

School inspection report

4 to 6 March 2025

ACS Hillingdon International School

108 Vine Lane

Hillingdon

Uxbridge

UB10 0BE

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' vision and values inform all aspects of the school's work and support an environment which promotes pupils' wellbeing effectively. Leaders' commitment to what being educated in an international school means ensures that pupils feel a sense of belonging and have the skills to make successful transitions to other environments and international settings.
2. Academic and pastoral leaders work collaboratively. They communicate effectively with each other about pupils' pastoral and academic needs so that pupils' intellectual and emotional wellbeing are supported in a way which also encourages independence even for the youngest pupils.
3. Governors provide efficient support and challenge to senior leaders, who in turn evaluate the school effectively and take action when required. However, middle leaders' quality assurance of their own departments is not always as effective as possible.
4. Pupils enjoy their learning. They typically experience lessons where teachers' subject knowledge, skills and enthusiasm enable all groups of pupils to achieve success and find the work interesting.
5. The school's democratic ethos and strategic work on encouraging pupils to voice their perspectives has resulted in pupils who are confident and sophisticated in their verbal exchanges with adults and each other, who contribute freely to class discussion and are prepared to take risks in their learning.
6. A suitable framework for assessment is in place. However, teaching in the upper school does not always provide pupils with feedback that makes it clear to them how they can make progress and develop their work further.
7. Pupils' emotional wellbeing is very well supported by the systems leaders have put in place to track any pastoral matters and ensure that staff supporting the pupils are well informed about their pastoral needs. Leaders' effective liaison with outside agencies, provision of counsellors and the swift provision of pastoral support when required ensure that pupils feel able to seek help should they need it.
8. Behaviour is good, bullying rare and pupils are confident that systems exist to deal fairly with issues should they arise. A focus on positive behaviour and a structured rewards and sanctions system encourage pupils' kindness and respect for others.
9. A proactive approach to matters of travel, risk, first aid and health and safety, and effective maintenance of the site, supports pupils in feeling safe at school.
10. Leaders utilise the school's international curriculum to promote a global outlook and appreciation of diversity and respect for fundamental British values such as mutual respect and individual freedom. The curriculum develops pupils' understanding of diverse cultures and societies.
11. Pupils proceed to universities and employment across the world, benefitting from effective, balanced and personalised careers advice that prepares them effectively for their next steps. Leaders give mindful attention to transition points within the school so that pupils are confident in progressing to the next stage of their education, whether at ACS Hillingdon International or elsewhere.

12. Leaders provide multiple opportunities for pupils from a young age to experience responsibility and leadership. A variety of partnerships with the local and wider community enables pupils to engage in charitable and service activities whilst broadening their horizons.
13. Arrangements for safeguarding are suitable. Governors and leaders monitor the school's safeguarding arrangements regularly to ensure their sustained effectiveness. Staff are well trained and understand what actions to take if concerns arise. Pupils feel safe in school and secure about how to report worries about themselves or others.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are met.
- Standards relating to the quality of education, training and recreation are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing are met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that teaching in the upper school consistently provides pupils with feedback that makes it clear to them how they can make progress and improve their work
- ensure that middle leaders' quality assurance of their own departments is consistently as effective as possible.

Material change request

14. Inspectors considered the school's request for a change to the details of its registration to include the admission of children aged 3 to 4 years.

- The curriculum for children in the early years is suitable and supported by effective teaching. Curriculum plans cover learning in a suitably broad range of areas, including those relating to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of children in the early years. Curriculum plans include some information about how the school intends teaching and assessing the curriculum to meet the learning needs of children aged 3 to 4 years.
- Safeguarding and supervision arrangements for children are appropriate and likely to remain so should the proposed material change take place. Staff currently employed by the school have the qualifications and experience to be able to cater for children aged 3 to 4 years. Leaders intend initially to provide combined provision for children aged 3 and 4 years, creating a mixed age class. Although leaders have undertaken some planning for this, they have not yet given full consideration to the needs of children aged 3 to 4 years. This is particularly with regard to any potentially required adjustments relating to sleeping arrangements, toilet and intimate hygiene arrangements for younger children.

