

# School inspection report

24 to 26 February 2026

## **Sherrardswood School**

Lockleys

Welwyn

AL6 0BJ

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 maintains an informed oversight of the school's operations and ensures that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those that apply to the early years. Collectively with leaders, they prioritise pupil welfare, promote pupils' wellbeing and support their learning and development as individual young people. Leaders are tenacious in regularly checking that they are meeting these aims.
2. Pupils of all ages experience a broad and varied curriculum. The relationship between teachers and pupils is supportive and encouraging. In most lessons, teachers use a thorough understanding of what pupils know and can do to plan effective lessons. Staff are typically effective in supporting pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), aided by a large and active learning support department and targeted interventions, when needed. Some teachers do not use a range of information to identify when pupils are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways. When this occurs, pupils' learning slows and they undertake work that is too easy for them.
3. Leaders ensure that the youngest children's learning and developmental needs are very well met. In the early years, children's communication and language, early reading and writing, and understanding of number and mathematics are well supported. Leaders and staff provide a planned curriculum and play opportunities that encourage regular communication and interaction between adults and children. Children gain self-confidence, learn to understand each other's feelings and emotions, listen to each other and take turns. They are well prepared to transition on to their next stage.
4. The school promotes pupils' physical and mental wellbeing. They have suitably qualified staff to take care of them if they are ill. Leaders work closely with any outside agencies, if required. Pupils demonstrate warm relationships and mutual respect between each other. Pupils behave very well, effectively supported by a culture and systems that are understood by all.
5. Pupils' social development is promoted throughout the curriculum, particularly through the rich co-curricular programme, where pupils collaborate, lead and develop positive relationships. The curriculum ensures pupils develop the skills, attributes and confidence required for future independence and contribution to society.
6. Leaders prioritise safeguarding. Leaders are well trained, appropriate to their role, and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. The school provides a range of ways in which pupils can raise concerns or worries. Staff know pupils well. All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on adults before they encounter pupils. Staff maintain an accurate single central record of appointments and appropriate staff files relating to safer recruitment checks.

## 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 use a range of information to identify and support pupils who are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways, so that they learn as effectively as they should in lessons.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. The proprietor maintains an effective oversight of all areas of school life, working closely with the leadership and management of the school. The proprietor ensures that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including in the early years, and that the requirements of the Standards are met consistently.
8. Leaders describe the school as a family that is busy, happy and ambitious. Leaders' vision is understood by staff, who recognise that pupils are individuals who all have different starting points and develop in their own way. The clear aims of promoting pupils' wellbeing and providing individualised pathways are well understood by staff, who know pupils extremely well.
9. Leaders have the appropriate knowledge and skills and their decisions, through self-evaluation, lead to effective improvements. This has recently included developing areas such as post-16 pathways, the reporting structure and academic mentoring. Leaders' approach is in line with the vision of the school as a mainstream school that supports all pupils with a broad spectrum of needs, interests, strengths and talents.
10. Leaders create policies and procedures that suit the context of the school and ensure their successful implementation. The school uses its website to provide appropriate information for pupils, parents and relevant external agencies. This includes all the policies and documents required, including those relating to the early years. Parents receive reports about the achievement and progress of their individual child's progress.
11. Leaders provide the local authority with all required information relating to pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan), including information related to finance and funding. Leaders also inform the local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.
12. Leaders prioritise the wellbeing of pupils in the decisions that they make such as, for example, through regular meetings and effective tracking of aspects of pupils' welfare. Leaders foster effective links with external agencies to promote the wellbeing of pupils and seek additional specialist expertise where needed. Leaders have highly positive working relationships with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners and a range of other professionals. This ensures that the needs of pupils are met effectively.
13. Leaders work closely with the proprietor body to ensure that risks are identified and managed effectively in wellbeing, safety and care. Leaders are appropriately trained and risk assessments are overseen by the proprietor. There is a range of suitable risk assessments in place related to on-site and off-site activities, as well as comprehensive welfare risk assessments for individual pupils. Leaders have implemented procedures that can better identify the needs of each individual pupil.
14. Leaders take effective action where necessary, fostering an environment where pupils and staff feel empowered to raise concerns. The school fulfils its duties under the Equality Act 2010 and has an effective accessibility plan. The proprietor body maintains effective strategic oversight of leaders' work, including safeguarding, compliance, safer recruitment and centrally provided services.
15. The school's complaints procedure is appropriate and implemented effectively. It takes account of statutory guidance related to the management of complaints. All concerns, including at the informal

stage, are recorded centrally. The school follows its published procedures and records are centrally stored. They are reviewed regularly to identify any themes or patterns.

