



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Report for an Additional Inspection

Ackworth School

September 2021

School's details

School	Ackworth School			
DfE number	384/6000			
Registered charity number	529280			
Address	Ackworth School Pontefract West Yorkshire WF7 7LT			
Telephone number	01977 233600			
Email address	reception@ackworthschool.com			
Headmaster	Mr Anton Maree			
Chair of governors	Mr David Bunney			
Age range	2 to 19			
Number of pupils on roll	493			
	Day pupils	418	Boarders	75
	EYFS	47	Juniors	107
	Seniors	267	Sixth Form	72
Date of visit	15 to 16 September 2021			

1. Introduction

Characteristics of the school

- 1.1 Ackworth School was founded in 1779 on behalf of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). It is a co-educational boarding and day school for pupils aged from two to nineteen. The school is situated in the centre of the village of Ackworth, near the town of Pontefract in West Yorkshire. Boarding is offered from the age of eleven in one of two boarding houses; one for male pupils and one for female pupils. The school is an incorporated registered charity and is administered by a board of governors known as the school committee, whose chair is called the clerk. The school has 65 pupils who require support for special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), of whom 25 have an education, health and care (EHC) plan. Seventy-two pupils speak English as an additional language (EAL). The school's previous inspection was a regulatory compliance inspection in October 2018.

Purpose of the visit

- 1.2 This was an unannounced additional inspection at the request of the Department for Education (DfE) which focused on the school's compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 (ISSRs), the National Minimum Standards for Boarding 2015 and the requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework.

Regulations which were the focus of the visit	Team judgements
Part 1, paragraphs 2, 2A and 3 (quality of education provided – curriculum, relationships and sex education; teaching)	Not Met
Part 2, paragraph 5 (spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils)	Met
Part 3, paragraphs 7 (safeguarding) and 8 (safeguarding of boarders); NMS 11	Met
Part 3, paragraph 9 (behaviour); NMS 12	Met
Part 3, paragraph 10 (bullying); NMS 12	Met
Part 3, paragraph 14 (supervision of pupils); NMS 15	Met
Part 3, paragraph 16 (risk assessment); NMS 6	Met
Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c) (provision of information)	Met
Part 7, paragraph 33 (complaints procedure); NMS 18	Met
Part 8, paragraph 34 (leadership and management); NMS 13	Not Met

2. Inspection findings

Quality of education provided – curriculum, relationships and sex education, and teaching [ISSR Part 1, paragraph 2 and paragraph 2(A); paragraph 3]

- 2.1 The school does not meet the standards.
- 2.2 The written curriculum policy provides appropriately for almost all curriculum areas. In most respects, the policy is implemented effectively, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work; planning takes into account the needs and aptitudes of all pupils including those with an EHC plan. Those pupils with SEND, including those with an EHC plan receive specialist support and have suitable levels of individual care to ensure they learn and make progress from their starting points.
- 2.3 In the junior and senior schools the development of the relationships and health education (RHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) policies has been undertaken in consultation with parents and with pupils. Both policies are made available for parents on the school website.
- 2.4 The personal, social and health education (PSHE) and RHE programmes of study in the junior school are well planned. Schemes of work and planning support the personal development of the pupils effectively through weekly timetabled sessions and other activities to broaden the pupils' experience.
- 2.5 In the senior school, the programmes of study related to PSHE and RSE are insufficiently developed to meet requirements and the needs of pupils. Work to audit the coverage of PSHE and RSE curriculum content across all other subject areas has been completed and, from September 2021, tutor time has been allocated for Years 7, 8 and 9 to study PSHE and RSE. Years 10 to 13 complete a carousel of activities over a number of weeks to cover the PSHE and RSE curriculum content. However, there is not yet a complete curriculum plan for these subjects with supporting schemes of work and plans have not been finalised for the complete school year, meaning that learning goals are unclear. Documentation does not confirm what framework for assessment for these subjects is to be used to ensure that pupils acquire new knowledge and increase their understanding and skills over time.
- 2.6 Pupils from Year 7 to the sixth form commented that lesson content in these subject areas varies in quality and the time allocated provides little opportunity for discussion or for questions to be asked. The current lack of consistently effective lesson planning and developed teaching strategies and activities over time supports this view. As a result, the outcomes for older pupils, in terms of developing understanding about positive relationships, are unsatisfactory, as evidenced in interviews with a large number of pupils. In response to questionnaires, a small minority of pupils in each of the junior and senior schools disagreed that the school helps them to understand how to make friends and develop positive relationships. Senior leaders acknowledge that PSHE has not previously had a high profile within the curriculum of the school. Although considerable work has been done to improve this situation, insufficient progress has been made.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils [ISSR Part 2, paragraph 5]