15. It is not recommended that the requested material change be approved.

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

16. Leaders use their good knowledge and skills to fulfil their responsibilities and actively promote the wellbeing of all groups of pupils. They are supported in this by effective governance, strategy and expertise across the ACS group of schools. The school's senior leadership team is able to draw on the advice of individual trustees and the group of schools to support them in their work as they apply the vision and values of the ACS group to the specific aims, needs and context of ACS Hillingdon International. A robust set of policies is in place, supported within the ACS group and contextualised by leaders for the school. Leaders and staff implement these policies effectively.
17. Governors monitor the school's compliance effectively, meeting regularly to review considerations such as health and safety, safeguarding and site maintenance. They utilise external audits, tracking software and a structured reporting process to ensure ongoing compliance with the Standards. Leaders utilise their regular collaboration with the other schools in the group in areas such as training, recruitment and health and safety to support school development.
18. Effective self-evaluation is used to translate the school's aims and ethos into actions which have pupils' wellbeing and achievement as their focus. Leaders implement a programme of professional development to support staff in gaining and developing appropriate skills and knowledge to effectively fulfil their responsibilities. Effective staff induction enables new staff, who often arrive from international settings, to settle quickly into school life and understand the particular nature of the school. However, in the upper school, middle leaders' quality assurance of their own departments is not always as effective as possible and is not consistent between departments.
19. Pastoral leadership across the school, including in early years, is highly effective. Efficient collaboration between leaders and managers through regular weekly meetings where pupils' wellbeing is discussed leads to a proactive approach that promotes pupils' welfare. Pastoral and academic leaders productively exchange information to ensure that staff understand individual pupils' specific needs and provide them with swift support should this be required.
20. The school website includes required and helpful information. There are a number of online systems which provide parents with detail about each pupil's attainment across the curriculum. Parents receive regular reports on their child's progress and development. Leaders liaise effectively with external agencies, including to support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND).
21. Leaders identify potential risks methodically and put forward appropriate controls to mitigate these. They consider contextual risks associated with the site, such as traffic, and also the needs of pupils with particular vulnerabilities. Shared learning from incidents or near misses within the wider group is applied to improve safety measures. Leaders provide training for staff on assessing risk within their areas.
22. Leaders implement a suitable complaints procedure and respond to any complaints within the published timescale and in accordance with the published policy. Leaders collate more minor worries or suggestions from parents and pupils, looking for trends and patterns, although these are not recorded and reviewed as systematically as possible.
23. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders implement a suitable accessibility plan to ensure that any pupils with disabilities can access the curriculum and the

premises. Leaders ensure that no groups of pupils are discriminated against, including by the teaching.

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

24. All the relevant Standards are met.

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

25. Pupils across the school experience a broad and creative curriculum which is appropriate to their abilities and needs and which covers all the required subject disciplines. It draws on models and specifications from international courses, including International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma, International Baccalaureate Career-related Programme (IBCP) and Advanced Placement courses, to offer pupils appropriate pathways for their interests and aspirations. Leaders' design of the high school diploma, taken by all pupils in the upper school, promotes curriculum breadth and ensures that students are well prepared in all core areas, as well as having the chance to take a variety of optional courses. Curriculum options, a focus on the creative arts and partnerships with professional arts bodies, mean that many pupils pursue at least one creative art to a very high standard throughout their time at school.
26. The curriculum provides a wide array of choices, including the recent addition of the opportunity to study video effects, animation and digital game design through the IBCP. A stimulating electives programme includes analogue photography, forensic science and 'mathletics'. In the lower school, science and social studies are studied in a way which combines several subjects, such as in projects where pupils create and video record their own meteorological or other such reports.
27. The curriculum has a sustained focus on global issues with an acknowledgement that many pupils might be in the school for a short time, may have started or may complete their education overseas and may work internationally. Leaders plan the curriculum so that transferable skills and knowledge are developed equally to the acquisition of knowledge about specific subjects. The curriculum, for all ages, includes creative multi-disciplinary projects, where pupils can choose elements of their work, which supports their engagement and motivation.
28. Leaders plan content and sequencing carefully, benchmarking standards of expected progress against a variety of international models. Pupils are assessed on entry and their progress tracked over time to check they are meeting or exceeding expected standards. Those pupils who take internationally recognised qualifications typically achieve above international averages for these examinations.
29. The school's encouragement of pupils speaking up for themselves and others, supports pupils of all ages to show developed articulacy and sophistication in vocabulary for their ages. They can argue, debate and weigh up competing perspectives. Many of the school's designed programmes explicitly nurture these skills in creative and critical thinking from an early age.
30. Teaching in mathematics and technology results in pupils' high proficiency and confidence in these areas. Leaders have introduced additional teaching alongside mathematics classes and many pupils of all ages take part in national and international mathematics competitions. All pupils from early years to Year 9 take courses in digital literacy and coding, developing skills in creating applications, robotics, and web design.
31. Pupils' achievement and participation in creative and performing arts courses is high. Leaders maintain partnerships with local film studios, professional orchestras and technology firms that enable pupils to understand industry standards and apply them to their own work. Staff promote and teach digital skills such as the use of cameras and editing and animation software. Pupils,

