

# School inspection report

13 to 15 May 2025

## **Saint Ronan's School**

Water Lane

Hawkhurst

Kent

TN18 5DJ

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. Leaders promote a caring and inclusive culture in which pupils are known, respected and encouraged to thrive. The school's ethos is consistently well reflected in relationships and daily routines. A clear focus on pupils' wellbeing, responsive pastoral care and accessible leadership supports the sense of belonging. Governors play an active role in the oversight and development of future plans for the school. While leaders demonstrate ambition and reflect on their practice to secure ongoing improvements, revised systems to ensure that pupils maximise their potential to achieve well are not yet fully embedded.
2. The school's engaging curriculum supports pupils' overall progress and personal growth effectively. Children in the early years benefit from rich learning experiences, purposeful play and supportive teaching. Early reading, including the development of children's understanding of the sounds that letters make, is well taught. Practical mathematics strategies support early progress in numeracy. This progress continues as children move into Years 1 and 2. However, the development of handwriting skills and opportunities for pupils to extend their learning are less consistent within these year groups. From Year 3 onwards, pupils build their independence, collaborative skills and capacity for deeper thinking. However, assessment information is not used consistently well to inform teachers' adaptations for pupils with different abilities.
3. Leaders ensure that pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing is prioritised. This is reflected in clear routines, secure environments and positive relationships. Pupils' behaviour is respectful and well managed. Their positive attitudes are underpinned by shared values and supported through outdoor learning and sport, as well as through time spent with animals on the school farm. Boarding routines are nurturing and responsive. As a result, pupils are confident, healthy and secure.
4. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to contribute meaningfully to school life and to wider society. From the early years onwards, they take on responsibilities in school. Older pupils develop empathy with others through roles such as on the school council and as prefects. They also support organised 'Friday gatherings' where they are responsible for looking after visiting speakers who come to the school. The curriculum reflects diverse perspectives and encourages pupils' social awareness. However, the provision to develop aspects of pupils' economic understanding are not yet fully embedded across phases.
5. The school's safeguarding arrangements are well established. Pupils know how to raise concerns through trusted adults, worry boxes and online reporting. Staff receive regular safeguarding training. Leaders collaborate closely with governors, the local area designated officer (LADO) and other external agencies to keep pupils safe. The safeguarding systems in the boarding accommodation are clear and applied appropriately. Leaders' approach to safer recruitment is secure. Records are well maintained, and governors provide effective scrutiny. Safeguarding leaders are responsive and visible. They ensure that pupils' safety is consistently prioritised.
6. Leaders successfully promote a warm and pupil-focused environment in which pupils are understood, valued and supported. The school's values are embedded across pastoral and academic life, resulting in calm and respectful relationships. Leaders demonstrate appropriate skills and knowledge. They fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so the standards are met consistently. Pupils are articulate and confident. They benefit from the strong focus on their wellbeing and personal development.

## 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:

- enhance the curriculum further so that pupils have sufficient age-appropriate opportunities to develop their understanding of economic matters and financial literacy across subjects
- check systematically to ensure that staff use all assessment information, including routine checks on what pupils know and can do, so that pupils of all abilities are consistently well supported to maximise their achievement, while developing confidence and autonomy in their learning.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

