

School inspection report

20 to 22 January 2026

Stonar School

Cottles Park

Atworth

Melksham

Wiltshire

SN12 8NT

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS	3
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS.....	5
RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS	5
SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE.....	6
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE	7
SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	8
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION	9
SECTION 3: PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING.....	10
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING	11
SECTION 4: PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY.....	12
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO PUPILS’ SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY	13
SAFEGUARDING	14
THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS STANDARDS RELATING TO SAFEGUARDING	14
SCHOOL DETAILS	15
INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL.....	16
INSPECTION DETAILS	17

Summary of inspection findings

1. Leaders articulate a clear vision that places the school's core values of kindness, industry, positive participation and contribution to others at the centre of school life. Pupils in turn uphold these values consistently in their daily lives. Leaders prioritise pupils' wellbeing in their decision-making. The proprietor provides effective oversight, which ensures that Standards are met consistently.
2. Leaders undertake thorough self-evaluation, which informs their strategic planning for the school. They implement appropriate measures to reduce potential risks to pupils and ensure staff receive effective training in managing risk. Leaders ensure that all required school policies and procedures are in place, understood by staff and reflect current guidance. However, not all the required previous inspection reports were on the school's website at the start of the inspection. This was rectified during the inspection.
3. Boarders benefit from welcoming, comfortable and homely accommodation. Staff provide boarders with consistent support and new boarders receive effective induction, helping them to settle quickly.
4. Leaders in the early years provide a well-organised and supportive setting that meets individual children's needs. Staff plan purposeful activities that develop early communication, literacy and number skills. As a result, children learn, grow in confidence and engage positively with others.
5. The well-balanced curriculum includes a wide range of academic, practical and creative subjects. Teachers use their high levels of subject knowledge to plan effective lessons that support pupils in making good progress. Leaders implement a suitable framework for assessment and teachers provide helpful feedback to pupils on how to improve their work. Staff support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) effectively. Teachers identify the needs of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) promptly and provide appropriate support. An extensive range of enrichment and recreational activities, including equestrian sports, enables pupils to develop their interests and acquire new skills.
6. Leaders place emphasis on pupils' emotional wellbeing and mental health and enable pupils to access support from adults when required. Well-planned relationships and sex education (RSE) and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programmes support pupils in developing their self-esteem and making positive and healthy choices to promote their wellbeing. An effective physical education (PE) programme supports pupils' physical health and fitness.
7. Pupils uphold high standards of conduct, supported by a well-understood behaviour policy. Staff deal with any bullying incidents promptly and effectively. Leaders maintain suitable arrangements for health and safety and for the administration of first aid and medicines. Suitable deployment of staff ensures effective pupil supervision arrangements across the site. Admission and attendance arrangements meet statutory requirements.
8. The school provides effective opportunities for pupils to develop their understanding of identity, diversity and various cultural and religious traditions. Pupils learn about key values, including democracy and the rule of law, and develop a clear understanding of democratic institutions. As a result, the school prepares pupils well for life in wider British society.

9. The careers programme prepares pupils well for the world of work. The school provides effective and individualised guidance for pupils considering their next steps, including on their choice of future academic and vocational courses. Pupils receive effective economic education that prepares them for managing their personal finances and future independence.
10. The proprietor's rigorous oversight ensures safeguarding procedures are well managed. Staff receive suitable training so that they have the appropriate skills and knowledge to safeguard pupils.