including children in the early years, move seamlessly between using digital devices, small whiteboards and paper to complete tasks.

32. Most teaching is well structured with clear learning objectives and utilises a range of well-chosen resources. Teachers provide explicit success criteria, so that pupils, from the very youngest, can work independently and collaboratively on a sequence of tasks and achieve success. Pupils are grouped sensitively by teachers to allow for typically appropriate support and challenge, such as extension tasks that include additional challenges. However, on occasion, a lack of challenge in an initial task means that some pupils with higher prior attainment do not make as much progress as they might. Staff manage behaviour well so there is little irrelevant chatter or distraction.
33. Clear goal setting, tracking and monitoring in the lower school, and in some subjects in the upper school, enable pupils to have a clear understanding of their individual next steps and understand how to make progress. However, in the upper school, teachers' feedback to pupils does not always provide them with clear advice about how to progress well and improve their work further.
34. Staff effectively support pupils who have SEND through accommodations such as seating arrangements, the provision of specific resources and the use of technology to ensure accessibility. Pupils with more substantial needs have an adapted curriculum and are supported through small group specialist lessons.
35. Pupils who speak English as an additional language receive either specialist support or in class adaptations so they can quickly access the full curriculum and participate fully in class.
36. The extensive extra-curricular programme allows for a wide range of interests to be stimulated and nurtured. Many of the clubs and societies are pupil-led or initiated, such as Arabic, Irish dance or Equity clubs. There is an ambitious programme of visits on offer to pupils, such as a debating trip to the Netherlands or a visit to Kenya. Leaders encourage pupils to engage with the activities effectively and their practical timetable and bus arrangements facilitate pupils' participation. Leaders provide opportunities for pupils to reflect on the skills gained through participation in these extra-curricular activities.

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

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

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

38. Leaders shape an ethos of mutual respect where pupils appreciate the individuality of others. Staff are sensitive to the needs of pupils, including those who have particular emotional needs, and make the school a welcoming and inclusive environment that promotes the success of all groups of pupils. Pastoral care is a priority. Counselling services within the school provide pupils with emotional support should they need it. Completion of a weekly wellbeing survey provides pupils with the opportunity to reflect on aspects of their welfare.
39. The curriculum and assemblies teach pupils about a range of faiths and religions. Pupils demonstrate understanding and respect for those of different faiths, or none, and the school calendar provides many opportunities to celebrate and learn about religious festivals and events.
40. Positive relationships between pupils and with teachers encourage pupils to develop their social skills and self-esteem. Leaders and staff encourage pupils of all ages to take risks in their learning, for example, expanding an answer or trying to respond even if uncertain, which builds both resilience and critical thinking skills.
41. Pupils enjoy extensive access to opportunities for physical recreation, sport and play. Children in the early years and lower school pupils take part in woodland-based activities and learn to appreciate the natural world, including through the creation of a sensory garden. The majority of pupils enhance their physical skills by participating in the sporting extra-curricular programme. The physical education (PE) programme develops pupils' strength and physical conditioning and a range of sport-related skills, as well as providing them with guidance about the importance of nutrition. Children in the early years learn how to live healthily, for example by cooking simple dishes in a specialist kitchen in their building or by growing vegetables in the school allotment.
42. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education programme is delivered by specialist teachers. It develops pupils' understanding of factors to consider in order to live happy and healthy and independent lives. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme meets the requirements of current statutory guidance. It covers topics such as friendship difficulties, staying safe online, strategies to guard against peer pressure, different types of healthy relationships, puberty and consent. The RSE programme is taught in an age-appropriate manner.
43. Leaders and staff promote and reinforce positive behaviour through the rewards and sanctions system. Their use of the school's 'SOAR' acronym encourages pupils to be safe, organised, accountable and respectful, through gentle reinforcement by teachers and through the display of posters about behavioural expectations. Leaders and staff implement the school's behaviour policy fairly and proportionately.
44. Bullying incidents are rare and leaders and staff deal swiftly with any concerns raised. Pupils can talk to trusted adults if they have any concerns about possible bullying. Leaders use rigorous record keeping and regular meetings and year group reviews to check that any incidents are quickly identified and dealt with effectively.
45. The premises are well maintained and comply with all regulatory health and safety requirements. Leaders make effective use of outside specialists who audit processes and equipment. The