7. Leaders maintain a visible presence in the school. They engage regularly with pupils, including through daily interaction and structured opportunities. During lunches with leaders, for example, pupils discuss their school experiences and any changes needed. Positive relationships are mirrored across the school community. Staff model values to support the development of pupils' personal responsibility and kindness. Leaders understand and implement their roles effectively. They are supported by governors who promote accountability, care and ongoing school development. Working closely together, they ensure that the Standards are met consistently.
8. Ongoing reviews of the quality of provision are informed by a range of evidence, including assessments of pupils' progress. A whole-school assessment tracking system aims to support teaching that is responsive to pupils' individual needs. However, this information is not yet used consistently well across departments. Leaders are acting to embed co-ordinated approaches to curriculum planning and assessment to meet pupils' needs. Plans to secure greater consistency are identified. However, teachers' practice in applying leaders' intentions remain variable.
9. Governors receive regular updates on pupils' progress, including from internal checks on learning and examination results. Their understanding of the school's academic performance ensures that they contribute effectively to strategic development over time. Governors are assigned oversight of specific areas such as safeguarding, curriculum and policy review. They maintain close links with staff and pupils through visits and engagement in school life.
10. Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised throughout the school day. Time is set aside for relaxation and outdoor activity. Pupils enjoy the school's welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Mealtimes are unhurried. The range of healthy food options available support pupils' physical and emotional health. Staff are accessible and responsive. Pupils are confident to raise concerns. This includes through the use of worry boxes and online reporting, alongside regular contact with boarding and pastoral staff.
11. The school's inclusive culture is well established. Staff identify pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). These needs are met through tailored support, with regular reviews and close collaboration across teaching teams. The school meets its duties under the Equality Act 2010. Regular reviews of the accessibility plan result in suitable adaptations to both the curriculum and learning environment. Teaching encourages empathy and understanding of different backgrounds and experiences. This contributes well to the school's respectful and inclusive community.
12. Leaders ensure that risk assessments are in place across all aspects of school activity, including site safety, educational visits and boarding provision. Risk assessments are reviewed systematically, with actions taken promptly when potential improvements are identified. Health and safety training is updated regularly. Practice drills, such as for fire safety, are evaluated to ensure continuous improvement. Leaders and governors prioritise compliance with statutory guidance. They ensure that policies are understood and implemented effectively.
13. The school's safeguarding arrangements are securely embedded. The associated policies are clear, up to date and reviewed regularly. Staff training is comprehensive, including during induction and in-school training days. Leaders engage with external agencies and the local authority to support

pupils' safety and wellbeing. Boarding provision meets regulatory requirements. This is characterised by a caring, family-style environment where individual needs are recognised and respected. Leaders seek boarders' views and adjust routines accordingly, for example, in introducing new activities and reviewing daily schedules.

14. The complaints policy is implemented transparently and efficiently. Records are kept systematically. Any concerns are addressed in line with published procedures. Governors receive regular updates and contribute to the effective oversight of any issues raised. Leaders ensure that statutory information is available to parents through the school's website. They maintain open channels of communication with families.

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

15. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

16. The school's cohesive, well-sequenced curriculum supports pupils' academic progress and personal development from the early years through to the end of Year 8. Teachers plan learning that allows pupils to develop key knowledge, understanding and skills across a range of academic and creative subjects. Pupils build confident speech, language and communication skills including, for example, through the wealth of opportunities for performances, presentations and poetry recitals.
17. In the early years, leaders and staff create a nurturing and purposeful environment where children make good progress across all aspects of their learning. The well-structured timetable balances adult-led and child-initiated activities appropriately. Children develop independence and confidence as a result. Teachers plan thoughtfully to include outdoor learning. They use careful questioning and provide targeted challenges to deepen children's thinking, particularly in early mathematics. Children apply their knowledge of the sounds that letters make to decode unfamiliar words. They build emergent writing skills through storytelling and purposeful play. Their fine motor skills development is promoted through drawing, painting and model-making. Children are supported emotionally through a secure key person system, where warm, responsive relationships foster self-assurance, social connection and a growing awareness of the feelings and needs of others.
18. In Years 1 and 2, pupils continue to build securely on these foundations through inclusive and well-planned lessons. Teachers model key mathematical concepts clearly, for example, through the use of visual and practical strategies to support pupils' understanding of number and calculation. Pupils' literacy and reading are supported by well-structured lessons focused on the sounds that letters make and sentence-development activities. However, pupils' handwriting and presentation skills are not always as consistently well developed. Across the curriculum more widely, pupils enjoy a vibrant mix of arts and physical education (PE). These opportunities encourage their creativity and self-expression. Teaching assistants play an active role in supporting pupils who have SEND. Consequently, these pupils access learning together with their peers. Overall, staff adapt resources and tasks to meet pupils' needs. However, at times, a few pupils are not moved on quickly enough to the next stage of learning when they are ready. This means that they do not always learn as much as they could.
19. From Year 3 onwards, pupils benefit from the curriculum, which is designed appropriately to develop their knowledge, communication and creative thinking. Cross-curricular links are used effectively by staff to provide further meaning and relevance, such as in theatrical performance in English and through source analysis in history. In mathematics, older pupils engage with algebraic reasoning and operations, although this level of conceptual challenge is not yet consistent in mathematics teaching across all year groups. Teaching is often purposeful, varied and effective in using questioning techniques and structured collaboration to sustain focus and encourage pupils to think independently. Project work in some subjects enables pupils to apply their learning in practical ways. They demonstrate perseverance and imagination, as they extend their understanding through reflection and experimentation. On occasions, where teaching is not as well planned, particularly for those with higher prior attainment, pupils are less able to build the confidence and independence needed to extend their learning.
20. Staff provide an extensive extra-curricular programme that enables both day and boarding pupils to develop their skills and interests beyond the classroom. Activities such as mountain biking, cookery and 'wind-down Wednesday' give pupils opportunities to try new things and to build confidence in

relaxed, supportive environments. Boarders contribute to shaping this provision, suggesting evening activities that are facilitated by staff; this includes yoga, board games, art activities, beach and outdoor learning opportunities. This environment fosters a culture of collaboration and respect.

