ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

28 to 30 April 2026

Dauntsey's School

West Lavington

Devizes

SN10 4HE

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' active oversight ensures that leaders successfully promote pupils' wellbeing. Governors and leaders understand and clearly communicate the school's vision for pupils to be ambitious, brave and compassionate. This vision provides direction for the school's ongoing and effective self-evaluation and the continual development of the school.

2. Leaders carefully plan and create an environment in which pupils develop very high levels of social responsibility and a sense of being part of a community, both within and outside of the school. Pupils lead a wide variety of groups and regular activities within the school to mentor, train and support other pupils across different age groups. Pupils develop empathetic and supportive relationships within and across year groups and between day and boarding pupils. Pupils lead a wide variety of charitable and partnership activities outside of the school. Older pupils work with younger pupils to plan and run events, courses and activities in the local area. Pupils regularly share their experiences in assemblies, developing a deep culture of service to others. This development of pupils' moral understanding and their commitment to serving their community is a significant strength of the school.

3. Leaders and teachers are ambitious for pupils' academic development. Leaders provide staff with training on different teaching methods which are based on recent research. Teachers are encouraged to undertake their own enquiries into different teaching methods and classroom activities. In the majority of lessons, teachers make use of these effective teaching strategies and pupils develop high levels of knowledge and understanding. However, this is not consistently embedded across all lessons and in some lessons pupils make less progress as a result.

4. Leaders provide a wide range of co-curricular activities to develop pupils' physical, creative and social skills. Staff monitor pupils' progress in these areas to ensure that pupils take part in a balanced range of activities. The adventurous activities programme is integrated throughout the school and pupils develop high levels of resilience and the ability to work as a team.

5. Pupils treat their peers and staff with respect and kindness. Teachers have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and pupils behave well inside and outside of the classroom. Pupils support each other and create a positive and welcoming environment.

6. The boarding houses provide a comfortable and supportive environment for pupils to live away from home. Boarding staff understand their responsibilities well and communicate effectively with staff across the school to ensure that boarders' needs are met.

7. Leaders promote a robust safeguarding culture within the school. Staff understand their responsibilities well and make appropriate use of the school's systems for reporting any concerns. Leaders respond to any concerns promptly and work collaboratively with external safeguarding partners as appropriate.

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 teachers consistently use teaching methods that enable pupils to make the best possible progress.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Governors and school leaders share a clear vision for the school, which gives pupils a wide range of opportunities and develops pupils' character and responsibility to their community. Leaders undertake regular and detailed self-evaluation against the school's aims, which takes into account the views of parents, pupils and staff. Leaders think carefully about how to create structures which promote the school's ethos. Where necessary, they identify and act on any areas for improvement, for instance introducing sibling houses and additional social areas and workspaces to enhance the links and friendships pupils make between houses.

9. Governors know the school well and make sure that school leaders have the knowledge and skills to ensure that the Standards are consistently met. They meet regularly in committees and scrutinise a variety of detailed presentations and reports from school leaders. Governors visit the school regularly to sit in on lessons, have lunch with pupils and observe activities, including the school council. Governors consider the results of surveys of parents and challenge school leaders on their response to these findings. Governors understand the school's policies and procedures and how they work in practice.

10. School leaders promote an inclusive environment throughout the school. They maintain a detailed accessibility plan and provide training to staff on how to adapt lessons and activities to meet the needs of pupils. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010.

11. School leaders take a detailed and proactive approach to risk assessment. They consider strategic risks to pupils' wellbeing and respond rapidly to emerging concerns, for instance the risks posed by artificial intelligence tools. Suitably trained staff take a systematic approach to assessing risk associated with the school's wide range of activities and trips. Robust procedures, such as pre-trip visits, tracking of staff qualifications and detailed documentation, ensure that the risks associated with these activities are effectively managed. Governors maintain close oversight of these processes by considering sample risk assessments and trip reports.

12. Leaders with responsibility for boarding take a systematic approach to reviewing the boarding provision to ensure it is consistent across houses and provides pupils with an experience which supports their wellbeing away from home. Leaders conduct regular and detailed self-evaluation against the statutory requirements and their own aims. They regularly review and update their procedures in response to these evaluations, for instance by improving the communication of fire evacuation arrangements to occasional boarders or creating a new social space for younger boarders.

13. Leaders maintain close links with external agencies, such as the local authority and medical services. They share appropriate information with the local authority, including when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times and in relation to annual reviews and finance for pupils who have education, health and care plans (EHC plans).

