

School inspection report

30 April to 2 May 2024

Totnes Independent School

Windmill House

Ashburton Road

Totnes

TQ9 5JT

The Independent Schools Inspectorate is appointed by the Department for Education to inspect association independent schools in England. Our inspections report on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards and other applicable regulatory requirements are met, collectively referred to in this report as 'the Standards'.

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Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor and senior leaders are committed to creating a progressive educational environment in which pupils can enjoy learning, achieve academic success, and flourish as individuals. The school's founding principles of love, acceptance, respect, and safety (LARS) permeate life at the school and are well understood by staff and pupils.
2. Pupils develop their literacy, oracy and mathematics skills through a suitably broad curriculum. There is a focus on positive classroom behaviours and effective teaching strategies.
3. The governors act as an advisory body to the proprietor and leaders. Working together, they maintain oversight to ensure that all Standards at the school are met. Not all senior leadership roles are fully developed. The school's self-evaluation has not fully considered the clarity of these roles or the leadership capacity to fulfil them.
4. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are provided for effectively through specialised support. Pupils who have difficulty attending school are given the support they need to help them improve their attendance.
5. A significant strength of the school is the well-considered support for pupils' mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. Leaders' make the most of opportunities through meetings with tutors, the curriculum and pastoral support to consistently promote the importance of understanding, kindness and respect. Pupils are helped to develop an understanding of their own emotions and those of others. They are able to relate and show empathy towards each other and adults in a mature manner.
6. Lessons are well planned and take account of pupils' needs and abilities. Pupils make good progress and achieve above expectations in relation to their starting points. Tracking the progress of pupils, the use of that data to inform teaching is generally well established.
7. A good range of clubs and activities allow pupils to develop skills and interests in a variety of creative and physical pursuits and pupils respond positively to these opportunities.
8. There is a strong school council with active pupil involvement which supports pupils' understanding of the democratic process and helps them develop a clear sense of justice, tolerance and respect for all. Pupils engage in projects in the local community, organise fundraising events and put their economic skills and understanding into practice both within and outside the school.
9. There is an embedded culture of safeguarding. Staff know and understand their responsibilities and the safeguarding team handle concerns sensitively and thoroughly, involving external agencies promptly when appropriate. Pupils are well supervised and feel safe at school.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

The proprietor should:

- develop the process of self-evaluation to ensure that the extent of leadership responsibilities are clear.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. The proprietor, senior leaders and governors provide clear direction for the school to fulfil the school's aims. They promote support for the academic and pastoral needs of the pupils allowing them to learn and flourish. Leaders and staff model and support the school's values, and pupil wellbeing benefits greatly as a result.
11. Oversight of the leadership's effectiveness is maintained by the proprietor through a system of self-evaluation and consultations with senior leaders to ensure the Standards are met. Leaders typically understand what is working well. However, the detail of the self-evaluation by the proprietor and leaders has not been sufficiently detailed to fully assess the capacity of senior leaders to execute their roles and responsibilities.
12. The governing group provide effective challenge and support to the proprietor and senior leadership team. The leadership team and governors work well together to ensure that the aims and ethos of the school are well understood and clearly communicated to staff, parents and pupils.
13. The curriculum is well planned by leaders and its implementation clearly supports the aims and objectives of the school. Academic outcomes are enhanced by integrating critical thinking, projects, and the teaching of interpersonal skills into the curriculum.
14. Leaders foster good behaviour amongst pupils via the active application of the school's aims and the promotion of active listening in classes. Behaviour management focuses on pupils taking responsibility for their actions. It creates a sense of security, belonging and community for pupils.
15. A suitable health and safety policy is in place and effectively implemented. There is a strategic approach to risk assessment which extends to contextual safeguarding risks. Risk assessments are detailed and include the identification of control measures which are put in place. The site is secure and pupils feel safe and supported.
16. Leaders liaise effectively and promptly with local authorities, children's services and counselling services so that pupils can receive appropriate specialised support.
17. Required information and policies are available on the school's website, and regular termly reports keep parents informed of their child's progress. The complaints policy is implemented appropriately. Concerns are addressed in a timely fashion and suitable records of these are maintained.
18. A suitable accessibility plan is in place which includes provision and adaptations of the curriculum for pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The school fulfils its obligations under the Equality Act and appropriate information is shared with local authorities in the annual review of education, health and care (EHC) plans.

