

# School inspection report

21 to 23 January 2025

## **Polwhele House School**

Truro

Cornwall

TR4 9AE

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 review the school's strategic aims regularly. The well-considered self-evaluation process ensures that strengths and areas for improvement are accurately identified to inform ongoing development planning. Pupils' wellbeing is prioritised by leaders, including as part of this review process.
2. Governors provide appropriate support and challenge to continue to improve the school. The regular meetings between leaders and governors ensure that the Standards are met consistently over time. Governors check that policies are suitably implemented. Pupils' welfare is promoted effectively through governors' on-site visits. Governors meet with staff and pupils to explore their views about the school. While health and safety are well managed overall, minor oversights were identified during the inspection. These were resolved swiftly by leaders and did not impact pupils' safety.
3. Pupils experience an age-appropriate, suitably designed curriculum. Teachers' expertise and adaptations to meet individual needs support pupils' good progress. However, teachers' feedback to pupils is sometimes not clear enough to help them understand how to improve their work. When this happens, pupils do not make as much progress as they could. Pupils' academic achievement is enhanced by a wide and varied extra-curricular programme. The high-quality opportunities available in the arts, equestrian sport and physical education (PE) programme are valued and enjoyed.
4. Children in the early years make good progress, supported by the expert and caring staff team. Children's achievements are underpinned by the effective partnerships between home and school. Learning opportunities and resources are designed appropriately to engage children's interest. Children enjoy learning, for example, through the regular outdoor activities that they undertake in the school woodland.
5. Effective adaptations support pupils' positive mental health and emotional development. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) benefit from the calm and well-trained staff designated to support them, and they make good progress. Relationships between pupils and staff are characterised by secure levels of trust. This trust contributes effectively to pupils' secure sense of wellbeing.
6. Pupils at the school are tolerant and respectful of individual differences. Their appreciation of diversity is well supported by staff who model the school's values in promoting a culture of kindness and respect towards one another. Pupils' courtesy is reflected, for instance, in holding doors open for others and readily offering assistance to visitors.
7. Safeguarding arrangements at the school are effective. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding receive suitable training and fulfil their responsibilities appropriately. Staff understand how to identify safeguarding concerns. They know the steps that should be taken if they receive a safeguarding disclosure. Leaders and governors' oversight of safeguarding processes is rigorous. All pre-employment checks are completed correctly for staff joining the school. However, there were minor administrative errors in the electronic recording of these checks in the single central record (SCR). This was corrected during the inspection.

## 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 oversight of health and safety issues is consistently robust to prevent further occurrence of minor issues
- check that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their work so that they achieve consistently well across all aspects of their learning
- implement rigorous systems to ensure that minor administrative errors do not occur in the school's single central record of pre-appointment checks.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

8. Leaders place pupils' wellbeing at the heart of the school's mission. Pupils thrive in school due to the individualised support and care offered by staff. They enjoy school and compare it to being part of a large and caring family.
9. The leadership team is reviewing and redefining the school's aims following the recent appointments of both headteacher and deputy head. Leaders' comprehensive evaluation of the school's strengths and areas for development involves consultation with pupils, parents and staff. This self-evaluation underpins the future strategic direction of the school and its accompanying development plan.
10. The managing council of governors provides rigorous oversight of the leadership team's work. Governors offer appropriate support and challenge in regular meetings and on-site visits, so that leaders continue to improve the school.
11. The school's risk management policy and processes are reviewed regularly. Leaders, managers and staff undertake training to ensure that they are equipped with the knowledge and skills to identify and mitigate risks to pupils' welfare.
12. Suitable risk assessments are in place to minimise the risks to pupils' safety while they are on school grounds and when undertaking activities further afield. Leaders promptly addressed minor oversights identified during the inspection. These did not impact on pupil's safety.
13. Governors work effectively with leaders to ensure that the Standards to protect pupils' welfare are met consistently. They support leaders in the regular review of policies and the effectiveness of policy implementation.
14. Leaders seek specialist guidance about pupils' welfare from external agencies when needed. They understand when pupils may be at risk of harm and accurately apply the expectations when referring their concerns for external support.
15. Equality, diversity and inclusion are well promoted. Leaders ensure that the school meets the requirements of the Equality Act 2010. They consider ways in which all pupils have access to the school site and the curriculum. This supports the good progress of pupils who have SEND.
16. In the early years, children make good progress due to the care and highly personalised learning opportunities they receive. High-quality outdoor learning opportunities, in woodlands located on the school site, build children's problem-solving skills and their ability to work collaboratively with others. Children's welfare is effectively promoted.
17. Parents are regularly informed about pupils' progress through consultation evenings and written reports. Leaders ensure that the required information, including previous inspection reports, is made available to parents through the school's informative website. The regular and effective communication between early years staff and parents contributes well to children's learning and development over time.

