



ISI Independent
Schools
Inspectorate

Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Reports

The Cedars School

November 2019



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School's Details

School	The Cedars School			
DfE number	869/6012			
Address	The Cedars School Church Road Aldermaston Reading Berkshire RG7 4LR			
Telephone number	0118 971 4251			
Email address	enquiries@thecedarsschool.co.uk			
Headteacher	Mrs Jane O'Halloran			
Proprietor	Mrs Jane O'Halloran			
Age range	4 to 11			
Number of pupils on roll	37			
	EYFS	4	Years 1 to 6	33
Inspection dates	5 to 7 November 2019			

1. Background Information

About the school

- 1.1 The Cedars is an independent co-educational day school for pupils aged 4 to 11 years.
- 1.2 The head has been the sole proprietor of the school following the retirement of the other initial proprietor's retirement in 2002. The school was established in 1992 in a Victorian school building, with extensions added in 2008 to create a second floor of classrooms. Since the previous inspection, the school has ceased to accept children under the age of 4 years.
- 1.3 The pupils are grouped in mixed age classes: Saplings, consisting of Reception and Year 1; Group 1, consisting of Years 2 and 3; Group 2, consisting of Year 4, and Group 3, consisting of Years 5 and 6.

What the school seeks to do

- 1.4 The school aims to identify and promote pupils' talents so that they develop fully as happy, secure, well-balanced children, who are kind, compassionate, tolerant and well-behaved. It seeks to prepare them for the next stage in life and to equip them with the knowledge of how to learn, work independently and live healthy lifestyles.

About the pupils

- 1.5 Pupils come from a range of professional backgrounds, mostly from families living locally to the school. Nationally standardised test data provided by the school indicate that the ability of the pupils is above average. The school has identified nine pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia and dyspraxia, speech and language and sensory difficulties, all of whom receive additional specialist help. No pupil in the school has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for two pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. Data used by the school have identified six pupils as being the most able in the school's population.

2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

Preface

The registration authority for independent schools is the Department for Education (DfE), which directs inspection according to a specified frequency or at any time where the DfE has particular concerns about a school. The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is the body approved by the Secretary of State for the purpose of inspecting schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and reporting on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Accordingly, inspection records whether the school meets each of these standards, which are arranged in eight Parts, each of which is divided into separate paragraphs. The inspection of schools that have early years settings not requiring registration similarly records whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, the inspection reports on the school's accessibility plan under Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010 and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

All association independent schools will have an inspection within three years from April 2016, in accordance with the Framework and DfE requirements. The inspection may be of COMPLIANCE ONLY or a combined inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY AND COMPLIANCE depending on a number of factors, including findings from their most recent inspection. Schools judged not to meet the standards may also be subject to a progress monitoring visit before their next routine inspection. The progress monitoring visit will judge whether the school has taken the necessary action to meet any un-met standards identified at their previous inspection.

The inspection was also carried out under the arrangements of the ISC Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership.

This is a FOCUSED COMPLIANCE INSPECTION which was combined with an inspection of EDUCATIONAL QUALITY, the report of which appears later in this document. The COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as **met** or as **not met**. All schools are required to meet all the standards applicable to them. Where the minimum requirements are not met, this is clearly indicated in the relevant section of the report and the school is required to take the actions specified. In this focused compliance inspection, key regulations and standards have been inspected in detail. These are the regulations on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety, arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information to parents; the handling of parents' complaints; and other related aspects of leadership and management. The remaining standards and requirements are deemed to continue to be met unless evidence to the contrary has been found.

Inspections do not include matters that are outside of the regulatory framework described above, such as: an exhaustive health and safety audit; compliance with data protection requirements; an in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features; contractual arrangements with parents; an investigation of the financial viability of the school or its accounting procedures.

Inspectors may be aware of individual safeguarding concerns, allegations and complaints as part of the inspection process. Such matters will not usually be referred to specifically in published reports in this document but will have been considered by the team in reaching its judgements.

Links to the full regulations and requirements can be found here: [The Education \(Independent School Standards\) Regulations 2014](#), [Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework](#).

Key findings

- 2.1 The school meets the standards in the schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014, and relevant requirements of the statutory framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, and associated requirements, and no further action is required as a result of this inspection.

