ISI Independent Schools Inspectorate

School inspection report

22 to 24 September 2026

Elysian, Shamley Green

Westland Farm

Lordshill Common

Guildford

GU5 0TL

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'.

Contents

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION FINDINGS **3**

THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SCHOOL MEETS THE STANDARDS **5**

RECOMMENDED NEXT STEPS 5

SECTION 1: LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT, AND GOVERNANCE **6**

SECTION 2: QUALITY OF EDUCATION, TRAINING AND RECREATION **8**

SECTION 3: PUPILS' PHYSICAL AND MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING **10**

SECTION 4: PUPILS' SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC EDUCATION AND CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIETY **12**

SAFEGUARDING **14**

SCHOOL DETAILS **15**

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL **16**

INSPECTION DETAILS **17**

Summary of inspection findings

1. The proprietor and advisory board visit the school often to review the school's policies and practice. They challenge and support leaders in their progress towards addressing current priorities. Governors check that leaders demonstrate a clear understanding of how to promote pupils' wellbeing and academic progress. Together, leaders and governors ensure that the Standards are consistently met.

2. All pupils at the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and have been identified as having high levels of anxiety, stress and trauma. With support and guidance from governors, leaders have designed a nurturing environment that enables pupils to rebuild their confidence, re-engage with learning, and attend school regularly.

3. The personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) curriculum and relationships and sex education (RSE) are carefully planned and matched to pupils' needs. The curriculum is dynamic which enables staff to respond swiftly to emerging issues such as online safety or friendship ruptures. The RSE programme meets statutory requirements. It provides pupils with age-appropriate guidance on managing physical and emotional changes as they move towards adulthood. Pupils are taught that every person is unique and deserves respect.

4. The thoughtfully crafted curriculum is implemented successfully to meet pupils' needs. Leaders ensure that the curriculum provides a careful balance between enabling pupils' academic education and their work with animals. The farm and its animals provide plenty of opportunities to teach pupils the key content of the curriculum.

5. Staff plan interesting activities that are carefully adapted to meet pupils' needs and interests, motivating pupils to enjoy learning. Staff support pupils to build positive relationships so that they feel valued, safe and achieve well.

6. The school's effective behaviour management approaches ensure that pupils behave well and are kind and respectful towards each other and staff. Pupils understand the need for rules and that behavioural choices have consequences.

7. Staff supervise pupils appropriately throughout the school day, including at break and lunchtimes. Staff are alert to risks that may affect pupils' welfare, health and safety and ensure that these risks are identified and mitigated.

8. At the start of the inspection, not all the required information was available on the school's website. This was rectified during the inspection.

9. Leaders ensure that pupils develop social awareness and an understanding of the wider world. Pupils learn to make appropriate choices. They develop a sense of responsibility through daily opportunities that reflect British values, such as democracy and inclusion. Pupils are well supported to understand and make informed decisions for life beyond school.

10. Arrangements to safeguard pupils are robust. Safeguarding is prioritised. Staff are well trained and understand their responsibilities well. The safeguarding team keeps staff up to date with the latest statutory guidance. Staff have a good understanding of potential contextual safeguarding risks to pupils. Staff are vigilant to any changes in pupils' attitude or demeanour. Leaders with responsibility

for safeguarding build productive and professional relationships with external safeguarding agencies and ensure appropriate procedures to safeguard pupils are implemented effectively.

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:

- consistently provide and make available all required information on the school's website so that this represents a full and accurate picture of the school.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

11. The proprietor and the advisory board work closely together to realise the aims of the school. They have suitable experience and expertise regarding provision for pupils who have SEND. Governors undertake a range of monitoring activities to assure themselves of the quality of the school's work. This enables governors to appraise the impact of leaders' actions and ensure that leaders have the skills and knowledge to fulfil their roles. Governors provide appropriate support, encouragement and challenge to hold leaders to account for the school's performance.

12. Leaders have established effective systems to evaluate what is working well and where further improvement is needed. For example, governors visit the school and receive regular detailed reports from senior leaders, mapped against the Standards, for all aspects of the school's work. Well-planned reporting structures, together with regular opportunities to engage with leaders, staff and pupils, enable governors to check that policies and practice comply with current legislation and guidance.

13. Leaders support pupils' wellbeing through a carefully planned curriculum that seamlessly integrates therapeutic approaches alongside working with animals. This enables pupils who often have complex social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) to attend school regularly and re-engage with learning.