21. Staff monitor pupils' academic progress through termly tracking. Typically, they use feedback appropriately to help pupils to improve their work. Most pupils make good progress across all subjects. Teachers' feedback ensures that they understand expectations and the steps they need to take to continue to improve.
22. The overall support for pupils who have SEND is well co-ordinated. Those with overall responsibility for pupils who have SEND collaborate effectively with staff, parents and external specialists to plan appropriate interventions. They draw on assessments of pupils' learning to inform adaptations so that pupils can access the full curriculum successfully. As a result, provision for pupils who have SEND is integral to teaching and learning across the school and is effective in all phases.
23. Leaders use feedback from staff, pupils and parents to refine curriculum planning and teaching practice. They demonstrate a clear understanding of pupils' progress. As a result, most teachers adapt provision according to needs, particularly for those pupils who have SEND. The curriculum is coherent, age-appropriate and prepares pupils well for the next stage of education.

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

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

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

25. Leaders prioritise pupils' physical and emotional wellbeing across both day and boarding provision. The well-structured day includes time for rest, outdoor play and engagement in a variety of activities, which fosters pupils' confidence and enjoyment. Pupils value the inclusive and supportive school culture. They have access to a broad range of co-curricular and sporting opportunities. These include cricket, tennis, yoga, farm activities on site, outdoor learning including in the forest and on the beach, swimming, concerts and competitions, all of which support pupils' physical health, creativity and self-esteem.
26. Pupils benefit from thoughtfully designed pastoral structures, through which staff support their personal development and emotional literacy. Behaviour is consistently well managed across the school. This is secured through clear systems, including rewards for effort and conduct, as well as proportionate use of sanctions where required. Pupils understand the expectations of their behaviour. They are confident that staff respond fairly if behaviour falls short of these expectations. In the early years, children benefit from strategies, such as helping them to 'stop, tell, ask and go' (STAG), when relationships become difficult. Circle-time activities support children to learn to regulate their emotions, as they build independence and empathy with others. Pupils throughout the school demonstrate high levels of respect and collaboration. Older pupils model positive behaviour for their younger peers.
27. Staff create an environment where pupils are respected and supported with routines for raising concerns through trusted adults, worry boxes and digital systems. Pupils are confident in identifying who to approach for help. They trust staff to respond quickly and effectively. Weekly pastoral meetings allow leaders to track emerging concerns and to co-ordinate support, for all pupils who need it.
28. Wellbeing education is embedded through personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, assemblies and regular chapel services. Pupils explore values such as kindness, responsibility and respect for individual difference. They engage in spiritual reflection through prayer and discussion. In English and theology, philosophy and religion (TPR), pupils develop emotional awareness and cultural understanding through the exploration of literature and world religions. These opportunities are age-appropriate and inclusive. This is supported through initiatives such as single-sex relationships and sex education (RSE) sessions, which are carried out in consultation with parents, and include clearly communicated guidance on curriculum content.
29. Leaders promote pupils' physical health through a wide range of PE and games activities. These are tailored to develop pupils' co-ordination, stamina and teamwork. Lessons blend skills instruction, theory and practice. These are adapted where needed to ensure access for all pupils. Team sports such as cricket, hockey and rugby are enjoyed, as well as dance and gymnastics. Children in the early years develop fine and gross motor skills through play-based learning. These skills are further enhanced by specialist sessions such as yoga and ballet. Outdoor learning is embedded across the school, with pupils enjoying regular outdoor access, including to the school farm and nature areas.
30. Those with responsibility for boarding ensure that routines are in place to support pupils' physical and emotional health through structured evenings, healthy meals and time for relaxation. They maintain safe and comfortable accommodation with appropriate supervision and staff deployment.

