

# **Focused Compliance and Educational Quality Inspection Report**

The Mead School

**February to March 2023** 

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# **School's Details**

School	The Mead School
DfE number	886/6033
Address	The Mead School
	16 Frant Road
	Tunbridge Wells
	Kent
	TN2 5SN
Telephone number	01892 525837
Email address	office@themeadschool.co.uk
Headmistress	Mrs Catherine Openshaw
Chair of Proprietors	Mr Sam Antrobus
Proprietor	The Mead School Ltd
Age range	3 to 11
Number of pupils on roll	237
	Pre-Reception 26 Reception and 94 Key Stage 1
	Key Stage 2 117
Inspection dates	28 February to 2 March 2023

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# 1. Background Information

#### About the school

1.1 The Mead School is an independent co-educational day school. Founded in 1987, in 2016 it became part of the Wishford Schools group, who oversee the school supported by an advisory board. The school comprises three sections: Pre-Reception, for children aged 3 to 4 years; Reception and Key Stage 1, for pupils aged 4 to 7 years; and Key Stage 2, for pupils aged 7 to 11 years.

1.2 The current headmistress took up her post in September 2021.

#### What the school seeks to do

1.3 The school aims to be a community that empowers individuals to flourish and enable every child to feel success. It seeks to deliver an inspirational education which fosters curiosity and ambition. The school intends to develop every child's independence and wellbeing and promote the school rule: 'Be kind, listen and do your best'.

### About the pupils

1.4 Most pupils come from local families representing a range of professional and business backgrounds. The school's own assessment data indicate that the ability of pupils is above average compared to those taking the same tests nationally. The school has identified 21 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which include dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism and other conditions. Of these, 15 receive additional specialist help. One pupil has an education, health and care (EHC) plan. English is an additional language (EAL) for three pupils, whose needs are supported by their classroom teachers. The curriculum is modified for those pupils identified as being the most able in the school's population.

# 2. Regulatory Compliance Inspection

#### Preface

The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) is approved by the Secretary of State to inspect schools which are, or whose heads are, in membership of the associations which form the Independent Schools Council (ISC) and report on the extent to which they meet the Independent School Standards ('the standards') in the Schedule to the Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014. Inspections of schools with early years settings not requiring registration also report whether the school complies with key provisions of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory framework, and for registered settings the full range of the Early Years Foundation Stage provisions is considered. Additionally, inspections report 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. Inspections also comment on the progress made to meet any compliance action points set out in the school's most recent statutory inspection.

ISI inspections are 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 FOCUSED COMPLIANCE inspection reports only on the school's compliance with the standards. The standards represent minimum requirements and judgements are given either as <u>met</u> or as <u>not met</u>. 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 standards have been inspected in detail. These are the standards on safeguarding; measures to guard against bullying; arrangements for pupils' health and safety; arrangements to check the suitability of staff; the provision of information; 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 standards and requirements can be found here: <u>The Education (Independent School Standards)</u> <u>Regulations 2014, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework.</u>

# **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's own framework for assessment] confirms that teaching enables pupils to make good progress in the context of Part 1 paragraph 3(a).
- 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 Pupils receive relationships education. The school has consulted parents and published a written statement of its policy which has regard to the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.5 The standards relating to the quality of education [paragraphs 1–4] are met.

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

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

#### PART 3 – Welfare, health and safety of pupils

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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

- 2.10 The school makes appropriate checks to ensure the suitability of staff, supply staff and proprietors, and a register is kept as required.
- 2.11 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

2.12 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.
- 2.13 The standards relating to the premises and accommodation [paragraphs 22–31] are met.

#### PART 6 – Provision of information

- 2.14 A range of information is published, provided or made available to parents, inspectors and the Department for Education. This includes 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. It also includes 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.
- 2.15 The standard relating to the provision of information [paragraph 32] is met.

#### PART 7 – Manner in which complaints are handled

- 2.16 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.
- 2.17 The standard relating to the handling of complaints [paragraph 33] is met.