14. Senior leaders and subject leaders regularly monitor the quality of teaching and pupils' learning. Subject leaders have a clear overview of their curriculum areas and pupils' achievements. This enables leaders to provide staff with personalised support, coaching and training so that staff improve their teaching skills and understanding. Leaders take effective action to implement consistent teaching approaches across the school and to drive initiatives such as improving pupils' writing skills.

15. Governors and leaders manage risk effectively, especially regarding the potential vulnerabilities of pupils who have SEND. Suitable risk assessments are in place for the animal care curriculum, health and safety, off-site activities and safeguarding. Adaptations are updated regularly in response to pupils' changing needs or emerging concerns. This enables leaders to minimise any risks associated with the premises so pupils continue to learn and benefit from extending their experiences in a farming environment.

16. Most of the required information is available to parents of current and prospective pupils on the school's website. At the beginning of the inspection, the school's website did not include details of the school's academic performance in the previous year nor the proprietor's contact details. The school's attendance policy, with a reference to the latest government guidance, was also missing. The school rectified these oversights during the inspection.

17. Leaders publish the complaints policy on the school's website and implement this effectively. Staff communicate regularly with parents so that concerns are addressed swiftly and within required timescales and stages.

18. Governors and leaders ensure that inclusion and equality are fundamental to the school's aims and ethos. Leaders fulfil their duties under the Equality Act 2010. A suitable accessibility plan is implemented effectively. Adaptations to the learning environment, classroom resources and

individual learning programmes are made so that pupils access all curriculum areas across the school site.

19. Leaders collaborate and liaise effectively with a wide range of external agencies to ensure that pupils' particular needs are identified and understood thoroughly. They work productively with children's services and other safeguarding partners to ensure an integrated approach to safeguarding pupils.

20. Leaders and staff communicate regularly with pupils' families, particularly through the annual review process. Parents receive regular reports and feedback on their child's progress and social and emotional development. In addition, staff contact parents weekly to update them on their child's recent activities, achievements and emotional wellbeing. Every pupil at the school has an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders furnish local authorities with the required information and statements about how public funds are spent. Leaders inform local authorities about those pupils who join or leave the school at non-standard times of the year.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

21. The curriculum is deliberately flexible and personalised. It includes the core subjects of English and mathematics alongside creative, practical, therapeutic and outdoor learning. The curriculum is divided into three core pathways: connect; grow; and thrive, so that leaders and staff can modify teaching plans to meet each pupil's individual educational and social needs, ensuring that they are best supported to learn. Staff break down tasks into bite-sized chunks so that pupils are not overwhelmed. Leaders enrich subject content through practical experiences and therapeutic approaches, helping pupils stay focused and apply what they know in different contexts.

22. Pupils access a broad range of accredited courses, including functional skills qualifications and vocational awards, as part of well-considered preparation for life beyond school. Pupils in Years 11 and 12 study courses in animal care, art, design and technology (DT), equine studies, history, horse riding, geography, information and communication technology (ICT), science, PSHE, music and touch typing. Pupils learn about different faiths and beliefs in PSHE and humanities. Many pupils achieve distinction levels in their extended research projects. Pupils make good progress from their starting points, as shown in their examination results. In the last two years, most leavers have proceeded to appropriate apprenticeships, further training or college.

23. Pupils enjoy a range of wellbeing activities such as playing card and board games, crafts, football, horse care, sensory swing and pool. Staff encourage pupils to choose and pursue additional challenges as they develop new interests and skills, such as in team-building activities involving crochet and embroidery. These activities help pupils find new and interesting ways to spend their leisure time, enabling pupils to build confidence, engagement and self-esteem.

24. Teachers are knowledgeable in the subjects they teach. They use their expertise to plan lessons that explain new concepts well. Teachers quickly spot and correct any emerging misconceptions. The expertise of therapists and staff ensures pupils' academic learning is blended seamlessly with the development of pupils' life skills, such as resilience and independence.

25. Typically, teachers provide helpful and detailed guidance that enables pupils to make good progress in their studies. Teachers support pupils to develop literacy skills. Pupils increasingly broaden their vocabulary and use English effectively in both writing and speaking. Pupils use subject-specific vocabulary such as 'chord progression', 'kinetic energy' and 'saddle and tack'. They develop mathematical knowledge, skills and understanding and apply their learning in practical ways across different subjects. For example, pupils count and categorise different breeds of birds in mathematics, interpret graphs in science and measure food for the goats and horses on site. Focusing on these communication and mathematical skills helps prepare pupils for adulthood and the workplace.