18. A suitable policy is in place for the management of complaints. This includes the expectations of timely and appropriate responses to parents if they raise a complaint. Leaders are effective in their implementation of the complaints policy.
19. Leaders maintain effective oversight in the annual review of education, health and care (EHC) plans for pupils who have SEND.

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

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

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

21. The curriculum and co-curriculum are broad and balanced. Programmes are designed effectively, taking appropriate account of pupils' age, interests and abilities. Consequently, pupils are motivated to learn and make good progress.
22. Pupils achieve well in reading and wider literacy, mathematics, science and languages. They develop their digital skills appropriately, for example, in their ability to code.
23. The well-developed PE programme is the key to pupils' success on the sports field. They value the opportunities to take part in competitive fixtures and sporting events. Pupils make good progress due to the skilful teaching they receive in arts and sports lessons and the varied opportunities to participate in competitive fixtures, competitions and performances. Children in the early years make good progress in developing their physical skills due to the access they have to specialist sports and dance teachers.
24. High-quality coaching contributes towards pupils' high levels of motivation and success in competitions up to national level. Pupils achieve well in performing arts and equestrian sports because of bespoke support from enthusiastic and well-qualified staff.
25. Pupils build on their previous learning through carefully structured programmes of study and well-taught lessons. Teaching and learning are designed to build on pupils' interests.
26. Pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding are developed through effective adaptations to the curriculum and lesson content made by teachers in most lessons.
27. Teachers and learning support staff work effectively together to ensure that pupils' misconceptions are identified and corrected quickly. An effective partnership between staff and parents and the appropriate use of a range of resources supports the good progress of pupils who have SEND.
28. Pupils achieve well, in line with the school's aim to help them to fulfil their academic potential. Pupils' positive attitudes to learning are evident in lessons. Their achievements are regularly celebrated in lessons and assemblies. This motivates them to learn successfully.
29. Pupils' good outcomes are supported by the effective use of assessment information to track their progress. Effective interventions are put in place when gaps in learning are identified. However, pupils are not always consistently clear about what they need to do to improve their work. When this happens, they do not make as much progress as they could.
30. In the early years, staff support children skilfully. Consequently, children achieve well in their learning. They are guided to think about their responses to questions, and in doing so they deepen their learning. Children build communication and language skills successfully. Purposeful talk is encouraged. The correct use of language is modelled consistently by staff.
31. Pupils' educational experience is further enriched by a varied, relevant programme of educational visits, visitors to the school, extra-curricular clubs and special events. Pupils enjoy access to equestrian and water sports. They participate regularly in local cultural events, such as when the school choir sang pieces from the Georgian era in a local cathedral. They have opportunities to

enhance their interest in subjects such as science, mathematics and drama through attendance at after-school clubs.