PART 1 – Quality of education provided

- 2.2 The school uses its own framework to determine attainment, instead of the national framework.
- 2.3 The curriculum is documented, supported by appropriate plans and schemes of work for the pupils and covers the required breadth of material. The teaching enables pupils to make good progress, encompasses effective behaviour management and is supported by suitable resources. A suitable framework for the assessment of pupils' performance is in place.
- 2.4 **The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.**

PART 2 – Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils

- 2.5 Principles and values are actively promoted which facilitate the personal development of pupils as responsible, tolerant, law-abiding citizens.
- 2.6 **The standard relating to spiritual, moral, social and cultural development [paragraph 5] is met.**

PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.7 Arrangements are made to safeguard and promote the welfare of pupils by means that pay due regard to current statutory guidance; good behaviour is promoted; bullying is prevented so far as reasonably practicable; health and safety requirements are met, including those relating to fire safety; provision is made for first aid. Pupils are properly supervised; admission and attendance registers are maintained, as required, and there is a strategic approach to risk assessment. A disability access plan is in place.
- 2.8 **The standards relating to welfare, health and safety [paragraphs 6–16], the requirement of Schedule 10 of the Equality Act 2010, and the ban on corporal punishment under section 548 of the Education Act 1996 are met.**

PART 4 – Suitability of staff, supply staff, and proprietors

- 2.9 **The standards relating to the suitability of those in contact with pupils at the school [paragraphs 17–21] are met.**

PART 5 – Premises of and accommodation at schools

- 2.10 Suitable toilet and changing facilities, and showering facilities where required by the standard, and appropriate accommodation for pupils' medical and therapy needs are provided. The premises are maintained to a standard commensurate with health and safety; acoustics and lighting are appropriate; water provision is adequate. Suitable outdoor space is provided for physical education and outdoor play.
- 2.11 **The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.**

PART 6 – Provision of information

2.12 A range of information is variously published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. These include details about the proprietor, the ethos of the school and the curriculum, and of the school's arrangements for admission, behaviour and exclusions, bullying, health and safety, first aid, details of the complaints procedure, and the number of complaints registered under the formal procedure during the preceding school year, and the provision for any with education, health and care plans or English as an additional language. They also include particulars of the school's academic performance during the preceding school year, inspection reports and (for parents only) a report at least annually of their own child's progress. The safeguarding policy is posted on the school's website.

2.13 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

2.14 Parental complaints, if any, are handled effectively through a three-stage process, (informal, formal and a hearing before a panel of three, one of whom is independent of the school). Each stage has clear time scales, and at the third stage the panel can make findings and recommendations which are communicated to the complainant. Records are kept appropriately, including of any action taken, whether or not a complaint is successful.

2.15 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

2.16 The proprietor ensures that the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge, and fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met, and they actively promote the well-being of the pupils.

2.17 The standard relating to leadership and management of the school [paragraph 34] is met.

3. Educational Quality Inspection

Preface

The EDUCATIONAL QUALITY inspection reports on the quality of the school's work. It focuses on the two key outcomes:

- The achievement of the pupils, including their academic development, and
- The personal development of the pupils.

Since the school was last inspected, the framework for inspection has changed. The current inspection framework uses different criteria and arrangements for grading from those used in previous inspection frameworks. The judgements made on this inspection are, therefore, not directly comparable to judgements made on previous inspections.

All independent schools are required to meet the requirements of the Independent School Standards. However, different inspectorates apply different frameworks that are suited to the different types of schools they inspect. The ISI terminology reflects quality judgements that are at least equivalent to those used by the national inspectorate, Ofsted. ISI reports do not provide a single overarching judgement for the school but instead give a clear judgement about key outcomes for pupils and information on the quality of the school's work.

The headline judgements must include one of the ISI descriptors 'excellent', 'good', 'sound' or 'unsatisfactory'.

Where necessary, National Curriculum nomenclature is used to refer to year groups in the school.

Key findings

3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

- Pupils make good progress overall.
- Pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) show a good rate of progress as a result of being well supported.
- The achievements of the more able pupils are less successful when insufficient challenge is provided.
- Pupils demonstrate sound skills in information and communication technology (ICT).

3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.

- Pupils show strong social awareness and their behaviour is excellent.
- Pupils demonstrate a good awareness of how to stay safe and healthy.
- Pupils enjoy and are able to create and maintain very positive and supportive relationships with other pupils and staff, reflecting the strong family ethos of the school.
- Pupils' explanations of their understanding of the world in spiritual or philosophical terms are not as developed as possible.