- 2.7 The school meets the standard.
- 2.8 The Quaker ethos of the school and the range of activities built in across the range of the curriculum ensures that all pupils receive suitable guidance to support their spiritual, moral and social development. There is an active promotion of British values throughout the school, encouraging respect, tolerance and empathy towards the needs of others, including those with protected characteristics. This was evident in the positive interactions observed in interviews, between pupils and between staff and pupils. Older pupils take the initiative and prepare and deliver presentations to younger pupils on issues current in society as a whole. During discussions, pupils articulated that

rules are necessary to ensure equality and fairness within society. Visitors to the school, trips and a range of themed opportunities on a range of relevant subjects engender pupils' effective understanding of differing cultures and the needs of a diverse world. Pupils develop age-appropriate democratic knowledge through classroom discussions and school council membership elections.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – safeguarding and safeguarding of boarders [ISSR Part 3, paragraphs 7 and 8; NMS 11]

Safeguarding policy

- 2.9 The school meets the requirements.
- 2.10 The school has an appropriate policy for safeguarding which provides suitable arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils at the school.

Safeguarding implementation

- 2.11 The school meets the standards.
- 2.12 Safeguarding arrangements are implemented effectively in line with current statutory guidance across all sections of the school. The school provides appropriate support for pupils' needs, including listening to children, giving a response and taking appropriate action when concerns are raised. All staff have recently received suitable training on changes to statutory guidance and online safety effective from September 2021. New staff complete a comprehensive induction process which ensures they understand their safeguarding responsibilities, including details of *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (KCSIE) Part 1 and Annex B, the staff code of conduct, whistleblowing procedures, procedures for children missing education and the school's behaviour policy. The designated safeguarding lead (DSL) and deputies have sufficient status and authority to undertake their roles, and have appropriate levels of training, which is in line with local procedures. The DSL provides regular informal updates to staff including for the identification and management of sexual abuse or harassment.
- 2.13 Staff have a full understanding of their safeguarding responsibilities. They recognise the importance of 'early help' strategies, know how to report any concerns about pupils or other staff to the DSL, and do so appropriately. Arrangements for referral of any allegation regarding an adult working with pupils, including senior leaders, are appropriate. They understand the varied types of pupil-on-pupil abuse including sexual abuse and harassment, and the seriousness of such behaviours. A suitable programme of training for staff has ensured that such incidents are dealt with appropriately, including through contact with the correct agencies. The advice of external agencies is responded to appropriately. Although a very small minority of pupils, in response to questionnaires, disagreed that they can speak to a member of staff about sexist and unwanted sexual behaviour, suitable support and interventions are provided for all pupils concerned in such incidents. This can include time spent away from school for reflection, in line with the school's ethos, without this being viewed as exclusion. The safeguarding policy and procedures are reviewed effectively after any such incidents to aim to prevent repetition.
- 2.14 Appropriate records for safeguarding concerns are maintained, which are regularly monitored by the DSL. These show timely and appropriate liaison with both parents and local agencies. The school committee undertakes a termly safeguarding review with due diligence, including review of incidents, demonstrating sufficient rigour in their oversight of safeguarding arrangements. Suitable recruitment procedures are provided for. Pupils, during discussions, commented that they are aware of safeguarding arrangements in school, including for on-line safety and are confident that their concerns will be addressed.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – behaviour [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 9; NMS 12]

- 2.15 The school meets the standards.
- 2.16 The school has a suitable behaviour policy which is available on the school website. It sets out the aims of the school and outlines the sanctions to be adopted in the event of pupil misbehaviour. Staff and pupils understand the policy ensuring that it is implemented effectively. Detail of incidents is recorded on a system of dedicated software and monitored regularly to identify patterns and action to be taken. A record is kept of the sanctions imposed upon pupils for serious misbehaviour which takes into account the specific needs of individual pupils including those with SEND. The school implements its exclusion policy fairly and appropriately. Pupils feel that the system is fair and staff feel well trained to deal with any incidents of poor behaviour in-line with the school policy.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – bullying [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 10; NMS 12]