#### PART 8 – Quality of leadership in and management of schools

- 2.18 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.
- 2.19 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.

The headline judgements apply 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. Where the school's own names differ from those used nationally, the details are given in the table below:

School name	National Curriculum name
Pre-reception	Nursery

## **Key findings**

- 3.1 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
  - Pupils' achievement is excellent. They attain very highly and progress well. A high proportion of leavers attain places at selective senior and grammar schools.
  - Pupils consistently display outstanding attitudes towards learning and achievement. They
    demonstrate very high levels of engagement and are keen to learn.
  - Pupils' non-academic achievements are outstanding for the size of the school.
  - Pupils throughout the school display excellent communication skills.
- 3.2 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
  - Pupils exhibit excellent self-awareness and self-esteem. They grow in confidence because leaders and staff treat them with much warmth and respect.
  - Pupils demonstrate an outstanding awareness of right and wrong for their age.
  - Pupils display highly advanced social development.
  - Pupils exhibit a very strong appreciation of diversity and equality.

#### Recommendation

- 3.3 The school is advised to make the following improvement.
  - Strengthen pupils' capacity to reflect deeply during lessons, equally strongly across all subjects.

### The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements

- 3.4 The quality of the pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent.
- 3.5 Pupils' attainment is excellent. Assessment data provided by the school confirm that all groups of pupils attain beyond age-related expectations. Children in the EYFS progress well from their starting points. A higher-than-average proportion of children attain national end-of-year expectations by the end of the Reception year. Most leavers attain places at senior schools of their choice. Most leavers who sit the Kent 11+ examination are offered places at selective grammar schools. Lesson

- observations, scrutiny of pupils' books and the school's own assessment data confirm that all groups of pupils make at least good and often excellent progress. This is because leaders ensure that assessment data is used to inform the support given to individual pupils, including those with SEND, to meet their learning needs. Written feedback often identifies areas for improvement clearly. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire said that teaching enables their child to make progress. The school fully meets its aim to empower pupils to flourish and feel success.
- 3.6 Pupils consistently display outstanding attitudes towards learning and achievement. EYFS children were very eager to share their World Book Day costumes and characters with each other and to the whole group. Younger pupils focused extremely well on matching letters to sounds prior to morning registration while others continued to arrive. Pupils in the middle years of the school switched swiftly from partner dialogue to listening to the teacher and then feeding back, maintaining very high levels of engagement. In all lessons seen, pupils demonstrated high levels of interest and a keen desire to learn and improve their performance. Pupils' highly positive attitudes result from teaching which is highly enthusiastic and focused, and because leaders and staff communicate clear expectations and maintain a relaxed and calm environment. The school fully meets its aim to deliver an inspirational education which fosters curiosity and ambition.
- 3.7 Pupils' academic and non-academic achievements are outstanding for the size of the school. Leavers have achieved academic, music, sports and performing arts scholarships to selective senior schools. Pupils have been crowned champions in the national ISA drama competitions three times in recent years, as well as winning best musical, best staging and best actor awards. Most pupils who have entered LAMDA examinations in recent years have achieved distinctions, with the other entrants achieving merits. All entrants to RAD ballet examinations have succeeded at pass, merit or distinction levels. Pupils have been ISA touch rugby and football shield winners. There has been outstanding success in netball, with pupils being King's Rochester netball winners in 2019 and 2020, ISA netball national final shield winners in 2020, Battle Abbey netball cup winners in 2019 and 2020, and ISA netball national finals plate runners-up in 2022. Pupils have also won the Solefield contact rugby tournament and the regional ISA netball competition in February 2023, qualifying for national finals in April 2023. Female pupils won the championship trophy at the Hilden Grange cross country tournament and qualified for representation at the ISA national cross country competition this year. Pupils have also been winners in the UKSA hockey plate competition and bronze medal winners in the ISA hockey bowl competition. Pupils' achievements in these areas result from the proprietor's funding of specialist teaching and the development of an astro turf pitch. They also result from leaders' provision of dance, drama, music and sports clubs and the engagement of pupils in fixtures with other schools, whole-school musicals, concerts, carol services and other performance events.
- 3.8 Pupils across the school display outstanding communication skills. EYFS children are extremely articulate. For example, they communicated eagerly and highly effectively about the recently hatched chicks. Nursery children listened to the staff and each other very carefully. They spoke with much confidence, using accurate vocabulary and well-developed phrases. Pupils communicated confidently and clearly to the rest of the school during a World Book Day assembly. Each pupil was audible and held the audience's attention. Pupils' writing, including that of the very youngest, demonstrates a very well-developed vocabulary as well as accurate and varied punctuation. Older pupils' writing, such as their re-telling of the tale of Odysseus, featured extremely effective writing techniques, including similes, metaphors and personification. The oldest pupils' analyses of texts show careful reading and accurate identification of the features of the different types of text. Pupils' writing develops strongly through staff's highly effective use of a consistent approach to literacy that focuses on the development of key skills.
- 3.9 Pupils' skills, knowledge and understanding are excellent overall. Nursery children displayed an awareness of Neil Armstrong being the first man on the moon when looking at a 'rocket' book. Year 6 pupils' work in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), such as the oldest pupils' work on building bridges, is of high quality. Older pupils conveyed a very strong understanding of the