Recommendations

3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvements:

- Increase pupils' progress further by providing more stretch and challenge for the most able pupils.
- Ensure that pupils develop strong ICT skills, through applying the use of technology across all areas of the curriculum.
- Enable pupils to better explain their understanding and appreciation of non-material aspects of life.

The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is good.

3.5 The school does not take part in National Curriculum tests, but the available evidence shows attainment to be above average in relation to national age-related expectations. Most pupils make good progress over time from their individual starting points. Those with SEND and English as an additional language (EAL) show a good rate of progress, being helped to fulfil their potential through the effective support they receive and comprehensively written individual learning plans. The most able pupils make steady progress year on year, maintaining a good level of attainment. The majority of the youngest children successfully complete the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) at a level in line with, and sometimes in advance of, that expected for their age. Pupils successfully gain entry to a range of senior schools and a few are awarded scholarships. In this way, the school fulfils its aim to prepare pupils for the next stage in life. The overwhelming majority of parents and pupils who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire agreed that the school enables pupils to make good progress and that the school meets their individual needs effectively.

- 3.6 Throughout the school, in most areas of the curriculum, pupils show good levels of knowledge, skills and understanding for their age. In the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) most pupils make quick progress for their age and ability, enabled by the nurturing atmosphere of their environment and a good range of resources. They make phonetically plausible attempts at writing words and at sounding out the words on displays. Most pupils show good knowledge, skills and understanding for their age in mathematics, English and science. This is supported by regular standardised assessments, the results of which are systematically tracked for each pupil. Younger pupils were seen to label parts of the human body confidently in a science lesson and older pupils explained their understanding of food chains in detail. In other subjects, including the arts, humanities and French, the pupils' levels of achievement, especially for the most able pupils, are limited when teaching does not enable the pupils to actively explore and find out more for themselves. Pupils develop age-appropriate knowledge, skills and understanding in these areas, being most successful when lessons contain a variety of activities and teaching is enthusiastic.
- 3.7 Pupils' ability to express themselves clearly and confidently in speech, conversation and debate is excellent. They happily take turns to speak and listen and enjoy the chance for lively discussion, as was demonstrated by Year 2 and 3 pupils enthusiastically debating the need for punctuation. Younger pupils were seen using interesting and appropriate language to describe the feelings of a character in role play activities. Pupils listen to each other well, showing respect and consideration for what others have to say. The youngest pupils were seen to rapidly demonstrate competence in writing the letter 'm' and in recognising the sound; with some pupils concentrating for a long time to sound out long words they had thought of and making plausible attempts to write these. As pupils progress through the school their writing skills are broadly in line with national expectations; however, their advanced level of spoken communication is not usually reflected in their choices of vocabulary and expressions in their written work. As they progress through the school most pupils become fluent, expressive readers and show good understanding of standard texts. Their good development of reading skills is supported by an effective system for hearing all pupils read, thus developing their progress.
- 3.8 Pupils demonstrate a good level of mathematical competence and understanding. When opportunity arises, they can apply their numerical skills to other areas such as science and cookery. Pupils in the youngest class make fast progress in their early mathematical learning, being able to count forwards and backwards to 20 and showing an understanding of place value by using blocks of ten bricks and individual bricks to show the value of two-digit numbers. Year 2 pupils showed understanding of basic data handling skills as they created simple graphs to record data for an investigation into whether taller children could jump greater heights. Pupils at the top of the school show good understanding of methods necessary to check their addition, including inverse operations and a secure knowledge of place value through addition of five-digit numbers. The rate of progress and level of attainment of all pupils, especially the most able, was seen to be higher in a few lessons which included opportunity for challenge of mathematical reasoning and independence in learning. Some pupils confidently explain their mathematical thinking and work through tasks quickly, but are not always given more challenging work matched to their individual needs which limits their rate of progress.
- 3.9 Pupils' ICT skills are sound. They show some competent skills, through their computing lessons, including word processing, research and basic coding. Their skills in using ICT to enhance their independent learning across the curriculum are, however, restricted by very few planned opportunities to apply these skills in lessons. They use ICT effectively whilst researching for occasional project-based homework, for example a Year 2 and 3 project on Victorian life, and are excited to be able to do so. Pupils at the top of the school were seen to be age-appropriately proficient in using the internet to research Sikh artefacts.