Boarders access effective wellbeing support. They contribute to shaping boarding life through offering structured feedback. Behaviour in boarding accommodation is respectful. Relationships are warm. Prefects and older boarders model positive conduct. The boarding team ensures a consistently effective approach to pastoral care, academic liaison and safeguarding.

31. Leaders ensure that medical and health provision are professionally managed. Trained staff are available throughout the day and night. Procedures for administering medication, first aid and health care are clear and effective. Appropriate records are maintained. These are used effectively to monitor and respond to pupils' emerging needs. Dietary requirements and allergies are managed through close collaboration between kitchen, medical and pastoral teams. Fire safety is embedded through regular drills and systematic site checks across day and boarding provision. External providers offer further oversight of safety arrangements. Pupils are well supervised at all times and leaders ensure appropriate supervision ratios for children in the early years.

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

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

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

33. The curriculum supports teachers to promote pupils' personal, social and cultural understanding effectively through a broad range of opportunities. Pupils are supported to explore identity, difference and moral understanding through story time, PSHE sessions and themed activities. Children in the early years are introduced to community roles through first-hand experiences in role play. They develop self-awareness and empathy for others through play-based collaboration. As pupils move through the school, the Ronian characteristics of perseverance, awareness, curiosity, imagination, empathy and cooperation are embedded in daily routines, assemblies and PSHE lessons. As a result, pupils are supported to reflect on their behaviour and responsibility towards others and to apply this to their own relationships. Pupils demonstrate empathy and care towards younger peers. They are gentle, kind and helpful. They listen to one another, are honest, work hard and look after property. Over time, they show increasing confidence in articulating their views on fairness, respect and distinguishing right from wrong.
34. Pupils consider diverse perspectives across subjects. They are supported to reflect on the experiences of others, for example, in English, when exploring prejudice through literature. In music, pupils study the cultural origins of jazz and reggae. In TPR, they examine different belief systems and in Latin, they explore how legal systems have evolved. These opportunities underpin the school's inclusive culture, where difference is valued. Pupils articulate their understanding of discrimination and human rights effectively. They can explain the importance of respect for and kindness towards others. Leaders ensure that pupils understand individual differences and needs. These are taught and discussed in age-appropriate ways. As a result, pupils demonstrate respect in their interactions in all aspects of school life.
35. Fundamental British values are interwoven in school values. Staff nurture a culture where pupils are encouraged to understand the perspectives of others. Pupils engage thoughtfully with differing viewpoints, work collaboratively and take responsibility for their actions within a supportive and inclusive community. Staff promote these through classroom discussion, curriculum content and democratic experiences. Pupils vote for student leaders and participate in campaigns, such as the election of an 'animal president'. This builds their understanding of democracy and shared decision-making. Assemblies and PSHE reinforce values such as individual liberty. In TPR and PSHE, pupils examine the rule of law. In Year 8, they explore crime and punishment. Through these topics, pupils begin to appreciate how their actions have consequences and how society is shaped by laws and shared values.
36. Leaders ensure that transitions are carefully planned and emotionally supportive. Consequently, pupils move confidently through each stage of their education. From the Nursery upwards, pupils are gradually introduced to new environments and staff. Additional support is provided at key points such as from Reception into Year 1. Assessment information is shared so that pupils build on their learning progressively as they move from pre-prep into prep school. Parents are engaged in the process in the summer term before pupils move to their next class, during which pupils experience information evenings and question-and-answer sessions. Pupils take part in 'move-up' days to build familiarity in a different environment. Staff share pastoral as well as academic information to ensure continuity. As pupils move into senior school, they benefit from interview coaching, school visits and

a comprehensive leavers' programme that blends academic, pastoral and personal development to support their transition to the next stage of education.

37. Leaders provide a range of enrichment activities that connect learning to the wider world. In languages, pupils take part in pen pal exchanges, cooking projects and cultural exploration. This enhances their understanding of global traditions. The 'Friday gatherings' feature visiting speakers, including alumni, who offer insights into future possibilities and civic responsibility. Pupils take on meaningful roles, including as prefects, house captains and student council representatives. In boarding, senior pupils lead activities, help with routines and manage a budget for events. This builds their collaborative skills and initiative. These experiences help pupils to develop leadership, confidence and a sense of service.
38. Pupils contribute positively to their community through charitable work and outreach activities, such as carol singing at care homes and supporting foodbank collections. They show pride in taking responsibility and in the impact of their actions. While pupils are introduced to some aspects of economic education, such as using money in mathematics, planning charity events and visiting French markets, this provision is not yet embedded across all phases. Consequently, pupils' understanding of financial literacy is limited.
39. Leaders ensure that pupils in Years 7 and 8 begin to explore future career pathways through PSHE, subject-linked activities and exposure to visiting speakers. Former pupils share experiences as part of the leavers' programme. This helps pupils to reflect on their own interests and aspirations.

