school is divided into five sections: the nursery, for children aged 2 to 4 years; the pre-prep, for pupils aged 4 to 7 years; the lower school, for pupils aged 7 to 9 years; the middle school, for those aged 9 to 11 years and the upper school, for pupils aged 11 to 13 years.
67. The school offers boarding for up to four nights per week on a flexi basis from the second term of Year 3. Male boarders reside in the main school building and female boarders stay in the nearby River House on the school site.
68. There are 96 children in the early years comprising one Nursery and three Reception classes.
69. The school has identified 72 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
70. The school has identified English as an additional language (EAL) for a very small proportion of pupils.
71. The school states its aims are to provide pupils with a safe, friendly and nurturing environment which promotes wellbeing. It seeks to uncover and develop potential whilst maintaining a balance between traditional childhood experiences and preparing children for an ever-changing and evolving world. The school's aspiration is for pupils to develop self-confidence, self-discipline and a strong values system based around integrity, industry, resilience, respect and acceptance.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

11 to 13 February 2025

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

73. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods and an assembly
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the chair and other governors
- discussions with the headmaster, 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.

74. 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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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)