- 3.10 Pupils demonstrate good study skills for their age. Pupils usually organise their work well and are keen to learn. All parents who completed the questionnaire stated that the school helps their child to be confident and independent and a large majority of pupils said that they are encouraged to think and learn for themselves. Most pupils can analyse information and texts effectively and hypothesise well from an early age, when given the opportunity to do so. This was seen most successfully in lessons where stretch and challenge were provided for all abilities. During an informal discussion, Year 1 pupils were able to clearly hypothesise about why their teacher's pumpkin might have become rotten over half-term and could offer some sensible suggestions as to what could be done in the future to prevent this happening again. Older pupils demonstrated their ability to use higher-order thinking skills to self-check their mathematical calculations using a variety of methods and thus to identify errors, to hypothesise over the best methods used. Most pupils are able to analyse and synthesise information presented to them in lessons, however, inspectors found that such opportunities are not consistent across all pupils in all year groups. Some most able pupils with particular talents and interests spoke of pursuing their interests out of school as, in their opinion, their potential in lessons is not always fully realised.
- 3.11 Some pupils achieve at higher levels than expected for their age in their particular talents, for example in dancing and gymnastics. Older pupils sing in a county choral event and in school pupils enjoy taking part in poetry competitions, school productions and 'Cedars Got Talent'. Members of the judo club take part successfully in tournaments and a few pupils are successful in early grade exams on the piano. Scholarships are offered to a few pupils by senior schools.
- 3.12 Pupils show positive attitudes towards their education. Children in the EYFS take effective leadership in learning by making independent choices of activity, happily selecting new and more challenging tasks over familiar activities. They readily practise the sounds that letters make, numeracy and fine motor skills in carefully planned activities whilst having lots of fun in their well-resourced and nurturing classroom environment. Pupils throughout the school enjoy working collaboratively with each other when opportunity arises. They enjoy the chance to show initiative and independence in their learning, however this willingness is not always exploited by teachers and the activities available, which encourages reliance on adult support. They happily ask questions in discussions and are comfortable to admit mistakes.

The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is good.
- 3.14 Pupils develop a high level of self-confidence as they progress through the school, supported by the nurturing environment, warmth and approachability of the school's leadership and staff, and family ethos. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they believe they are well prepared for the next stage in learning and understand that in order to improve and fulfil their potential they should persevere. Older pupils spoke confidently about their understanding of the current whole school theme of resilience in relation to trying their best. During the inspection, however, inspectors observed that many pupils often show a lack of resilience in lessons where there were limited opportunities to rise to challenges and an over-reliance on adults to find solutions for them when help is needed. All pupils who completed the questionnaire said that the feedback and marking they receive helps them to improve. Pupils are aware that they have targets to help them make progress, but some are less sure of the specific steps needed. This is because of inconsistent guidance about how to improve and develop their work. Pupils stated that their personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons and the caring approach of their teachers help them to reflect on emotions and ways in which they can be kind, reliable and considerate towards others.

3.15 In discussions, pupils showed an appreciation of the importance of considering a variety of factors when making decisions and expressed confidence in making decisions related to their well-being and safety, including when online. They understand that decisions they make now and in the next phase of their education can be important in determining their future. When speaking to inspectors, pupils demonstrated some understanding of the importance that decisions play in their long-term success. Inspectors found that pupils' ability to apply decision-making skills in their own learning is limited, often because some lessons do not pose sufficient challenge for some or allow pupils to follow lines of enquiry in which they are interested. Pupils at the top of the school are able to choose which element of Tudor life to research for an independent homework project and are excited by this opportunity to make decisions in their learning. The youngest children independently make decisions about whether or not to wear a coat outside, depending on the weather, and confidently decide which activities to choose in their classroom.

In discussions, pupils demonstrate some appreciation for the non-material aspects of life but struggle to articulate this aspect in any detail or without significant prompts. They appreciate that everyone deserves to be respected for their beliefs and cultures, supported by their study of different faiths in religious education and personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) lessons, and pupils of all ages value the views and beliefs of others. They find it more challenging to express how the beauty of the world, the arts and different experiences make them feel. By the time they leave the school, pupils show a sound level of cultural and aesthetic awareness. They find it difficult to express their understanding of the world in spiritual and philosophical terms, mainly because teachers tend not to encourage them to express their feelings about what they see and hear in the world around them and in visual and performing arts.