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

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

## Safeguarding

41. Safeguarding arrangements are effective and meet current statutory requirements. Pupils' safety and wellbeing are prioritised consistently across the school and boarding provision. Safeguarding leaders are active in their responses to concerns. They hold regular meetings to review cases, assess contextual risks and co-ordinate timely interventions. Leaders work effectively with external agencies, including the LADO, to ensure appropriate support for pupils. Weekly updates, pastoral meetings and a recently introduced digital safeguarding platform support real-time communication and oversight of the school's work to keep pupils safe.
42. Governors fulfil their safeguarding responsibilities effectively. Those governors with overall safeguarding responsibility receive detailed termly updates and monitor compliance through visits, policy scrutiny and regular reviews of the single central record (SCR) of new staff appointments. A recent external safeguarding audit has led to further improvements in the maintenance of safeguarding records.
43. Staff training reflects current statutory guidance. New staff induction includes all mandatory content, such as the role of the designated safeguarding lead (DSL), the categories and signs of abuse, and the prevention of extremism. As a result, staff understand safer working practice and the school's safeguarding procedures, including how to promote online safety. Safeguarding training is reinforced through quizzes and scenario-based discussion. Staff are confident to identify, report and escalate safeguarding concerns, including low-level concerns and child-on-child incidents. A culture of openness and accountability supports the school's effective safeguarding practice.
44. Leaders ensure that safer recruitment procedures are applied methodically. All pre-employment checks are completed before new staff assume post, including the verification of references, and the SCR is accurately maintained. Leaders conduct risk assessments for visitors and volunteers. They communicate clear expectations for on-site conduct.
45. Pupils are taught how to stay safe, including when online, through PSHE, assemblies and computing lessons. Consequently, they demonstrate an age-appropriate understanding of digital safety. This is supported by a secure filtering and monitoring system that alerts staff to potential concerns. Pupils report concerns through worry boxes, trusted adults and a digital concern button. In boarding, pupils know how to contact the independent listener and are supported by well-trained staff who understand the specific safeguarding risks of residential care.
46. Supervision across the school is effective. Safeguarding principles are reinforced in daily routines, including through enhanced supervision in changing areas and during transitions. Pupils' feedback helps to inform ongoing improvements. Safeguarding responsibilities are shared across pastoral, SEND and boarding teams to ensure cohesive and responsive support. As a result, safeguarding is visible, understood and embedded across all areas of school life.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Saint Ronan's School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	886/6006
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1066420
<b>Address</b>	Saint Ronan's School Water Lane Hawkhurst Kent TN18 5DJ
<b>Phone number</b>	01580 752271
<b>Email address</b>	info@saintronans.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.saintronans.co.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Saint Ronan's School (Hawkhurst)
<b>Chair</b>	Mr Nick Beart
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr Joe Lewis
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 13
<b>Number of pupils</b>	423
<b>Number of boarding pupils</b>	95
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	18 to 20 May 2022

## Information about the school

48. Saint Ronan's School is a co-educational, independent day school which offers flexible, part-time boarding options during the week from Year 3. The school is a registered charity, and the trustees form the governing body. Founded in Worthing in 1883, the school relocated to its present site in Hawkhurst, Kent, in 1946. It is set in parkland and landscaped grounds, with boarding provision located within the main mansion. The school comprises Nursery, the pre-prep from Reception to Year 2 and the prep from Year 3 to Year 8. Since the last inspection, the current headteacher joined the school in September 2024. The Chair of Governors took up role in March 2025.
49. The school has one boarding house which is split into single-sex dormitories. It offers flexible part-time boarding for pupils in Years 4 to 8.
50. There are 65 children in the early years comprising five classes, three of which are in Nursery and two in Reception.
51. The school has identified 51 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
52. The school has identified no pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
53. The school states its aims are to provide an all-round education with teaching that promotes learning and achievement. It seeks to collaborate with parents to encourage pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, ensuring they are pastorally well supported.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

13 to 15 May 2025

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

55. 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 headmaster, 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.

56. 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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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For more information, please visit [isi.net](http://isi.net)