14. Leaders maintain a comprehensive suite of policies and handbooks which staff implement consistently. When significant changes to procedures are introduced, leaders provide staff with clear and timely training on how to implement the new procedures effectively.

15. Leaders communicate proactively with parents about the activities of the school, including regular updates on their child's academic progress. The school website includes all required information so that parents can have a comprehensive understanding of the school.

16. Leaders provide a suitable policy for parents to submit complaints. Leaders respond promptly and appropriately to any complaints that may arise. Leaders maintain suitable records of concerns and complaints, including those which relate to boarding. They review these with governors to identify any trends or patterns and take actions as appropriate.

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

17. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

18. Leaders provide a comprehensive curriculum which develops pupils' skills and knowledge across a broad range of subject areas. Younger pupils study a compulsory curriculum which includes core and creative subjects and a choice of modern languages. As pupils move through the school, they make choices to narrow their selection of subjects in preparation for public examinations. Leaders regularly review the curriculum and adapt it to meet the needs of pupils, for instance by adding BTEC and Cambridge Technical qualifications to their existing range of GCSEs and A levels. Pupils achieve above national averages in public examinations and make good progress.

19. Leaders carefully consider the range of skills pupils will need to be successful academically and provide a range of additional courses to support the development of these skills. Pupils in the lower school learn skills such as critical thinking and independent study. Older pupils benefit from courses such as the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ), core mathematics and in-house courses such as 'leadership, sport and adventure' and 'Dauntsey's philosophy'. These courses deepen pupils' understanding and help them develop intellectual skills which prepare them for further study.

20. Leaders provide teachers with regular training to develop the effectiveness of the techniques and activities they use in lessons. Leaders encourage teachers to undertake their own research into different approaches in their subject and to share the success of these approaches within their departments. For instance, teachers help pupils understand the importance of regularly recalling what they have previously learnt. Teachers make effective use of digital technology to support pupils' learning, for instance by providing access to further reading to challenge pupils to extend themselves beyond the curriculum. In the majority of lessons, teachers combine their understanding of effective teaching methods with their knowledge of pupils' current level of attainment to provide effective lessons. However, in some lessons the teaching methods used are less effective in enabling pupils to build their knowledge and skills as effectively as they might.

21. Teachers successfully develop pupils' reading, writing and speaking skills across their subject. Regular reading time in the school day fosters pupils' enjoyment of reading. In English lessons, pupils learn to read text closely and analyse poetry collaboratively. Across their subjects, teachers provide pupils with opportunities for discussion and debate. Teachers make effective use of questioning to probe pupils' understanding and challenge them to communicate their ideas clearly, for instance by moving a discussion skilfully around the class so all pupils contribute. Pupils are articulate and confident whether answering questions in class or presenting to the rest of the school in assemblies.

22. Pupils develop their mathematical and scientific skills well. The range of mathematics qualifications ensures that teaching of numerical skills is well matched to pupils' needs and current levels of attainment. Teachers of science and mathematics know their subject well and use this to plan lessons which avoid common misconceptions. Pupils are able to apply their quantitative skills across subjects, for instance when interpreting graphs in economics or analysing tests on materials in design technology.

23. Pupils benefit from a comprehensive performing arts programme. Teachers use their good subject knowledge to support pupils to develop creative and aesthetic skills in drama, music and dance. Pupils in Year 7 learn at least one instrument and pupils in all years and at all levels of attainment take part in concerts, dance showcases and theatrical productions. Leaders in the visual arts provide an ambitious programme where the study of works of art underpins the development of technical

artistic skills, for instance when Year 7 pupils learn about the symbolism of mortality within 'memento mori' pieces of art when composing a still-life drawing.

24. Leaders provide a comprehensive framework to monitor pupils' attainment across the school. Teachers assess pupils' work regularly and provide them with clear and helpful feedback. Pupils understand their current level of attainment and how to improve. Subject leaders monitor pupils' progress carefully and respond to provide additional support as necessary. Leaders evaluate the progress of different groups of pupils systematically and respond promptly to adapt the teaching and curriculum to support any groups who may need it.

25. Academic leaders ensure that appropriate support is provided to pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The learning support department assesses pupils' needs and works with pupils to create detailed learning plans. Teachers use these to adapt their teaching effectively to provide additional support to pupils who may need it. Where necessary, pupils receive specialist support from staff, such as executive function coaching.

26. Leaders provide extensive support for pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). They identify pupils who may require additional support early and provide this through support lessons with specialist teachers and the 'study buddy' system with older pupils. Pupils take a range of English language qualifications to improve their proficiency. Leaders in this department provide targeted training for teachers. This enables them to adapt their lessons, for instance by providing word lists or checking understanding of technical vocabulary.