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

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



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

33. The school's aim to create a friendly, caring environment where every child feels valued is effectively realised. This environment contributes well to pupils' high levels of self-esteem and sense of self-worth.
34. Pupils feel safe and secure at school. Staff know their pupils well as individuals. Pupils value the care that they are consistently shown. They trust that staff will listen empathetically to their concerns and act appropriately if concerns are raised.
35. Pupils' emotional and mental health is well supported through effective interventions by appropriately qualified staff. The well-planned personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) curriculum, together with themed assemblies, helps pupils to understand how to protect their own wellbeing. Pupils in Years 3 to 9, for example, demonstrated a well-developed understanding of how good mental health can be achieved during a mindfulness assembly and themed day. During yoga sessions, pupils learned about how meditation and deep breathing can alleviate stress.
36. The personal, physical and emotional health of children in the early years is well supported. The positive relationships between children and staff are at the heart of this success. Encouragement by staff builds children's confidence, so they participate enthusiastically in activities and persevere with tasks.
37. The PSHE programme ensures that pupils have a well-developed understanding of how to look after themselves and how to interact effectively with others. Pupils are kind. They appreciate the differences in others. The harmonious nature of the school community is reflected in the high level of understanding that pupils show to each other.
38. An age-appropriate relationships and sex education (RSE) curriculum helps pupils to understand how to build secure relationships and, for example, develop their knowledge of the impact of their changing bodies.
39. Pupils' awareness of the importance of good physical health is regularly promoted through the science and PSHE curriculum. Children in the early years learn about the importance of oral hygiene and how to use a toothbrush effectively.
40. Pupils' physical development is well supported by outdoor learning and the extensive sports programme. Consequently, they achieve high levels of physical fitness, as exemplified by the proportion of pupils achieving the qualifying time needed to enter a regional school's cross-country competition.
41. Pupils learn about nutritious food and how healthy choices contribute towards their wellbeing and physical development. Children in the early years regularly discuss healthy food options.
42. Pupils almost always behave well. They are polite and courteous in their interactions with adults. Pupils manage their behaviour appropriately during unstructured times, such as breaktimes. Their ability to self-regulate is supported effectively by the strong moral values that staff promote.

43. Pupils are motivated by the school's rewards for positive conduct. Sanctions are given fairly for behaviour that is not in line with the school's behaviour policy. When this happens, pupils are supported to make better choices in the future.
44. Pupils understand the different forms that bullying can take. Staff deal effectively with any bullying behaviour on the rare occasions that it occurs.
45. Appropriate supervision is in place for pupils on the school site and when visiting other locations. Children in the early years are equally well supervised.
46. Pupils' spiritual development is enhanced through assemblies, outdoor lessons and in performing arts sessions. Early years children, for example, transitioned successfully from moments of unbridled joy to a more meditative state during a dance lesson. Pupils in Years 3 to 5 gleefully participated in a scavenger hunt in the walled garden.
47. The school premises are suitably maintained. In most instances, appropriate health and safety arrangements are in place.
48. Suitable measures are in place to protect pupils from the risk of fire. Staff receive appropriate training in fire safety. Pupils have a clear understanding of fire evacuation procedures because of regular practices.
49. Effective first aid arrangements are in place. Pupils' medical needs are addressed appropriately by well-trained staff. Adequate medical accommodation is available for pupils who are sick or require first aid.
50. Admissions and attendance policies and processes are suitable. Pupils' attendance rates are effectively monitored. Any instances of pupils' absence are followed up quickly. The local authority is notified if a pupil joins or leaves the school at a non-standard transition time.

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

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

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

52. Leaders are effective in promoting the school's aim of developing strong moral values that will support pupils in their future lives. Pupils learn about the legal framework that underpins British society and the consequences that may result from breaking the law.
53. Children in the early years learn about right and wrong choices. They are kind and get on well together. This is reflected in the way that they take turns and share, in the classroom and at play.
54. Pupils are tolerant and respectful towards one another. Diversity is celebrated through lessons, assemblies and wall displays, and by visitors to the school. Assemblies cover a wide range of themes, for example neurodivergence and Pride Week. Pupils enjoy learning about the music of different countries, for example, as they join in enthusiastically playing steel pan drums.
55. British values are discussed across a range of subjects. Pupils gain an understanding of the United Kingdom's parliamentary democracy in history lessons. Visiting speakers' contributions, for example, include talks from members of parliament. Democracy is experienced firsthand through elections to the school council. Pupils consider different political viewpoints during PSHE lessons.
56. The PSHE curriculum raises pupils' awareness of how to manage their finances. They enjoy learning about institutions, services and individuals that support and protect British citizens. A visit by the air ambulance helicopter and the ambulance service, for example, helped pupils to understand the role played by medical professionals in times of crisis. Pupils appreciate the sacrifices made by members of the armed forces in acts of remembrance in the local community.
57. Pupils understand the importance of making a positive contribution to their school community and to wider society. They are keen to raise money, for example, for a national children's hospital, and to collect items to donate to foodbank charities. Some pupils lead clubs for their peers, such as mathematics and crochet clubs. Other pupils play an active part in running the school's equestrian centre, even when this requires an early start to their school day.
58. The school fulfils its aim to prepare pupils well to move to the next stage of their education. Pupils regularly interact with their peers in different year groups. Younger pupils experience early contact with staff who teach older year groups. These opportunities support a smooth transition between year groups and phases. Older pupils receive helpful guidance in making subject choices for GCSE.
59. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are given helpful careers guidance and advice about next steps. Year 8 pupils, for example, attend a local careers fair while senior pupils have opportunities to learn about jobs through talks by adults on a range of career routes.