different impact of air resistance on cones with different areas and shapes. In art, younger pupils demonstrated excellent aesthetic understanding through their still life work involving complex shading and pencil blurring. In music, very young pupils demonstrated an excellent knowledge and understanding of musical terminology, such as 'staccato' while singing *Somewhere over the Rainbow*. Music heard practiced throughout the inspection was of consistently high quality. Older pupils' books demonstrate good understanding of ethical issues, such as the impact of globalisation and challenges that a growing population might present for people to have sufficient water or food. However, these ideas are not developed as fully as possible. Similarly in some subjects, pupils' work demonstrates secure knowledge of significant facts, but does not always demonstrate much deep reflection about these. Lesson planning is detailed and systematic, ensuring that pupils receive the support they need to progress well. However, the design of some of the worksheets used at times inhibits pupils from developing their ideas in depth, such as when only one line or very limited space is given for pupils to record their responses to questions.

- Pupils display advanced mathematical understanding. Older nursery children counted up to 14 with confidence during registration, displaying excellent number skills for their age. Younger pupils were able to add one more with security and were able to halve and double values effectively. Older pupils used terms such as denominator and numerator accurately during real-life problem-solving activities and showed secure understanding of bar modelling with fractions. Y4 pupils applied mathematical skills highly successfully to STEM work on exploration to record tally charts and pictograms about sea creatures. The oldest pupils accurately identified whether different mathematical symbols, such as '6t', were variables, terms or expressions. Pupils ably identified understanding of 'like' and 'unlike' terms and could explain what made them so. They were able to simplify algebraic equations accurately with confidence and explain their methodology clearly. Pupils make the most mathematical progress when work is matched to their needs and abilities from the outset.
- 3.11 Pupils demonstrate competent information and communication technology (ICT) skills. Young pupils show a strong aptitude for coding, advancing at their own pace through a coding programme with increasing levels of challenge. Pupils in the middle years of the school used binary coding to create messages to the international space station. Older pupils used hand-held devices to solve non-verbal reasoning problems in preparation for a wide range of senior school entrance examinations. Pupils make effective use of ICT to conduct individual research, such as about countries they select to study, and convey their findings in well-formed presentations. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that their use of a particular digital programme aided their recall of multiplication tables.
- 3.12 Pupils exhibit competent study skills. For example, children showed much curiosity about the materials and activities that they engaged with, observing what happened when they mixed colours and filled bottles very well. Older nursery children were able to identity different animals from clues given about the sounds they made. The youngest pupils make excellent use of self-chosen physical and practical resources to check their own mathematical hypotheses. Older pupils readily use thesauruses to develop and extend their vocabulary, such as when drafting a formal complaint from the perspective of a character in a story. They also demonstrated effective note-taking skills during a non-verbal problem-solving activity on matrices, including adding to these notes as they learnt more. Pupils of all ages are well-organised and prepared for their lessons and other activities. Older pupils who spoke to the inspectors conveyed a strong awareness of what they termed 'fake news' and the importance of using legitimate websites when researching for information. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school equips their child with the team working, collaborative and research skills they need in later life. Inspectors found that pupils can put forward reasonable hypotheses, such as about the causes of the First World War. However, in some lessons, they do not always analyse or reflect on the subject matter as much as possible.