- 2.17 The school meets the standards.
- 2.18 The school has a suitable policy for bullying which sets out clearly the measures the school takes to prevent bullying in the first instance and to deal with it, should it occur. This is implemented effectively. Staff and pupils fully understand their responsibility for reporting any instances of bullying, and records show that this happens in practice. Resolution of bullying incidents involves discussion with both perpetrator and victim, and parents of all parties are involved at an early stage and kept informed.
- 2.19 The school is fully aware that such incidents may become safeguarding issues and may necessitate the involvement of the police or the local authority children's services. Those with designated responsibilities understand the thresholds for such referrals.
- 2.20 All bullying instances are recorded in appropriate detail, using dedicated software. Records for behaviour, bullying and safeguarding are suitably linked so that patterns and trends can be identified and appropriate action taken in a timely manner. Records indicate that bullying incidents do occur within the school but that they are taken seriously and, generally, are dealt with effectively in as far as it is possible.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – supervision of pupils [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 14; NMS 15]

- 2.21 The school meets the standards.
- 2.22 The school has adequate arrangements for the supervision of pupils within lessons, as they move around the school, at breaks and lunchtimes and before and after school. There are sufficient staff to supervise boarders.
- 2.23 The number of staff on duty has been reviewed and increased under COVID-19 to ensure that year group bubbles can be maintained and supervised at the same time. Detailed advice has been provided for staff who undertake supervisory duties to ensure that all areas of the school considered a greater risk, including toilet facilities, are part of their regular walk rounds. Suitable arrangements have been implemented for supervision in the sixth-form area and other areas where pupils gather socially.

Welfare, health and safety of pupils – risk assessment [ISSR Part 3, paragraph 16; NMS 6]

- 2.24 The school meets the standards.
- 2.25 The school has an appropriate policy for risk assessment and ensures that risk assessments are drawn up for areas of the school and specific activities which might pose a risk to pupils. It also completes

appropriately detailed welfare risk assessments for pupils with additional social and emotional needs, including the victim or perpetrator of any incident of inappropriate sexualised behaviour.

- 2.26 The school has assessed the risks posed by the COVID-19 pandemic appropriately and has implemented effective measures to manage on-line teaching, teaching within the classroom, movement around the school, and break and lunchtime arrangements in order to ensure, as far as possible, the health and safety of staff and pupils.

Provision of information [ISSR Part 6, paragraph 32(1)(c)]

- 2.27 The school meets the requirements for providing information relating to safeguarding to parents. Particulars of the arrangements for safeguarding are published on the school's website.

Manner in which complaints are handled [ISSR Part 7, paragraph 33; NMS 18]

- 2.28 The school meets the standards.
- 2.29 The school provides parents with a written three-stage policy which is made available on the school's website and is in line with current guidance. It sets out clear timescales for the acknowledgement and resolution of each complaint and makes appropriate efforts to adhere to these. It keeps detailed records of each complaint and takes effective action following any review of its procedures, whether or not the complaint was upheld. Complaints relating to the boarding provision are suitably recorded.

Quality of leadership and management [ISSR Part 8, paragraph 34; NMS 13]

- 2.30 The school does not meet the standards.
- 2.31 Those with leadership and management responsibility have not demonstrated the necessary skills and knowledge or fulfilled their responsibilities effectively so that all of the independent school standards are met consistently. They have not ensured that the well-being of pupils is actively promoted at all times.
- 2.32 Senior leaders have not yet ensured that curriculum provision for PSHE and RSE in the senior school is sufficiently developed or that suitable supporting schemes of work and planning are in place. Restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic have hindered progress in implementing change. For example, it has not been possible to gather the whole school or the whole staff together to reinforce core messages that relate to RSE. Outcomes for pupils in the development of their understanding of positive relationships and their overall preparation for life outside school are unsatisfactory.

3. Regulatory action points

- 3.1 The school does not meet all of the requirements of the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, National Minimum Standards for Boarding Schools 2015 and requirements of the Early Years Statutory Framework and should take immediate action to remedy deficiencies as detailed below.

ISSR Part 1, Quality of education provided – curriculum, relationships and sex education and teaching, paragraphs 2, 2(A) and 3.

- In the senior school, ensure that programmes of study for PSHE and for RSE are developed fully to cover required areas comprehensively, and that teaching, particularly those aspects relating to supporting schemes of work, resources, planning and framework for assessment, is appropriate and implemented effectively to prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life in British society [paragraph 2(1)(a), (2)(d)(i), (2A(1)(b) and d); paragraph 3(a), (c) and (g)].

ISSR Part 8, Leadership and management, paragraph 34; NMS 13

- The school must ensure that those with leadership and management responsibilities use their skills and knowledge and fulfil their responsibilities effectively to promote the well-being of pupils and to ensure that the independent school standards are met consistently [paragraph 34(1)(a), (b) and (c); NMS 13.3 to 13.5].

4. Summary of evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors held discussions with the head, senior leaders and other members of staff and met with the chair of governors. They visited different areas of the school and talked with groups of pupils. They scrutinised a range of documentation, records and policies.