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

**16. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

17. Leaders provide pupils with a broad and varied curriculum, starting with the youngest children in the early years. Leaders routinely review this curriculum to ensure that it offers a wide range of learning across subjects that align with pupils' abilities, interests and aspirations. This leads to a wide range of qualifications and accreditation at GCSE, A level, BTEC Nationals and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ). The school tailors the curriculum to ensure that there is a good range of vocational qualifications for those pupils who want it, such as the Arts Award, which provides practical learning about skills of working and performing in theatres.
18. The relationship between teachers and pupils is supportive and encouraging. Knowledgeable, subject-specialist teachers plan lessons that reinforce pupils' understanding of important concepts and vocabulary. Teachers use targeted questioning to challenge pupils, especially the oldest pupils in the sixth form. Teachers provide helpful feedback and guidance to pupils. They use a range of formative assessments to check on pupils' learning, such as quizzes, examination-style questions, self-marking, scaffolded tasks and reviews of work. Pupils are actively encouraged to articulate reasoning in class to support their deeper understanding.
19. In most lessons, teachers are adept at identifying when pupils are ready to apply their learning in more complex ways. For example, some pupils' thinking is challenged through targeted extension, such as tailored essays in geography. Not all lessons took into account the needs of all pupils, and in some cases the pace of lessons is too slow, reducing engagement and placing limits on pupil progress.
20. Leaders identify pupils' needs effectively and in a timely way. They ensure that staff are well informed about how to support pupils who have SEND. Staff, supported by a highly proactive learning support department, provide effective support in lessons. Targeted additional interventions, when needed, are in place to support varied and numerous individual needs. Pupils who have SEND access the curriculum and learn effectively.
21. There are only a very small number of pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) and who are in the early stages of learning English. Where pupils have additional linguistic needs, these are identified effectively by an assigned co-ordinator. Teachers support pupils, where needed, to develop linguistic skills and access the curriculum effectively.
22. Leaders ensure that there is a well-understood and precise assessment system across all phases in the school. Leaders use this assessment system to identify how well pupils are faring. Where pupils need more support, this is provided in lessons and through additional intervention, where needed. Leaders are adept at supporting pupils to be ready for the rigours of assessments in the qualifications that they access in Years 11 and 13. Typically, pupils learn well over time, achieve a range of qualifications and go on to highly appropriate post-16 and post-18 education, training and employment.
23. Leaders and staff in the early years have created a curriculum that supports the youngest children in the development of their communication and language, early reading and writing, and mathematics and number skills. They use a range of assessment information to check on how children are faring, from their varied starting points. They act quickly to support any children who need extra help. Well-

trained staff ensure that children's needs are met and that they are well supported to transition on to Year 1.

24. A wide range of recreational clubs are offered throughout the school, with high numbers of pupil participation. Pupils value the variety of additional activities on offer, such as performing arts, computing, sport, opportunities for outdoor learning activities, library sessions and food technology.
25. The oldest pupils in the sixth form access a range of optional enrichment opportunities, including scholars club, innovators club and debate club. Staff expertise ensures these programmes provide consistent, meaningful enrichment that helps develop pupils' learning. For example, pupils undertake projects that range from historical research to creative performance work, and the debating club offers external competitions that significantly build pupils' confidence.