27. Leaders provide an extensive programme of activities for pupils. Throughout the school, there is a focus on activities which develop pupils' resilience, ability to collaborate and openness to new experiences. The 'William Dauntsey award' provides a structure to the broad programme, with pupils having to develop a range of physical and social skills. Tutors monitor pupils' progress through the award, ensuring that pupils develop skills across a range of disciplines. Pupils take part in adventurous activities including sailing, trekking and canoeing, helping them develop confidence and the ability to work together under pressure. A wide range of trips and expeditions enable pupils to put these skills into practice, for instance when managing living in a camp in arctic Sweden. In school, including in boarding time, pupils develop skills not covered in mainstream activities, for instance by developing strategic thinking in tabletop wargames club or exploring additional sports such as fencing.

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

28. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

29. Leaders create an environment in which pupils form close and highly positive relationships across the school, including with pupils in different year groups and across boarding and day houses. The wide range of mentoring and buddy systems across academic, co-curricular and boarding activities mean that younger pupils spend time with older pupils on a weekly basis. Leaders provide further structured activities and opportunities do this, for instance in the 'Farmer Boules' tournament in which pupils of different ages compete against each other in a supportive atmosphere. The younger pupils develop confidence, and the older pupils learn what it means for someone to depend on them.

30. Staff have high expectations for pupils' behaviour and implement the school's behaviour policy consistently. Pupils treat their peers and other adults with respect and compassion. Teachers provide training for pupils on respecting those with different characteristics, for instance helping pupils understand about neurodivergence. Pupils understand the harm caused by prejudice and learn how to safely challenge such views. Teachers and pupils work together to create an inclusive community, for instance by providing support to newly arrived pupils in the boarding houses.

31. Leaders take a proactive approach to preventing bullying. Staff ensure that pupils understand the school's expectations and implement the anti-bullying policy effectively. Staff record any incidents of unkindness or suspected bullying systematically and leaders respond promptly and appropriately.

32. Leaders provide a curriculum for physical education (PE) which both enables pupils to perform at high levels and celebrates participation so that pupils develop their physical skills and fitness in line with their interests. Younger pupils take part in a range of sports in PE lessons and games afternoons, developing skills across core sports. Pupils in Year 9 take part in the 'moonrakers' programme which introduces them to endurance sports such as kayaking and cycling. Older pupils choose between competitive sports and other physical activities, such as dance, to develop their physical fitness, athleticism and self-esteem. PE staff and sports coaches have specialist expertise and support the most ambitious pupils to achieve regular success in national sporting competitions.

33. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to develop their spiritual understanding and appreciation of the non-material aspects of life. In regular services, pupils come together in a shared space to reflect on their beliefs and they are thoughtful and curious about spiritual matters. Pupils run their own society for exploring matters of faith and the philosophy behind different belief systems.

34. A comprehensive curriculum for personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) helps pupils understand themselves and their relations with others. Leaders respond to pupils' views in developing and reviewing the curriculum so that lessons are relevant and build on pupils' prior knowledge. Pupils learn how to keep themselves healthy, including how to eat healthily. For instance, pupils analyse different food types based on their ingredients and nutritional information so that they understand the impact of marketing and social media on their food choices. Pupils learn how to manage their mental health and are confident in speaking about the challenges they face.

35. The PSHE programme includes all statutory requirements for relationships and sex education (RSE). Pupils learn about positive relationships, including intimate relationships, and the legal and moral

duties around consent. Pupils learn about issues such as sexual health and online risks such as sexting and sextortion.

36. Leaders with responsibility for the premises and accommodation take a systematic approach to maintenance and safety. Staff record the regular schedule of checks and tests carefully and ensure that any required works are identified and carried out promptly. Staff make appropriate use of external specialists where necessary, for instance to inspect the condition of any asbestos on site.

37. A regular schedule of testing and servicing ensures that fire alarms and firefighting equipment are well maintained. Leaders review the fire risk assessment regularly and update the premises or procedures as necessary. Staff carry out regular evacuation drills so that pupils understand what to do in the event of an emergency. Boarding house staff provide regular induction and refresher training for pupils on fire procedures, including carrying out evacuations in boarding time.

38. The boarding accommodation is well maintained and provides boarders with good quality, comfortable sleeping and living spaces. Boarding house staff develop positive and trusting relationships with boarders so that they feel well cared for and are able to raise any concerns they may have.