proprietor maintains effective oversight of the school's health and safety and fire safety arrangements. Staff receive appropriate training in fire safety and leaders maintain a suitable fire risk assessment. Regular fire evacuation and lockdown drills ensure that pupils know what to do in an emergency.

46. Pupils are suitably supervised throughout the day and during lunch and pick up times, with staff readily available. Staff to child ratios in the early years are generous and exceed regulatory requirements.
47. Admissions and attendance registers are maintained in line with current statutory guidance. Leaders analyse patterns of attendance and consistently promote the importance of full attendance throughout semesters. A rolling admissions approach to support globally mobile families means that pupils may join or leave the school at any point during the year. The school informs the local authority when any pupils join or leave the school at non-standard times of transition.
48. Staff implement the first aid policy effectively. Any required medical assistance is administered in a timely manner by suitably trained staff. There are robust systems in place to store and administer specific pupils' medication. Staff undergo regular first aid training. Accommodation for pupils' medical needs is suitable and well organised.

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

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

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

50. Most teaching develops pupils' skills in working collaboratively. Tasks are provided that require pupils to combine individual research with collaboration with others to come to overall solutions. Younger pupils are reminded of the importance of turn taking and giving the speaker full attention during discussions.
51. Many aspects of the curriculum are designed around real-world problems that enable pupils to develop their social and economic understanding. For example, mathematical tasks in the lower school equip pupils with a useful understanding of money. Enterprise projects in the lower school teach budgeting and profit and loss. Individual projects at IB Diploma level allow pupils taking politics to explore the impact of social media on voting patterns.
52. Belonging and kindness are key values and are encouraged through the taught curriculum, policies, the topics of assemblies and the PSHE programme. Leaders and staff teach pupils why individuals should be respected for their identity and background. Pupils learn about why it is important to respect people's protected characteristics, such as race, sexual orientation and religion. Several pupil-initiated societies exist to support this, for example the LGBTQ society.
53. Leaders' introduction of an accredited global citizenship course allows pupils in both the lower and upper schools to explore topics such as comparative political systems, social institutions and global concerns. Whilst this supports fundamental British values such as democracy and the rule of law, it also allows pupils to gain an understanding of different countries' political and belief systems. Leaders ensure that a balanced view of any political issues or perspectives is presented and provide materials to help pupils understand complex or contentious current affairs.
54. In the upper school, a global languages class allows pupils to explore a different language and culture each month, often featuring videos made by children from different countries. The 'critical perspectives' course encourages older pupils to review historical events from diverse viewpoints. The school's published cultural calendar identifies days and events important to different faiths throughout the year and leaders develop pupils' understanding of their religious significance.
55. From the age of eight, pupils receive structured career guidance through PSHE, assemblies and subject-led talks, progressing to university fairs, visiting speakers and, by the time pupils are aged 13, individual meetings to discuss potential future pathways. Many curriculum topics enable pupils to learn about the world of work and explore particular careers. The personalised and balanced guidance contributes to pupils' preparation for their next steps, including the international and UK destinations to which many pupils progress.
56. Leaders provide pupils with a number of ways in which they can share their opinions and contribute to the development of the school. A wide range of roles of responsibility are available to them from the early years, where door holders and lunch bucket distributors, for example, carry out their roles with pride. Pupils are involved in mentoring programmes and pupil council and others are ambassadors for areas such as technology or STEM. Leaders use democratic processes for selection of pupils to these roles and rotate them regularly to maximise participation.