# The quality of the pupils' personal development

- 3.13 The quality of the pupils' personal development is excellent.
- 3.14 Pupils' self-understanding is excellent. For example, EYFS children were very confident when getting ready to go outside for an activity. When attempting to put their shoes on, they persisted in their efforts when initial attempts to do up the straps were unsuccessful. In conversations, pupils demonstrated a strong awareness of their own strengths and areas for development. They said that they look back at their previous work to see how well they had learned and progressed, and that the feedback from teachers helped them improve their work. The youngest pupils reflected well about what makes them happy. Pupils in the middle of the school years displayed excellent reflection on the extent to which they had developed leadership qualities. Pupils spoke confidently with inspectors in depth and with honesty about their own and others' experiences in the school. They also described how the school had aided them to build resilience in the face of challenges, such as the recent lockdowns and sad events in their personal lives. Pupils said that they look back at their previous work to see how well they had learned and progressed. They explained that the feedback from teachers helped them improve their work. Pupils grow in confidence because leaders and staff treat them with much warmth and respect. They encourage pupils to express their views and enthusiastically value their suggestions. All parents who responded to the questionnaire agreed that school helps their child to be confident and independent. The school fully meets its aim to develop every child's independence.
- 3.15 Pupils exhibit a notably strong awareness of right and wrong for their age. In discussion, older pupils offered extremely thoughtful and nuanced reflections about which moral behaviours they most valued and how sometimes there might be tensions between kindness and truthfulness in some circumstances. They conveyed highly articulately their understanding of the moral imperative to make things work better for the next generation. Older pupils' personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) work demonstrates well-developed moral understanding about rights and responsibilities. Pupils articulated unanimously their understanding that decisions have consequences. During an assembly, pupils recalled and referred to the school's values and expectations. Reception children articulate why they need to try to learn as best as possible. Pupils show much empathy towards each other and spot if others are worried or feeling low. However, some pupils who spoke to the inspectors and a few pupils who responded to the questionnaire disagreed that pupils are kind and respect each other. Inspectors found that pupils' behaviour was excellent. They conduct themselves with good manners and look after each other during break times. This is because leaders and staff consistently promote and model the schools' values and rule: 'Be kind, listen and do your best'. Pupils said that the 'traffic light' system of behaviour management was highly effective in helping them behave well.
- 3.16 Pupils' social skills are excellent. Nursery children engaged in a collaborative counting game with much delight. Reception children enjoyed finding partners and joining together to act out a French song. All children, including the youngest, confidently shared resources and activities with each other, calmly and happily. The youngest pupils showed an enhanced level of collaboration when dancing a choreographed song which led to an extremely high level of performance. Young pupils demonstrated excellent collaboration as they helped each other rehearse words for the song *That's what's friends are for*. During lessons seen and discussions with inspectors, the pupils made sure that everyone was included well. For example, in an English lesson for pupils in the middle of the school, all pupils collaborated well together to create a group story map before creating their own. Leaders and staff convey consistently high expectations of pupils' social behaviour.
- 3.17 Pupils display an excellent appreciation of diversity and equality. They spoke passionately about the dangers of different forms of prejudice and of the importance of accepting and respecting all for who they are. They spoke strongly and assuredly about the importance of everyone's rights being respected regardless of their background, culture, skin colour and identity, including gender identity. Pupils also displayed a well embedded understanding of how unkind comments could hurt people's

feelings and were not acceptable. Pupils, including children in the EYFS, demonstrated entirely inclusive behaviour throughout the inspection. Almost all parents who responded to the questionnaire said that the school actively promotes values of democracy, respect and tolerance of other people. Displays around the school evidence leaders' and staff's positive promotion of inclusive attitudes and respect for diversity.