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's website includes all required previous inspection reports, so that it provides clear and accurate information about the school.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The proprietor maintains effective oversight of the school. Directors ensure that leaders systematically promote pupils' wellbeing and fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They interrogate and challenge leaders' decision-making through formal meetings and ongoing professional dialogue. They check that the Standards are met consistently by scrutinising reports by leaders, analysing data relating to safeguarding and pupils' attainment, and regularly visiting the school to evaluate the impact of leaders' work. They review the effectiveness of their oversight through engaging with external advisers and considering periodic feedback from parents and pupils about the school's provision.
12. The school's values, which leaders consistently model, guide their decision-making. Pupils reflect these values in their daily conduct and uphold high standards of behaviour within a calm, supportive environment characterised by respect and mutual trust.
13. Leaders review the effectiveness of the school's provision and areas for improvement systematically. This evaluation informs a well-structured development plan aligned with the group's strategic framework. Following a recent evaluation, leaders have introduced new systems that support more effective analysis of pupils' attendance at school, give a clearer oversight of pupils' participation in co-curricular activities and improve the procedures for rewarding positive behaviour.
14. Well-informed directors and leaders adopt a structured approach to risk management. Leaders ensure that suitably trained staff identify potential hazards and implement effective measures to mitigate them. Leaders review risk assessments regularly and make any required changes.
15. Boarding leaders implement appropriate policies and procedures. New boarders receive a suitable induction, helping them to settle quickly into school life and make friends. Boarding staff work effectively with pastoral, academic and healthcare teams to ensure that individual boarders' needs are met. Boarding houses are well appointed, homely and comfortable.
16. Early years leaders ensure that staff provide children with high-quality learning experiences and attentive pastoral care. Leaders foster a positive environment that promotes children's wellbeing and establishes secure foundations for their future learning.
17. Leaders ensure that pupils receive well-structured support for their emotional wellbeing and mental health. Pupils can access timely help from adults when needed. Pupils' health needs are met through effective PSHE and PE programmes.
18. Leaders publish all required policies and procedures on the school's website or otherwise make them available to parents and others as appropriate. At the beginning of the inspection, not all required previous inspection reports were published on the school's website. This was remedied during the on-site inspection.
19. School policies reflect current statutory guidance. Leaders ensure that they are reviewed regularly and implemented consistently. They check that staff understand school policies. Leaders maintain a comprehensive accessibility plan and ensure that the school complies with the Equality Act 2010.

20. Parents regularly receive detailed information about their child's attainment, effort and conduct. The school provides both structured and less formal opportunities for parents to discuss their child's progress with teaching and pastoral staff.
21. Leaders maintain effective relationships with external agencies to promote pupils' wellbeing, including the local authority and safeguarding partners. They notify the local authority when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times. Leaders report to the relevant local authorities the required information about the annual reviews for pupils who have education, health and care plans (EHC plans).
22. The school implements a suitable complaints procedure. Leaders manage complaints in line with the published timescales. They review outcomes carefully to ascertain whether any changes to the school's policies and practice are required, including in cases where complaints are not upheld.

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 provide a broad and coherent curriculum across all phases of the school. In the early years, they supplement children's development of early speaking, writing and number skills by providing specialist teaching in subjects such as PE and modern foreign languages. In the prep school, the curriculum emphasises reading, writing and numeracy, supporting pupils' learning across a wide range of academic and creative subjects. The senior school curriculum includes a focus on oracy, which develops pupils' debating and public-speaking skills. Across the school, the curriculum provides structured opportunities for pupils to develop their digital competence. These include the creation of web pages and the safe and ethical use of artificial intelligence for research.
25. Leaders regularly review the curriculum to ensure that it meets pupils' needs and responds, where possible, to their interests and ambitions. The sixth-form curriculum therefore includes vocational subjects such as equine management, business, and sports and exercise science. A range of well-considered outdoor-education activities and trips, including visits to historical sites and museums, enriches pupils' experience of the curriculum.
26. Teachers demonstrate high levels of subject knowledge. They plan lessons carefully so that they build methodically on pupils' prior learning and use a range of effective resources. Teachers set clear expectations, which encourage pupils to concentrate well, develop an enthusiasm for learning and sustain high levels of interest in their work. Through skilful, incisive questioning, teachers encourage pupils to think independently and articulate their reasoning clearly. Teaching consistently promotes a culture of mutual respect, which supports pupils in challenging different viewpoints constructively. For example, in a senior-school philosophy, religion and ethics lesson, pupils debate whether life begins at conception with maturity and sensitivity. Year 3 pupils discuss their differing views about how a story's narrative might unfold in a thoughtful and measured way.
27. In the prep school, teachers analyse data relating to pupils' aptitude and progress rigorously. In the senior school, pupils regularly receive personalised feedback on how to improve their work. Information about pupils' assessed starting points and achievement is used effectively by teachers to assess and monitor pupils' progress. Teachers typically give pupils regular opportunities to reflect on their work and discuss its quality with peers, developing pupils' ability to evaluate their own learning. Results at GCSE and A level indicate that pupils make good progress in relation to their assessed starting points.
28. In the early years, staff adopt a systematic approach to teaching how letters relate to the sounds they make, which supports children in establishing secure foundations for reading and writing. Children build secure early writing skills through structured tasks that support fine motor development. They acquire early number skills successfully through activities which develop their understanding of counting, number recognition and quantity.
29. During boarding time, younger boarders undertake supervised private study, which provides a clear structure for their work and enables them to access help from teaching staff when required. Sixth-form boarders access appropriate study facilities during boarding time and email teachers to request guidance if they need it.
30. Leaders of provision for pupils who have SEND ensure that support is carefully considered, monitored for its effectiveness and informed by pupils' views on the strategies that help them learn.