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

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

## Safeguarding

61. Leaders promote a robust safeguarding culture. The school's safeguarding policy includes the latest statutory guidance. The policy is available to parents and other stakeholders via the school's website. While safeguarding is effective overall, leaders do not identify minor administrative errors, specifically in the SCR. These were rectified during the inspection.
62. Staff with responsibility for leading safeguarding have senior positions within the school and appropriate training to fulfil their responsibilities effectively. They access support appropriately from external agencies when required.
63. Governors provide suitable challenge to leaders to ensure that safeguarding procedures are effective and in line with current guidance. Governors include safeguarding as a standing agenda item in termly meetings. They undertake a comprehensive review of the annual report on safeguarding that leaders submit to the local authority.
64. Staff safeguarding training is updated regularly. All staff and volunteers receive comprehensive training when they join the school. Consequently, they understand how to identify and respond appropriately to safeguarding concerns. Governors meet with staff to ensure the effective management and reporting of safeguarding disclosures and concerns. Staff understand their duty to report low-level concerns.
65. Pupils feel safe at school. They know how to raise a concern if they are worried. They are confident that if they report an issue, staff will provide a caring and effective response.
66. Pupils and parents receive regular and helpful guidance on how to stay safe, including when online. Robust filtering and monitoring systems provide effective oversight of internet use at the school.
67. Staff implement policies and procedures rigorously when pupils are missing or absent from education.
68. Leaders and managers with responsibility for recruitment complete pre-employment checks appropriately and maintain a SCR of appointments. While all relevant recruitment checks are undertaken before staff commence employment at the school, the dates of some checks were incorrectly entered on the SCR of appointments. These errors were corrected before the end of the inspection.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Polwhele House School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	908/6076
<b>Address</b>	Polwhele House School Truro Cornwall TR4 9AE
<b>Phone number</b>	01872 273011
<b>Email address</b>	office@polwhelehouse.co.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.polwhelehouse.co.uk
<b>Proprietors</b>	Canon Richard White and Mrs Rosemary White
<b>Chair of the Board of Directors</b>	Mr Robert Tasker
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Emma Edwards
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 14
<b>Number of pupils</b>	91
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	January 2022

## Information about the school

70. Polwhele House is an independent co-educational school for pupils aged between 2 and 14 years. The school is owned and overseen by two proprietors who are assisted by a managing board of governors. The school comprises early years provision, a junior school and three classes of pupils in the secondary school, in Years 7 to 9.
71. The school has identified 34 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
72. The school does not have any pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL).
73. The school aims to enable pupils to fulfil their academic potential and to find their special talent within a friendly, stimulating and caring environment. The school aspires to help each child to feel valued and to develop strong moral values that will support them in their future lives.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

21 to 23 January 2025

74. A team of four inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

75. 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.

76. The inspection team considered the views of pupils, members of staff and parents who responded to ISI's pre-inspection surveys.

**How are association independent schools in England inspected?**

- The Department for Education is the regulator for independent schools in England.
- ISI is approved by the Secretary of State for Education to inspect independent schools in England, which are members of associations in membership of the Independent Schools Council.
- ISI inspections report to the Department for Education on the extent to which the statutory Independent School Standards, the EYFS statutory framework requirements, the National Minimum Standards for boarding schools and any other relevant standards are met.
- For more information, please visit **[www.isi.net](http://www.isi.net)**.

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