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

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

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

27. Physical wellbeing is promoted throughout the school through a well-planned and well-taught physical education (PE) curriculum, games provision, forest school, yoga and clubs. Through structured and regular timetabled lessons in PE, pupils learn about fitness, healthy lifestyles and play sports such as netball and football.
28. There is a wide-ranging programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) across the school, which is planned so that it is appropriate for the ages of the pupils. This includes relationships and sex education (RSE), elements of which are also delivered by external providers and in biology lessons. These programmes enable pupils to recognise, articulate and manage their feelings effectively. Pupils also learn about important topics and values, such as the role of the Equality Act 2010, and the protections it offers people, healthy relationships and consent. Leaders adapt the curriculum to address any issues that arise or that pupils would like to discuss.
29. Leaders implement an appropriate behaviour policy and anti-bullying strategy, which they monitor effectively. Pupils consistently behave well. They understand the behaviour systems, including the 'reminder, warning, on-call' structure and the use of restorative approaches. Leaders promote positive behaviour through a range of rewards, such as house points, commendations, 'golden time' and celebrations in newsletters and rewards. Pupils report that bullying is rare and that any incidents are dealt with quickly and effectively. Pupils demonstrate warm relationships and mutual respect between each other.
30. Children in the early years gain age-appropriate self-confidence, emotional regulation and physical development. Through the curriculum, pupils learn to understand each other's feelings and emotions, listen to each other and take turns. They learn about right and wrong, and taking responsibility when they make mistakes. They learn about the importance of kindness and socialisation. Children's fine and gross motor skills are well supported through well-planned physical activities. As a result, children develop physical and emotional skills appropriate for their age.
31. Buildings and outdoor areas provide appropriate accommodation in which pupils and children study and enjoy recreation. Leaders and staff maintain the buildings and grounds to a suitable standard. The school meets the requirements of health and safety and fire legislation and maintains appropriate records related to this. Pupils are well supervised on the school site and during any off-site activities.
32. Medical provision meets the needs of pupils who are sick or need first aid. Medical accommodation is suitable. Appropriate procedures are followed and recorded in all cases, in line with the school's policy. Staff receive up-to-date training, including in paediatric first aid. Appropriate healthcare plans and welfare risk assessments support pupils, where required, and are known to staff.
33. Pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing are supported well. Pupils have access to safe spaces, if required. For example, the prep school's hub club and the senior school's base and sensory room are spaces where pupils can go for short purposeful breaks. These areas are supervised and monitored effectively.

34. The school maintains appropriate and accurate admission and attendance registers. Leaders have suitable policies and procedures relating to attendance, in line with statutory guidance. They work closely with the local authority to support pupils and families who have a prolonged absence, in line with their statutory responsibilities. Leaders inform the appropriate local authority of any pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard transition points in the school year.

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

**35. All the relevant Standards are met.**

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

36. Social development is promoted throughout the curriculum, particularly through the rich co-curricular programme, where pupils collaborate, lead and develop positive relationships. The curriculum ensures pupils develop the skills, attributes and confidence required for future independence and contribution to society. Opportunities for public speaking and debating, as well as collaborative projects, support pupils in becoming articulate, reflective and socially responsible.
37. School leaders provide a curriculum that supports the growth of pupils' social understanding, including right from wrong. For example, children in the early years are supported to learn, explore and play together. They learn to listen to each other, take turns and act kindly. They quickly learn to take responsibility when they have acted inappropriately and apologise.
38. Economic understanding and careers education are purposefully developed from an early age, preparing pupils for future education and employment. Initiatives such as Young Enterprise, 'The Apprentice', charity fundraising and the 'preparation for life' curriculum enable pupils to understand finance, enterprise and workplace skills. Sixth-form pupils speak warmly of a variety of both local and national charities that they support and raise money on behalf of, for example Home-Start Hertfordshire, which supports parents to be the best they can be to improve children's outcomes, Hertford pantries and Cancer Research.
39. Careers guidance is delivered from Year 7 through PSHE, external speakers, subject taster days and work experience. As they get older, pupils receive structured support, including university and college admissions days, QR-coded pathways information, interview training and regular one-to-one guidance. Leaders work closely with individuals over time, creating bespoke pathways to meet their abilities, interests and aspirations. Leaders continually review provision and bring improvements to the offer available to pupils, including increasing apprenticeship opportunities.
40. The school celebrates difference and promotes equality, inclusion and respect, and this is reflected in pupils' attitudes and behaviour. Assemblies and 'festival of the month' provide opportunities to explore diversity and protected characteristics, and promote cultural understanding. Events such as the 'International Mother Language Day' assembly enhance pupils' appreciation of linguistic and cultural heritages.
41. Pupils are taught about the importance of fundamental British values through the curriculum and wider whole-school opportunities. For example, pupils learn how democracy operates in the school through school council elections, prefect applications and voting on school mottos and menus. Respect and tolerance are evident in daily interactions and school culture.
42. Pupils contribute to school life in various ways. Older pupils regularly volunteer in the prep school, which fosters responsibility and confidence. Pupils in the sixth form apply for leadership positions in the school such as head of school and prefects, taking on responsibilities in areas such as charity and the environment. Mentoring between pupils is well established, allowing pupils take responsibility, manage setbacks and develop independence. Sixth-form pupils, trained by the leader responsible for mental health, run a weekly 'hot chocolate mentoring café', which is effective in supporting younger pupils. This helps the older pupils to value and develop their leadership skills.