Teachers adapt their teaching appropriately to support pupils using, for example, coloured overlays and enlarged fonts on worksheets and modelling processes step by step.

31. Leaders provide well-structured support for pupils who speak EAL. Specialist teachers develop carefully considered strategies to support the development of pupils' spoken and written English, including dedicated lessons where required. Teachers adapt their teaching appropriately to support pupils who speak EAL by providing, for instance, helpful guidance on technical vocabulary.
32. The school provides a rich array of recreational activities to develop and extend pupils' skills and interests. These include a wide range of equestrian sports, in which pupils achieve much success at national and international levels. Pupils take part in The Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme (DofE), develop sign-language skills, learn to fly aeroplanes in aviation club and undertake extended treks on Dartmoor. The school organises a wide range of activities for boarders at weekends, including archery, bowling, trips to wildlife parks and visits to British towns and cities of interest.

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 prioritise pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing. Pupils know how to seek timely support from adults when required, including tutors, pastoral leaders and trained counsellors. Boarders can speak to an independent listener, external to the school, with whom they can discuss concerns. A carefully planned PSHE programme teaches pupils how to manage their emotions and mental health, helping them build self-confidence and self-esteem.
35. The school develops pupils' spiritual awareness effectively. In all sections of the school, including the early years, pupils learn about a range of faith traditions. Pupils develop an appreciation of the non-material aspects of life through regular engagement with the natural environment, including structured walks in the school grounds and the surrounding countryside. Pupils across the school visit the stables regularly, where their interaction with horses encourages them to reflect on their connection with the wider natural world.
36. A well-structured relationships education programme in the early years and prep school provides meaningful opportunities for pupils to learn about identity, relationships and how people are different from each other. In the senior school, the RSE programme teaches pupils about healthy relationships, consent, personal boundaries, risky behaviours and personal responsibility. Trained staff evaluate pupils' understanding regularly through assessments and quizzes. Teachers use this information to adjust the programme where required.
37. The school provides effective health education. Across the school, pupils learn about nutrition and healthy eating. Children in the early years learn how to maintain their oral health and the importance of hygienic practices in their daily routines. Through the PSHE programme, older pupils learn about the risks of alcohol and drug misuse. An effective programme of PE across all phases of the school supports pupils' physical development and fitness. In the early years, well-supervised outdoor provision promotes children's physical development, including climbing and balancing. A broad programme of team sports, including rugby, hockey, football and netball, successfully develops pupils' physical skills.
38. The behaviour policy sets out expectations, rewards and sanctions clearly and staff apply the policy fairly and consistently. As a consequence, pupils uphold high standards of conduct and demonstrate mutual respect.
39. Leaders implement an effective anti-bullying policy. Through the PSHE programme and assemblies, pupils develop a secure understanding of different types of bullying. Leaders record the few instances of bullying meticulously and respond appropriately to any emerging patterns.
40. The prefect system offers pupils purposeful opportunities to contribute to the life of the school. Prefects benefit from appropriate training which gives them a clear understanding of their responsibilities. They discharge their roles reliably, supporting their peers and contributing positively to the life of the wider school community.
41. Suitably trained and knowledgeable staff responsible for health and safety develop and implement clear policies to support pupils' physical wellbeing. As a result of regular evacuation drills, including

during boarding time, pupils know how to respond to an emergency. Leaders implement regular checks and maintenance, including of fire safety equipment and gas, electrical and water systems.