26. In the most effective lessons, staff use a range of resources to engage pupils and stimulate discussion. The animals kept by the school have modern, well-maintained, and spacious accommodation, allowing pupils to see them up close. Pupils learn with great interest about the different routines and habitats of familiar and more exotic species, from Polish chickens to alpacas. This aspect of the school's provision offers rich opportunities for personal development, helping pupils understand that animals have needs they can meet by feeding them and keeping their habitats healthy. Knowing the animals by name helps pupils to understand them as sentient creatures whose needs they must respect. Leaders design and deliver the animal care and outdoor

curriculum to broaden pupils' understanding of the natural world. Some pupils go on to complete work experience placements successfully and begin apprenticeships that involve looking after animals.

27. The learning support team has established effective assessment arrangements to identify pupils' abilities and aptitudes when they first join the school. The learning support team advises staff on the most effective resources and strategies to help pupils access the curriculum.

28. Leaders carefully consider pupils' individual needs and help remove barriers to learning. Staff use therapeutic resources such as plastic construction bricks, doodling books and fidget toys to calm and soothe pupils and help them better manage their behaviour. Engaging with animals such as chickens, goats and guinea pigs helps lower pupils' anxiety, improve concentration, and build physical skills. Pupils learn to recognise and regulate their feelings and emotions. They begin to take responsibility for how they respond to different social situations.

29. Leaders implement a responsive assessment framework. They collate and analyse a wide range of information to monitor pupils' progress, including reviews of individual plans, examinations and clinical and engagement reports. Teachers use this information to plan lessons pitched at a suitable level so pupils' needs are correctly identified, gaps are spotted and appropriate actions are implemented that enable pupils to learn successfully.

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

30. The physical education (PE) curriculum focuses on activities around caring for animals, particularly horses. Hoop games involving the school's Shetland ponies help to develop pupils' co-ordination and gross motor skills. The wellbeing activities programme takes place each lunchtime, where pupils participate in basketball, football and walking. The school provides opportunities for pupils to engage in sports and physical pursuits at off-site venues, including swimming at the Guildford Lido. Participation in these activities helps to develop pupils' self-knowledge, self-confidence, social skills and teamwork. Pupils learn about the importance of exercise, sleep and healthy eating. This helps to prepare them to manage their own physical and mental health and wellbeing as they get older.

31. Leaders consult parents regarding the content of the RSE programme. This is delivered during PSHE lessons. Pupils are taught appropriate topics such as consent, emotions and resilience. This gives pupils strategies to make positive choices and to understand, build and sustain healthy, respectful relationships.

32. The curriculum is carefully planned so that pupils have a structured start to each day by caring for the animals and completing general farm duties. Leaders recognise that for those pupils who experience overstimulation, interacting with animals can be grounding and calming. Gentle petting, listening to an animal's breathing, or simply watching its movements greatly supports pupils' ability to self-regulate and develop their appreciation of the needs of other living things. Pupils become more relaxed and open about sharing worries or concerns when surrounded by animals in nature, which benefits their mental health.

33. The school implements the behaviour and anti-bullying policies effectively. Many pupils arrive at the school with difficulties in understanding and managing their emotions and feelings. Staff establish a calm environment and predictable routines, and respond sensitively to pupils' needs. They model courteous and respectful behaviour, which helps pupils understand how to build and maintain healthy relationships. On the rare occasions when restrictive actions are needed, leaders respond effectively and promptly to the specific incident. Leaders provide suitable follow-up support for pupils to help them reflect on their behaviour and restore relationships.

34. Over time, pupils learn how to consciously distinguish between emotional dysregulation, related to their social and emotional needs, and intentional misbehaviour. Staff support pupils well to reflect on their behaviour and the impact of their actions on others. Pupils understand that their misdemeanours have consequences and that they are responsible for them. Pupils learn to be respectful and behave well. This transformation ensures that pupils access their learning and are better prepared for the next steps into adulthood.

35. Pupils develop an understanding of the spiritual and moral aspects of life, often experienced through art, music and farm-based activities in nature. Pupils understand how the personal challenges they encounter can profoundly influence what they believe is important in life. Pupils listen to and respect each other's feelings and perceptions. If pupils become anxious, they access safe spaces to take time out and reflect on their feelings. When ready, they successfully return to their learning. This positive coping strategy benefits pupils' social and emotional wellbeing.

36. Leaders ensure that the attendance and admission registers are maintained appropriately and comply with current statutory requirements. Leaders monitor any non-attendance closely and work effectively to improve it where necessary. For example, some pupils follow a reduced timetable that reflects their interests. As their confidence and enthusiasm for school and learning grow, timetables are increased to include all curriculum areas. For other pupils, the curriculum is adapted so that they study literacy and numeracy through equine studies.