57. The school enables pupils to develop their sense of responsibility to those around them and the wider world. Assemblies and the displayed aims of the school reinforce the notions of service and duty towards others. The global citizenship diploma encourages pupils to engage with and develop their understanding of society. Pupils actively engage with the local community through, for example, creating workshops on nutrition for pupils at a partner primary school, organising a clothing and toy donation drive for re-homed refugee families and supporting the organisation of a science and technology day at an amusement park.

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

58. All the relevant Standards are met.

Safeguarding

59. Safeguarding is a whole school priority. Leaders recognise the contextual safeguarding risks within an international school with a diverse cultural community from over fifty countries. Leaders are sensitive to the fact that some pupils may face heightened vulnerabilities due to unfamiliarity with local laws, displacement, or homesickness. Leaders and staff take effective measures to educate pupils and parents about safeguarding rules and culture within the United Kingdom.
60. Leaders maintain a co-ordinated safeguarding approach, working closely with local safeguarding agencies across the multiple local authorities where pupils reside to ensure a robust response to safeguarding issues. In addition, effective partnerships with embassies and national agencies established for expatriate communities provide further support.
61. Leaders, supported by specialist staff across the ACS group, implement clear and robust safeguarding procedures that meet the requirements of current statutory guidance. The thorough and clear safeguarding policy is available on the website and is well understood by staff. The staff code of conduct offers unambiguous guidance about safeguarding requirements.
62. Governors receive suitable safeguarding training. They maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements and provide support and challenge to leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities through the scrutiny of reports and frequent meetings.
63. Leaders with designated safeguarding responsibilities provide relevant training for staff and governors. The effectiveness of training is supported through an online assessment to check for understanding. Training records are clear and well maintained. Training supplies staff with the confidence to identify and report safeguarding issues appropriately.
64. The safer recruitment of new employees is thorough and well organised. The school undertakes all appropriate safer recruitment checks on new staff before they commence working with pupils and records these accurately in a single central record of appointments (SCR). Staff involved in recruitment have undergone safer recruitment training and maintain staff files meticulously. Leaders and governors regularly review recruitment logs and the SCR.
65. The safeguarding team are appropriately trained to carry out their responsibilities. They respond effectively whenever safeguarding concerns are raised, including through liaison with relevant external agencies including the local authority designated officer (LADO) and children's services. Staff undertake training about the 'Prevent' duty about risks relating to radicalisation and extremism and how to respond to any concerns about these.
66. Comprehensive filtering and monitoring of internet usage is in place and leaders regularly check the efficiency of these. The school teaches pupils how to stay safe, including when online and when using social media.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

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

School details

School	ACS Hillingdon International School
Department for Education number	312/6060
Registered charity number	1179820
Address	ACS Hillingdon International School 108 Vine Lane Hillingdon Uxbridge UB10 0BE
Phone number	01895 259771
Email address	enquirieshillington@acs-schools.com
Website	www.acs-schools.com/hillingdon
Proprietor	ACS International Schools Ltd.
Chair	Mr Robert MacNaughton
Headteacher	Mr Martin Hall
Age range	4 to 19
Number of pupils	551
Date of previous inspection	1 to 4 February 2022

Information about the school

68. ACS Hillingdon International School is an independent co-educational day school located on a single site in Uxbridge, Middlesex. It consists of a lower school catering for pupils aged 4 to 10 years, and an upper school catering for pupils aged 11 to 18 years. It is part of a wider group of three schools who share some policies and are overseen by the same governing body.
69. There are 16 children in the early years comprising two Reception classes, housed in their own building.
70. The school has identified 123 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). No pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
71. The school has identified English as an additional language for 59 pupils.
72. The school states its aims are to build the knowledge, understanding, skills and dispositions that will prepare its pupils to make a difference. It strives to develop pupils to become effective learners, confident individuals and caring contributors.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

4 to 6 March 2025

73. A team of six inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

74. 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 headteacher, school leaders, managers and other members of staff
- discussions with pupils
- visits to the learning support area and facilities for physical education
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

75. 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

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For more information, please visit isi.net