42. Pupils benefit from the provision of well-resourced facilities to support their medical needs. Staff suitably qualified in first aid, including paediatric first aid, provide appropriate first aid and medical care to any pupils injured or unwell. First-aiders are deployed appropriately across the site. Leaders ensure the safe storage and administration of medicines in line with the school's policy. Staff keep appropriate records of pupils' medical needs and the administration of first aid and medication.
43. Leaders ensure effective supervision of pupils during the school day, including during breaktimes, lunchtimes, before school, during activities and in boarding time. This supports pupils' self-confidence and sense of security. Leaders in the early years ensure that the ratio of children to adults meets requirements.
44. Leaders maintain accurate admission and attendance registers, in line with statutory guidance. They monitor attendance closely and act promptly where concerns arise. Leaders put in place detailed plans to support pupils who require help in improving their attendance.
45. Boarders benefit from well-maintained and homely boarding accommodation. They receive nutritious, good-quality meals, with appropriate provision for individual dietary requirements, and can access healthy snacks.

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

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

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

47. Pupils learn how to understand, respect and value people's individual backgrounds and identities. Leaders organise visits to places of worship to develop pupils' understanding of different faith practices. Children in the early years explore events and festivals such as Diwali, Holi, Chinese New Year and Easter through stories, discussion and creative activities. Year 7 pupils learn how stereotypes linked to characteristics such as disability or sex can shape prejudicial attitudes. Pupils learn to appreciate a range of linguistic customs and traditions through themed events such as the International Day of Languages. Boarding staff organise events that celebrate a range of boarders' national traditions, promoting mutual understanding and respect for other people's heritage.
48. Pupils develop a clear appreciation of music, drama, literature and art. Pupils at all levels take part in musical activities, including choirs, external festivals and musical events organised by the proprietor for its schools. Pupils are supported in taking music and drama examinations, in which they attain high levels of success. The school organises visits to London theatres to develop pupils' understanding of dramatic works and theatrical traditions. A broad range of activities supports pupils in developing their aesthetic judgement, including photography, visual art and fashion.
49. Pupils develop a high level of social responsibility. In all sections of the school, staff model positive social behaviour, which pupils emulate. Early years staff develop children's sense of responsibility by providing structured opportunities for children to show leadership, collaborate in decision-making and support each other. For instance, children take turns to pour milk and water for others. In the prep and senior schools, a range of roles such as classroom monitor, house captain and school council representative enables pupils to develop leadership skills, help shape the life of the school community and support their peers.
50. The school provides opportunities for pupils to contribute responsibly to the wider community. Pupils visit a local care home to perform music for residents, and staff arrange structured visits to a local school, enabling pupils to collaborate with their peers in music, art, dance and sport.
51. The school actively promotes pupils' understanding of citizenship. Pupils learn about democratic participation and the role of Parliament through assemblies and the PSHE programme, including participating in mock elections and presentations by visiting speakers. Through the curriculum and assemblies, pupils learn about the legal system, public services and British values such as individual liberty and mutual respect. Teachers are diligent in ensuring that pupils receive a balanced perspective in discussions with political themes.
52. The curriculum provides well-considered opportunities for pupils to develop their moral understanding. For example, in a religious studies lesson, Year 9 pupils consider the arguments for and against abortion, articulating their views with sensitivity, respect and due consideration. In Year 13, pupils debate whether there is any basis for the concept of 'victimless crime'. In the early years and prep school, children and pupils explore the consequences of their choices and learn to distinguish between right and wrong in their behaviour. For instance, children in the early years take turns listening to each other's views.
53. Pupils receive suitable economic education. Carefully planned role-play activities in the early years, including a travel agency, ice-cream parlour, fish-and-chip shop and greengrocer, develop children's

practical understanding of money. In the prep and senior schools, economic education is embedded in the curriculum and supported by the PSHE programme. Through this provision, pupils develop a clear understanding of budgeting, saving and enterprise, and how to prepare for financial independence in their future adult lives.