39. An extensive system of prefect positions, school leadership and school councils provide pupils with a range of appropriate duties and responsibilities. Staff provide prefects with leadership, safeguarding and anti-bullying training. Prefects act as positive role models around the school and in the boarding houses and are available to provide support to pupils who may require it.

40. A carefully planned rota system ensures that there are appropriate levels of supervision around the school site. Teachers take part in school activities and engage pupils in informal discussions throughout the day so that pupils know that there is always someone to speak to should they need help. In the boarding houses, a careful system of duties ensures there is always someone available. Staff systematically share their pastoral observations when handing over responsibility so that pupils experience a consistent approach to their care.

41. Leaders understand the importance of promoting pupils' attendance. Staff take accurate registers of pupils at key times throughout the school day, including in the evenings, weekends and at bedtime. Leaders monitor attendance carefully and promptly identify any pupils at risk of low attendance. They work closely with families to support pupils to come into school and, where necessary, work with the local authority to provide additional support.

42. A well-resourced medical centre with appropriately trained staff provides accommodation for any pupils who may become unwell. Medical staff store pupils' medication securely and record its distribution in appropriate and accurate records. Staff maintain clear records of any injuries or accidents and analyse these regularly for any trends. Leaders ensure that there are sufficient staff trained in first aid available throughout the school day, on trips and in boarding time.

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

43. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

44. Leaders promote a school culture in which service to others is a natural expectation of daily life. From the youngest ages, pupils are encouraged to contribute to the community around them through 'service in the everyday', for instance clearing up at the end of lessons or helping others in their homework. Older pupils take on regular and substantial roles, including running a peer listening service, coaching younger pupils in sport and providing academic mentoring. Older boarders take turns living in the junior boarding house to support the running of the house and mentor the younger pupils. School leaders monitor pupils' involvement in these activities carefully through the 'William Dauntsey award' and intervene where necessary, for instance to prevent a pupil becoming overloaded or take action to support pupils who are not engaging with this programme. Pupils develop very high levels of social responsibility and an understanding of how they can contribute positively to their community.

45. Pupils are involved in a wide range of partnership and charitable activities beyond the school. Pupils take leadership roles in many of these, such as running learning activities in a woodland environment for local primary schools, and hosting the Wiltshire Disability Games. These activities continue throughout the weekend and in the school holidays. Pupils in the sixth form lead sports clubs on a weekly basis, assisted by younger pupils. Pupils hear in assemblies about older pupils' experiences of service which normalises the expectation that they seek out ways to support their community within and outside the school.

46. Fundraising for charity is a central part of the life of the school. Each year pupils propose different charities to support and present them to their peers before pupils vote on the final choice. Pupils from all ages are involved in these activities and recent chosen charities have been proposed and presented by pupils at the start of their time at the school. Charities chosen can include national and international charities so that pupils learn to appreciate the challenges people face around the world. Pupils also consider environmental causes, for instance a pupil-led initiative to cycle the length of school bus routes in order to raise funds to offset the school transport's carbon emissions. Pupils gain a deep moral understanding of their responsibility to others in their local area and beyond.

47. A well-planned careers guidance programme prepares pupils for life beyond school. Leaders with responsibility for careers work with subject leaders to ensure that pupils begin learning about their future options from the beginning of their time in the school. A systematic programme for older pupils provides them with employment skills and supports them to engage with relevant work experience. A wide range of businesses and employers visit the school and provide pupils with further practical examples of the careers open to them.

48. Pupils are well prepared for further study beyond school. Pupils receive one-to-one sessions with specialist advisors to consider their sixth-form study and its impact on future pathways. Staff provide older pupils with impartial advice on a range of opportunities, including universities in the UK and overseas, apprenticeships and school-leaver programmes.

49. Pupils develop their cultural knowledge and understanding in lessons, as well as through the PSHE programme. In art lessons, pupils explore different cultural traditions, and pupils in German lessons study the historical political culture of East Germany. Regular activities such as an interfaith week

and culture day enable pupils to learn about and celebrate different cultures and beliefs. Pupils study the intellectual and spiritual meaning behind different religious festivals and practices such as Ramadan. The pupil-led equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) society arranges a variety of talks and activities in response to pupils' interests so that they can learn more about the different cultural backgrounds of pupils present in their school and the wider community.