37. Pupils are closely supervised throughout the school day, in accordance with their individual plans and needs. Staff communicate regularly during morning and after-school debriefs about updates or changes to pupils' supervision. Staff are always on hand to support pupils' different needs.

38. The school site, including the caravan, farm outbuildings, log cabins and stables, is well maintained. Regular health and safety audits and maintenance checks help keep the school safe and secure for all users. Effective procedures reduce fire risk. Trained fire marshals and regular fire drills ensure that staff and pupils implement the required evacuation procedures. Leaders commission up-to-date fire risk assessments from an external specialist company to identify any areas for improvement, minimise risk, and ensure that the school complies with the latest fire safety regulations. The school maintains appropriate records for health and safety, fire safety procedures and maintenance.

39. Leaders ensure that pupils receive appropriate first aid or medical support throughout the school day, as required. Appropriately trained staff are on hand to respond to accidents, illness and individual medical needs. Effective protocols are in place for administering medicines, which are stored securely and administered appropriately, in line with the school's procedures.

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

40. Typically, pupils join the school after extended periods of absence from education and with complex social and emotional needs. The well-planned careers programme, based on nationally recognised benchmarks, aims to nurture each pupil's potential. Pupils receive helpful and impartial guidance from staff about a range of careers and apprenticeships. These, together with visits to colleges of further education, work experience placements and talks from visiting speakers, help pupils make appropriate next-step career choices.

41. In PSHE lessons and through their interactions with adults, particularly their key worker, pupils learn to appreciate and understand the need for rules, rewards and consequences to protect individual interests and maintain a well-ordered society. Staff model appropriate social behaviour. This enables pupils to distinguish between right and wrong and apply moral principles and values. Pupils learn strategies for interpreting new social situations by selecting appropriate vocabulary and levels of formality for different occasions.

42. The carefully planned economic curriculum enables pupils to develop their understanding of monetary and financial matters. Pupils are taught the value of money and develop skills in everyday situations, such as using money in the local shop and café. As part of their fundraising and entrepreneurial tasks, pupils learn how to manage a budget to plan activities at the local fair, for example, involving the school's horses. The curriculum helps pupils develop important skills, such as making sensible financial decisions and spending wisely. Pupils learn about the importance of paying bills on time, monthly household running costs and the benefits of savings and investments. These activities help pupils develop financial literacy by learning to make informed decisions about money in preparation for adult life.

43. The PSHE curriculum teaches pupils to demonstrate tolerance and respect and to celebrate differences. Leaders provide a calm, nurturing ethos that aims to rebuild pupils' self-confidence so they can form respectful relationships with staff and each other that equips them well for life in British society. Pupils understand not to judge people based on stereotypes. They listen to one another and understand differences between people. Pupils develop an appreciation of the diversity of cultures, traditions and values other than their own by reading literature and through their art and music lessons.

44. During PSHE and history lessons, pupils gain an understanding of democracy, how laws are made through voting in elections and the role of national media outlets. These studies help pupils learn the benefits to society when citizens respect democracy, abide by the law, and contribute positively to their communities. Pupils express their views through discussions and written communication with leaders and staff, for example, by suggesting improvements to spaces around the school site and enhancing resources.

45. Pupils gain knowledge and understanding of local and national British institutions in contemporary society. Pupils visit local places of interest such as Guildford, Hampton Court Palace and the RHS Gardens in Wisley. Visits and talks from vet nurses, a farrier and a hairdresser, and trips to local equine hospitals support and promote pupils' understanding of, and respect for, these services. Such outings help pupils learn how public institutions can contribute positively to society. When teachers

plan activities that consider political issues, they present pupils with a balanced range of views without bias.

46. Leaders give pupils opportunities to take on leadership roles in the school, such as through environmental and charitable activities. Leaders establish clear routines whereby all pupils take responsibility for the care and welfare of the animals and general farm jobs. Staff support older pupils by modelling positive behaviour and skills so they can guide and inspire younger pupils to manage the horses correctly. Pupils understand that they have a responsibility to each other to manage their emotions and behaviour, appreciate others' views and opinions, and develop their own leadership skills.

Safeguarding

47. Governors and leaders promote a robust safeguarding culture and ensure that safeguarding is a central priority for all staff. Leaders demonstrate a secure understanding of the potential vulnerabilities of pupils who have SEND and ensure that safeguarding risks are carefully considered before decisions are made. Staff are confident in seeking advice and are alert to the signs of concern, including identifying pupils who may be at risk of harm and understanding the mechanisms for reporting any concerns promptly. Staff are knowledgeable about contextual safeguarding risks, including those associated with social media, extremism and radicalisation.