54. Leaders provide an effective careers programme. Pupils learn about a variety of professions through attending careers fairs and visits to school from representatives from a range of career pathways. Staff support pupils effectively as they prepare to take the next steps in their learning. Teachers and tutors provide helpful guidance to pupils on making GCSE, A-level and BTEC subject choices. Older pupils receive high-quality, individualised support in considering their higher-education options, including degree courses at UK and international universities, and vocational pathways.

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

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

Safeguarding

56. Leaders prioritise pupils' safeguarding across the school. Safeguarding leaders and staff receive comprehensive training for their roles, including training related to the risks of radicalisation and extremism. Leaders provide staff with regular updates on safeguarding practice and systematically check their understanding. Where gaps in understanding are identified, leaders arrange additional training. New staff receive a thorough induction into safeguarding practice. As a result, staff at all levels are vigilant about pupils' welfare. They know how to report concerns promptly in line with the school's safeguarding policy, which reflects current statutory guidance.
57. Appropriately trained directors oversee safeguarding procedures rigorously. They check that procedures are effective through regular reviews of safeguarding practice, scrutiny of the school's liaison with safeguarding partners, including the local authority, and discussions with leaders, staff and pupils.
58. Safeguarding leaders in all phases of the school collaborate effectively with each other, and with boarding, pastoral and healthcare teams, through structured meetings and regular discussions. They monitor concerns diligently to evaluate risk and ensure that appropriate and timely action is taken to support pupils when required. Records relating to safeguarding matters are precise and comprehensive. They include the rationale for decisions, details of referrals made and actions taken. Staff know how to report any concerns about the conduct of adults and do so when required. Leaders act without delay on concerns, recording the issues raised in detail and identifying any emerging trends that might require further action. They promptly consult the local authority when they require external advice about the behaviour of adults.
59. Leaders implement suitable filtering and monitoring of the school's internet to protect pupils from accessing inappropriate, harmful or illegal material. Leaders test these systems regularly, taking account of emerging online risks, and adjust them as required.
60. Pupils learn how to keep themselves safe through the PSHE programme, assemblies and visiting speakers. They develop an age-appropriate understanding of online risks, including those associated with contact from unknown individuals, and know how to report concerns to trusted adults at the school.
61. Appropriately trained staff implement safer-recruitment procedures effectively. Leaders ensure that all required pre-employment checks are completed before staff begin work, including checks on adults living in boarding accommodation. An accurate single central record (SCR) of appointments is diligently maintained.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Stonar School
Department for Education number	865/6001
Address	Stonar School Cottles Park Atworth Melksham Wiltshire SN12 8NT
Phone number	01225 701740
Email address	office@stonarschool.com
Website	www.stonarschool.com
Proprietor	Nace Educational Services Limited
Chair	Mr Daniel Jones
Headteacher	Mr Matthew Way
Age range	2 to 18
Number of pupils	435
Number of boarding pupils	129
Date of previous inspection	8 to 9 February 2023

Information about the school

63. Stonar School is a co-educational day and boarding school near the village of Atworth in Wiltshire. It was established as Stour House School in Sandwich, Kent, in 1895. The school moved to its present site during the Second World War. The school is overseen by the board of directors of Nace Educational Services Limited and supported by a local advisory board.
64. The school has three boarding houses on the school site. Hart House has three sections: one for male boarders in Years 5 to 9, one for male boarders in Years 10 to 13, and one for female boarders in Year 11. Ganbrook House accommodates female boarders in Years 5 to 10. Female boarders in Years 12 and 13 live in York House.
65. There are 50 children in the early years, comprising one Nursery class and one Reception class.
66. The school has identified 134 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. Six pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
67. The school has identified English as an additional language for 57 pupils.
68. The school states its aim is to prepare pupils to thrive in a globalised world by supporting them to develop the skills, knowledge and self-assurance to succeed academically and personally.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

20 to 22 January 2026

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

70. Inspection activities included:

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

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

How are association independent schools in England inspected?

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **www.isi.net**.

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For more information, please visit isi.net