50. The PSHE curriculum provides pupils with a well-planned programme of economic education. Pupils learn how to make safe financial choices and how to manage spending, saving and budgeting. Older pupils learn how to plan their expenditure when leaving home and about earning money and paying taxes. Pupils learn about different types of credit and debt, including student loans, mobile phone contracts and mortgages. Pupils are confident in discussing financial matters and planning for their future.

51. Pupils learn about the institutions and services of modern Britain. In history lessons, pupils learn about different political systems including feudal systems, communism and democracy. Pupils learn about the functioning of representative democracy in tutorials and practise this in voting for representatives for the school council. Many of the school's charitable activities and priorities are decided by direct votes so that pupils understand the importance of individual liberty and of everyone having their voice heard.

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

52. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

53. Leaders promote a robust safeguarding culture throughout the school. Leaders review and update safeguarding policy and procedures regularly and ensure they are in line with current statutory guidance.

54. Governors conduct regular reviews of safeguarding, scrutinise safeguarding reports carefully and provide effective oversight. Governors meet with leaders during monitoring visits, review records and monitor any trends. They speak to staff and pupils to check the effectiveness of the school's actions.

55. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding understand their roles well. They undertake regular training and are up to date with local and national safeguarding trends. Leaders provide staff with effective training on their safeguarding responsibilities through regular training sessions and briefings. Staff understand and make active use of the school's reporting systems, including for any low-level concerns they may have about other adults.

56. Boarding staff take part in specialised training and understand their additional responsibilities for pupils who are resident on the school site, including those who are from overseas. They consider boarders' needs carefully, for instance systematically checking in with them when they return to school after holidays. Boarding staff carefully consider the suitability of guardianship arrangements for overseas boarders and are alert to any concerns pupils may have about these arrangements. Leaders ensure that there is a suitable independent person for boarders to contact, should they need to raise concerns, and they provide clear information about how to do this.

57. Leaders maintain comprehensive systems for recording and responding to any safeguarding concerns. Leaders consider all concerns carefully and promptly agree the most appropriate course of action. Regular meetings between safeguarding leaders, pastoral leaders, boarding and medical staff ensure that information is shared effectively across the school and pupils are provided with effective support. Where necessary, leaders with responsibility for safeguarding work collaboratively with local safeguarding partners, such as mental health services, and provide effective support for pupils.

58. In PSHE lessons and assemblies, pupils learn to keep themselves safe, including online. Pupils learn about how drugs and alcohol may make them vulnerable and the risks of online grooming, for example. Leaders maintain an effective internet filtering and monitoring system, which they test on a regular basis. Leaders respond promptly to any instances where pupils attempt to access inappropriate content or are at risk of harm.

59. Leaders ensure that adults present on the school premises or engaged with the school elsewhere undergo suitable checks. Staff carry out the necessary pre-appointment checks on employees before they commence work. Resident adults in boarding accommodation undergo the relevant checks and sign appropriate residency agreements. These checks are systematically documented in well-organised files and in an accurate single central record of appointments.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

60. All the relevant Standards are met.

School details

School	Dauntsey's School
Department for Education number	865/6007
Registered charity number	1115638
Address	Dauntsey's School West Lavington Devizes Wiltshire SN10 4HE
Phone number	01380 814500
Email address	info@dauntseys.org
Website	www.dauntseys.org
Proprietor	Dauntsey's School
Chair	Mr Tony Clifford
Headteacher	Mr John Davies
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	836
Number of boarding pupils	292
Date of previous inspection	21 to 22 June 2023

Information about the school

61. Dauntsey's is a co-educational day and boarding school located in the village of West Lavington, Wiltshire. The school is a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection a new headteacher was appointed in September 2024 and a new chair of governors was appointed in June 2025.

62. Boarding accommodation is provided in five boarding houses. There is one mixed-sex boarding house for pupils in Years 7 to 9. There are four single-sex boarding houses for older pupils, two for female pupils and two for male pupils.

63. The school has identified 320 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.

64. The school has identified English as an additional language for 61 pupils.

65. The school states its aims are to achieve high academic results, while instilling a life-long love of learning, through excellent and innovative teaching. The school aims to deliver outstanding pastoral care, where every pupil and staff member is known, valued and respected, and where kindness, courtesy, compassion and tolerance are ever present. Leaders aim to offer first-class, tailored university and careers advice in order to find the best future path for each individual. They aim to provide a broad range of co-curricular activities, which offer adventure, opportunities and challenge. Leaders aim to ensure the school remains a benefit to the local community and beyond, to cherish and protect the environment, while also reducing its carbon footprint.

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Inspection details

Inspection dates	28 to 30 April 2026

66. A team of nine 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 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.

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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