48. Staff understand how to recognise and report concerns about adult behaviour, including self-referral, when conduct falls below agreed professional standards. Leaders maintain a suitable record of low-level concerns to identify and address any patterns in the behaviour of adults working in the school. The school rigorously maintains records of safeguarding concerns on its online platform, including the rationale for leaders' actions and how concerns are followed up.

49. Leaders recognise that pupils with high levels of anxiety and who have SEND can be particularly at risk when navigating online platforms. During PSHE lessons, pupils learn how to stay safe by studying topics such as 'digital footprints' and 'responsible use of social media'. Leaders maintain a mobile phone-free site, with pupils handing devices to staff upon arrival. Effective, secure internet filtering and monitoring systems help mitigate risks such as exposure to online bullying and harmful or inappropriate content. These systems are checked regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose. Staff investigate any alerts swiftly, including the details and reasons for any actions taken.

50. Leaders have established clear mechanisms for pupils to seek assistance. Pupils benefit from nurturing relationships with staff, which enable them to feel secure and well supported. Pupils can raise any concerns verbally or in writing with a trusted adult, through a conveniently located box, or by reporting via an anonymous online system. Pupils' concerns are treated with respect and handled sensitively.

51. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding oversee the content, delivery and impact of the PSHE and RSE curriculums. This approach enables staff to address any emerging concerns in later lessons. In addition, the daily morning and end-of-day briefings give staff the opportunity to come together and raise any minor issues or concerns relating to pupils' behaviour, which collectively build a picture of emerging patterns or more serious concerns.

52. Leaders have established effective partnerships working with the local authorities that commission places at the school. They also work effectively with other external agencies. They seek advice or make timely referrals to relevant agencies, such as children's services and the local authority safeguarding officer as required. These professional relationships enable leaders with responsibility for safeguarding to consider and collate a wealth of information about each pupil so staff can identify risks and put in place robust safety plans to meet pupils' needs.

53. Leaders and governors ensure robust safer recruitment systems are in place to check staff suitability to work with children. They undertake the required pre-employment checks on adults before they begin working at the school. These checks are accurately recorded on the single central record of appointments (SCR). Staff recruitment procedures are thorough.

School details

School	Elysian, Shamley Green
Department for Education number	936/6043
Address	Elysian, Shamley Green Westland Farm Lordshill Common Guildford GU5 0TL
Phone number	07944 875503
Email address	sg.admin@elysianuk.org
Website	www.elysianuk.org
Proprietor	Elysian Animal Assisted Therapy and Learning
Chair	Dr Charlotte Williams
Headteacher	Ms Nadine O'Hara
Age range	11 to 17
Number of pupils	37
Date of previous inspection	10 to 12 October 2023

Information about the school

54. Elysian, Shamley Green is an independent co-educational day school, located near Guildford, Surrey. It caters for pupils who have a variety of social, emotional and mental health needs, many of whom have experienced trauma and adverse childhood experiences. Many pupils have missed extended periods of education in previous educational establishments. The previous inspection of the school was conducted by Ofsted, in October 2023. This is the first inspection of the school conducted by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI).

55. Located on a farm, the school comprises a stable block, paddocks, outdoor learning spaces and surrounding fields that make up 108 acres of farmland. It accommodates many different animals, including alpacas, chickens, donkeys, goats, guinea pigs and horses.

56. The proprietor body comprises two directors, who form the governing body. An advisory board of independent professionals supports the directors in overseeing the school's educational and welfare arrangements. The proprietor is also responsible for two similar provisions in West Horsley, Surrey and Liss, Hampshire.

57. All pupils attending the school have special educational needs and/or disabilities and each pupil has an education, health and care plan.

58. The school has not identified any pupils as speaking English as an additional language.

59. The school states it aims are to nurture and support pupils to regain their confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to re-engage with the school community and with learning. Through a blend of farm-based education and animal-assisted therapies that incorporate academic, vocational and wellbeing activities, the school seeks to ensure that all learners leave with appropriate life skills and achieve a range of accreditations that enable them to thrive in adulthood.

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2026

Inspection details

Inspection dates	22 to 24 September 2026

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

61. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some of which were accompanied by senior leaders
- observation of registration periods
- discussions with pupils and examination of samples of their work
- discussions with the headteacher, senior leaders, other members of staff and two governors, including the chair
- review of processes for attending recreational and sports activities
- examination of curriculum and other documentation made available by the school.

62. 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**.

Independent Schools Inspectorate

CAP House, 9-12 Long Lane, London, EC1A 9HA

For more information, please visit isi.net

© Independent Schools Inspectorate 2026