3.16 Pupils are able to distinguish clearly between right and wrong. They respect the need for rules and take pride in following the clear rules of the school and classroom rules, which they have written themselves. The behaviour and moral understanding of pupils throughout the school is excellent. All parents who completed the questionnaire stated that the school actively promotes good behaviour. Pupils are extremely well-behaved in lessons and around the school. During discussions pupils spoke proudly of rewards that are given and that poor behaviour is rare. They are clear about sanctions that may be imposed and believe these to be a clear deterrent for poor behaviour choices. They are aware that their behaviour has an impact on other people, show a keen sense of fair play and accept full responsibility for their own behaviour, including towards others. They challenge any misbehaviour and do not accept or expect unkindness. Pupils are extremely tolerant of each other and show empathy to any individual needs or difficulties.

3.17 Pupils show strong social awareness. They form positive relationships with their peers and with pupils in other parts of the school. They are very supportive of each other reflecting the care and support that they, in turn, receive from staff. All parents, and most pupils, who completed the questionnaire said the school helps pupils to develop strong teamwork and social skills. Different age groups play well together and ensure that everyone is included. They show care and sensitivity towards each other, particularly when playing with those younger than themselves. In lessons they are keen to work cooperatively and show support for each other in group tasks and discussions. Pupils are very fair in taking turns to share ideas and opinions and work well together in undertaking their House duties and chores. They are socially aware and work well together in discussions, tasks and play. Through physical education lessons, as a member of school council, and charity works they enjoy working as part of a team or in pairs to achieve common goals both large and small. Pupils' social development and collaboration is excellent.

- 3.18 Pupils of all ages willingly carry out jobs within their class, for example during the inspection, the youngest children in the school quickly and happily responded to the teacher's request to tidy up. All pupils contribute positively to the lives of their immediate and wider community. They feel encouraged by the supportive ethos of the school and the *Three Cs* – compassion, co-operation and courage - which are rewarded weekly. Pupils benefit from close links with other schools, including a school for disabled children. Pupils take pride in their school environment and are willing helpers to ensure it remains comfortable and safe for all. They take the responsibility of lunch time tasks seriously and support each other happily in fulfilling their duties. The school collectively supports a local school for children with disabilities and other charities, both local and national, enhancing pupils' good level of social responsibility. Pupils run fund raising events for charity, for example sponsored runs, cakes sales, a school 'bake off' and a fortnightly tuck shop.
- 3.19 Pupils show value and respect for the cultural diversity within the school and show sensitivity and tolerance to their peers. They enjoy learning first-hand from their friends about their cultures and faiths. Pupils are tolerant of each other, showing respect, consideration and patience with the needs and differences of their fellow pupils. Their positive attitudes towards each other are supported by the inclusivity of the school. In discussions, pupils express clearly their high respect for and appreciation of those from backgrounds different to their own. They mix readily with pupils of other nationalities, backgrounds and beliefs. Pupils spoke of feeling lucky to be in a multi-cultural school. As they progress through the school pupils become aware of British society and the role of the democratic process through the promotion of fundamental British values in the PSHE curriculum. They develop understanding of the role of democracy through their elections for the school council and assemblies about democratic events. All parents and pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Inspectors found that pupils show high levels of respect for cultural diversity.
- 3.20 Pupils demonstrate a good understanding of how to lead a healthy lifestyle. They are aware of how to stay safe and healthy, both in everyday life and online. All pupils talk of the importance of choosing to follow a healthy diet and agree with the school rule about only bringing in fruit for the morning snack. They learn in science that a balanced diet and exercise help them to be physically healthy. They take part in physical education lessons keenly and understand the benefit that exercise has to their physical health. Pupils appreciate that sharing a worry is helpful and express any concerns with their teachers or by putting a note in the worry box. By Year 2 pupils are able to describe how to use the internet safely and respectfully since this is taught and reinforced effectively in computing lessons. All parents indicated in the questionnaire responses that the school encourages their children to lead a healthy lifestyle, a view shared by the pupils. In addition, all pupils who responded to the questionnaire said they knew how to stay safe when online.

4. Inspection Evidence

- 4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, conducted formal interviews with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the proprietor and attended assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. The responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires were analysed, and the inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

Inspectors

Mrs Penelope Austin

Reporting inspector

Mrs Joanna Hubbard

Compliance team inspector (Head of pre-prep, IAPS school)

Mrs Clare-Anne Bruce

Team inspector (Head of infant and junior departments, IAPS school)