- 3.18 Pupils display advanced decision-making skills. EYFS children were highly successful in choosing self-initiated activities, such as making a bridge from junk modelling and forming numerals 1 to 9 in playdough. EYFS staff set up activities but also encourage children to initiate their own. The oldest pupils used their understanding of hockey very effectively to make decisions on which positions to switch to and play within the team. Pupils make sensible choices of where to play during breaktimes and what healthy snacks to eat. Minutes of school council meetings show that pupils make considerate decisions on behalf of others, such as whether playground buddies should all be Year 6 pupils or whether all year groups should have a turn. The oldest pupils who spoke to the inspectors talked thoughtfully and intelligently about what factors they took into account when considering their next schools and how they organised themselves to prepare for them. Staff give pupils opportunities to review their performance and provide older pupils with much guidance about how to best prepare themselves for their next schools.
- 3.19 Pupils show a deep appreciation of non-material aspects of life. The youngest pupils displayed excellent musical appreciation, showing great delight when singing well. Other young pupils sang with great enthusiasm when singing *Somewhere over the Rainbow*. Younger EYFS children listened to a story appreciatively and respectfully, creating a shared moment of reflection and calm. Older pupils who spoke to the inspectors explained with feeling how different types of music affected them and how certain forms of art and lyric inspired them. However, there are times when pupils do not demonstrate as much spiritual awareness as possible. For example, during a religious education (RE) lesson, pupils conveyed limited reflections about the meaning of Holy Week. This is because the activity did not encourage pupils to explore or express their ideas fully. Pupils who spoke to the inspectors said that they would like to have more time to reflect and consider ideas during some lessons.
- 3.20 Pupils make outstanding contributions to others. They take on roles such as house captains, sport captains, music, drama and ICT monitors, as well as 'leader of the day'. When speaking to the inspectors, older pupils explained how much they enjoyed supporting the younger ones, conveying a strong sense of responsibility. The older pupils' PSHE books contain thoughtful individual reflections on different ways people can make a difference to society, such as a sponsored walk and a food bank challenge. The school council discuss and determine what actions different year groups could take to promote recycling and save energy. Pupils choose and support a range of different charities, such as those relating to children's terminal illness, climate change and a cancer hospital in London, explaining to others convincingly why these charities merited their support. Leaders provide pupils with many opportunities to take on leadership roles and positions of responsibilities.
- 3.21 Pupils' understanding of how to stay safe and keep healthy is outstanding. Reception children showed excellent recall of how to keep healthy during a discussion about exercise. They explored their heart rate with much excitement. All pupils who responded to the questionnaire said that they understand how to stay safe online. In discussion, pupils conveyed sensible ideas about how to keep themselves safe when using the internet and look after themselves during any moments of anxiety or stress. Older pupils' PSHE books include pupils' intelligent and well-informed ideas about how to sustain good mental health, such as limiting screen time, exercising daily and having enough rest. They contain thoughtful reflections about how to guard against peer pressure. Pupils' books also conveyed a good understanding of the dangers of smoking and vaping for their age. The PSHE programme promotes pupils' careful consideration of how to look after their own mental and physical well-being and safety. The school fully meets its aim to develop every pupil's wellbeing.

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## 4. Inspection Evidence

4.1 The inspectors observed lessons, had discussions with pupils and examined samples of pupils' work. They held discussions with members of staff and with the chair of the proprietary body, observed a sample of the extra-curricular activities that occurred during the inspection period, and attended form meetings and assemblies. Inspectors visited the facilities for the youngest pupils, together with the learning support and educational resource areas. Inspectors considered the responses of parents, staff and pupils to pre-inspection questionnaires. The inspectors examined curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

#### **Inspectors**

Mr Steven Popper Reporting inspector

Mr Oliver Bullock Compliance team inspector (Deputy head academic, IAPS school)

Mrs Emma Stanhope Team inspector (Head of lower school, IAPS school)