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

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

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

20. The proprietor and staff promote the school's aims of pupils taking responsibility for their learning and achieving their best.
21. Pupils benefit from a curriculum that is well planned, covers all the required areas and takes account of pupils' age, ability and needs. There is an appropriate range of subjects and flexibility by leaders allows adjustment of academic programmes to best suit individual pupils.
22. Pupils' understanding is deepened through the well-planned project lessons. The projects allow pupils to develop literacy, numeracy and creativity skills. For example, a Year 7 class designed their own fictional characters, initially through an extended creative writing exercise, then drawing a character, before pixelating it and ultimately producing an embroidered version.
23. Teachers are knowledgeable and plan lessons well, making good use of time. Effective teaching techniques engage pupils and deepens their understanding and pupils make good progress.
24. Clear and consistent assessment by teachers of pupils' work includes detailed feedback. Pupils understand how to plan their next steps and what they need to do to improve.
25. Pupils are ambitious and keen to learn. Outcomes in public examinations at GCSE indicate that the majority of pupils achieve results that are well above the expectations indicated by their starting points.
26. Pupils are calm and purposeful in lessons because of the clear expectations of staff. Pupils are encouraged to think and question, and they are confident to do so. Teachers and senior leaders support good behaviour through positive and open dialogue with pupils. Positive relationships between staff and pupils help to promote the development of pupils' emotional understanding and social skills.
27. Pupils who have SEND are well supported by a dedicated and effectively trained and deployed team of learning support mentors. As a result of effective communications about the needs of pupils, teachers understand how best to support them in lessons and as a result, pupils who have SEND learn effectively and make good progress.
28. Tailored support ensures pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) develop their understanding of language and make good progress.
29. Emphasis is placed on the importance of activity and being outdoors. There is an appropriate range of suitable physical and recreation activities in the extra-curricular programme, providing opportunities for physical and emotional development and a balance to academic work.

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

30. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

31. Leaders have considered carefully the ways in which to support pupils to understand and manage their emotions. Through day-to-day interactions with pupils and pastoral support, staff consistently encourage pupils to reflect thoughtfully on the values of kindness and respect. Pupils consider how best to help each other and they can access and interact with staff and school leaders with ease. Staff are well trained and understand how to guide pupils so that they deepen their self-understanding and appreciate the impact of their emotions on their behaviours. Pupils have high expectations of themselves and others, and thoughtfully challenge when another's behaviour is not consistent with the values shared by the school community. Pupils are polite, gentle and thoughtful towards each other and adults.
32. Pupils take on responsibilities through school council as form representatives and student leader roles. The school council is well attended, and purposeful. It works with school leaders to achieve goals such as the setting up of the pupil-run tuck shop, the purchase and siting of a new suggestions box, and the planning of a new bike shed.
33. Close attention is given by staff and leaders to supporting pupils' emotional and mental health needs. Relevant information is shared between staff so that any risks are mitigated appropriately. Pupils feel safe and supported and this helps them grow in confidence, resulting in good personal progress. Pupils discuss their work and progress openly and provide each other with support. Effective strategies are put into place to improve attendance where required.
34. Leaders, staff and pupils have high expectations of good behaviour. Pupils behave well in school. Supported by the 'Behaviour for Learning' initiative, which is effectively implemented, pupils engage constructively with staff and accept responsibility for their own behaviour.
35. Pupils are highly accepting of people from different backgrounds or who may hold different views or beliefs to them. They learn to appreciate diversity through cross curricular activities in subjects such as history, geography, personal, social, health and economic (PSHE), English and Spanish. These focus on developing cultural awareness and sensitivity by studying complex issues.
36. The *Personal Development* programme implemented by leaders is successful in supporting significant social and emotional development. Equality and diversity are strongly held values in the school community and this is supported by the PSHE curriculum. Every year the school holds a Pride festival, inviting in speakers from Devon Proud2Be.
37. The leadership of the school has given suitable training and resources to the teaching of relationships and sex education (RSE) which meets the needs of pupils. Pupils acquire the knowledge they need and give feedback to inform improvements to the programme.
38. The school buildings and site are well maintained and appropriate health and safety checks are undertaken and correct records are kept. Risk assessments are kept up to date, are usefully detailed and effectively implemented. Suitable facilities for first aid when a pupil is unwell or injured are in place and clear records are kept of care provided and any medication administered.

39. Admissions and attendance registers are kept and maintained in accordance with requirements. Absence patterns are tracked with appropriate and timely follow-up. Transfers of pupils to and from other schools are notified to the local authority.
40. Pupils are well supervised and feel safe on the site. Pupils support one another and know when to give their friends time and space. Bullying and unkindness is rare but when incidents do occur pupils say these are dealt with well.
41. A high proportion of pupils challenge themselves through participation in pursuits such as The Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (DofE) and the Ten Tors challenge on Dartmoor. Physical education features prominently in the timetable and meets pupils' needs. In addition, before and after school physical activities such as Qigong, cross-country running and basketball enjoy high participation rates.