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

**43. All the relevant Standards are met.**

## Safeguarding

44. Leaders prioritise safeguarding. Leaders are well trained, appropriate to their role, and knowledgeable about their responsibilities. The proprietor body monitors safeguarding arrangements and is suitably trained. The proprietor maintains regular contact with the school's safeguarding team. The safeguarding arrangements are outlined appropriately in the school's safeguarding policy and associated policies. These include the additional expectations of adults in the early years setting. The arrangements are implemented effectively so that the wellbeing of pupils is promoted.
45. Staff working with pupils receive regular and up-to-date safeguarding training at an appropriate level, including approaches to working with the youngest children in the early years. Staff have an effective understanding of arrangements. They are alert to the potential risks faced by pupils in the context of their school. There are daily staff briefings, which include pupil safeguarding and welfare aspects that are important to share. Staff report concerns quickly and are confident that swift action is taken. They know to report any low-level concerns about any adults to the headteacher in a timely way.
46. Leaders with safeguarding responsibilities work closely together and share knowledge and expertise. They ensure that there is effective and timely communication and action to secure the safety and wellbeing of pupils of all ages. Leaders ensure that records are detailed and identify any risks to pupils. Pupil welfare risk assessments are drawn up where required.
47. Leaders work closely with relevant safeguarding partners, including children's services, the police and the local authority. Some statutory training delivered to the staff is undertaken by specialists at the local authority. Leaders act promptly to secure the right support at the right time for pupils.
48. The school provides a range of ways in which pupils can raise concerns or worries. Staff know the pupils well and there are many well-embedded methods of communication. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including online. Internet filtering and monitoring systems protect pupils online and identify any inappropriate use. Leaders act swiftly to address any alerts or concerns.
49. All appropriate pre-employment checks are made on adults before they begin working with pupils. Staff maintain an accurate single central record of appointments and appropriate staff files relating to safer recruitment checks.

### The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Sherrardswood School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	919/6047
<b>Address</b>	Sherrardswood School Lockleys Welwyn Hertfordshire AL6 0BJ
<b>Phone number</b>	01438 840616
<b>Email address</b>	headteacher@sherrardswood.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.sherrardswood.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Alpha Schools (Holdings) Limited
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Ali Khan
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Anna Wright
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 18
<b>Number of pupils</b>	449
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	21 to 23 February 2023

## Information about the school

51. Sherrardswood School is a co-educational independent day school situated in Hertfordshire. The school is owned by Alpha Schools Limited, whose directors provide governance of the school. The school consists of the early years for children aged two to five years old, a prep school for pupils in Years 1 to 6, a senior school for pupils in Years 7 to 11 and a sixth form for pupils in Years 12 and 13. The school is located on the same site at the registered address.
52. The early years comprises one pre-school, one Nursery and one Reception class.
53. The school has identified 244 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. There are 49 pupils in the school who have an education, health and care plan.
54. The school has identified English as an additional language for four pupils.
55. The school states its aims are to develop pupils who are happy, confident learners who share respectful relationships, which leads to a strong community. The school seeks to develop well-rounded and confident individuals who care for each other and are celebrated for their individuality.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

24 to 26 February 2026

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

57. 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 of 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
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

58. 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.
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