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

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

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

43. Leaders and teachers are highly knowledgeable about, and invested in, the importance of the personal, social and emotional development of the pupils, and the responsibility on them to contribute to the community.
44. The school council provides valuable opportunities for pupils to exercise leadership through specific positions of responsibility including head pupils, academic, diversity, sports and art leads. Every tutor group also has an elected pupil representative. As a result, a significant proportion of pupils are able to advocate and represent the views and experiences of their peers through debate and listening in an organised forum where respect for and understanding of the democratic process is cultivated.
45. School leaders encourage the school council to embrace responsibility, giving autonomy to pupils to set the agenda and initiate changes. In this way, pupils contribute to the life of the school and the wider community. For example, it organises fundraising for local charities such as Food for Children, Totnes Caring, Toilet Twinning and major events such as Pride week and Open week.
46. The values of democracy, personal freedom and accountability, and the rule of law and fairness are fostered by teachers and leaders and rooted in the school's culture. Pupils develop a strong sense of justice and appreciation of right from wrong at an early age, for example, Year 7 pupils in English debated complex issues showing acute empathy as well as independent critical analysis.
47. Pupils show social responsibility and commitment to sustainability and the outdoors through clubs such as Environment club and Bushcraft club. A high proportion of pupils are also involved in DofE and all participants research and organise their own voluntary service element to promote their interpersonal skills and independence.
48. Consideration of current affairs and societal concerns form the basis of tutor times every week. The sessions allow pupils access to balanced views and different sources of information, gaining an insight into society in modern Britain and the wider world. For example, a Year 10 tutor group considered the drivers and consequences of increasing global wealth inequality. 'Themed forums' at which speakers such as MPs and the local police might present, and a wide-ranging programme of local trips and visits, including to the local fish market in the early hours of the morning, typify how the school helps to develop pupils' understanding and appreciation of life in the local community and the wider world.
49. Careers guidance is given to pupils in all year groups in an age-appropriate manner. Year 10 pupils attend an annual careers convention in Exeter and Year 11 pupils value the guidance and help they receive regarding potential A-level courses and applications to further education institutions. Pupils are given sufficient information to inform subject choices for GCSEs.
50. Economic education is embedded in the PSHE and Wellbeing curriculum. One Year 8 pupil explained how they had been learning about taxation and in Year 9 pupils learn about budgeting, whilst Year 11 pupils consider planning and managing the finances for school events using money raised from the pupil-run tuck shop.

51. Pupils are respectful of each other and have a clear understanding of right and wrong. They demonstrate the importance of accepting responsibility for their own actions. Issues between pupils are resolved through open exchanges and restorative justice. Two Year 11 pupils explained how they had fallen out but then used positive 'LARS' communication to resolve their differences.
52. Pupils and teachers speak warmly of their respect for each other. With a focus on tolerance and understanding differences, pupils are able to feel comfortable and confident in school.

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

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

Safeguarding

54. The safeguarding culture is strong and prominent with effective arrangements to promote the safety and welfare of pupils in place. Leaders emphasise wellbeing and foster a sense of security across the school community. As a result, pupils are confident talking to or contacting adults if they have a concern and they know action will be taken.
55. The school's safeguarding policy, overseen by the proprietor and advisory governing group, aligns with statutory guidance and is rigorously implemented. The school regularly evaluates its safeguarding practices, including an annual review, tailoring responses to the context of the school, ensuring that measures are in place to manage potential and contextual risks.
56. Safeguarding leaders have suitable up-to-date training and the experience to manage concerns about pupils when they arise. They ensure all staff are trained annually to a level above guidance requirements and receive weekly updates on welfare and safeguarding issues. Liaison with external agencies is effective and any referrals are made promptly.
57. Staff effectively record concerns about pupils. These records are reviewed by safeguarding leaders to detect patterns and maintain a clear overview allowing appropriate support to be put in place for pupils.
58. Pupils understand how to stay safe online. Within PSHE and RSE lessons, pupils receive education on how to navigate online safely and manage personal security. Filtering and monitoring systems help safeguard pupils' activities.
59. A suitable record of appointments is correctly maintained with all the required checks undertaken before staff, volunteers, or governors join the school. Relevant staff are suitably trained in safer recruitment procedures and the proprietor has oversight of the recruitment process.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	Totnes Independent School
Department for Education number	878/6068
Address	Totnes Independent School Windmill House Ashburton Road Totnes Devon TQ9 5JT
Phone number	01803 864 484
Email address	office@top-school.co.uk
Website	www.totnesindependentschool.co.uk
Proprietor	Mr Ross Robens
Chair of advisory governing group	Mr Geoff Chapman
Headteacher	Mr Simon Bowley
Age range	11 to 16
Number of pupils	114
Date of previous inspection	13 December 2021

Information about the school

61. Totnes Independent School (formerly known as Totnes Progressive School) is an independent co-educational day school in Totnes, Devon for pupils aged 11 to 16 years. The school is owned and managed by the proprietor as a limited company. The company has two directors, one of whom is the proprietor and the other a leader and teacher at the school. A governance group provides advice and support.
62. The school has identified 45 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). 19 pupils at the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
63. English is an additional language for three pupils.
64. The school states its aims are to develop and promote academic tenacity, self-reliance, responsibility, resourcefulness, and personal conscientiousness. It seeks to develop pupils' ability to be kind and considerate to others, especially when making decisions and navigating challenging situations.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

30 April to 2 May 2024

65. A team of three inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

66. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of tutor periods
- observation of a sample of extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection
- discussions with the advisory governing group and its chair
- discussions with the proprietor, head, school leaders and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

67. 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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