

## School inspection report

2 to 4 December 2025

### **Dolphin School (incorporating Noah's Ark Nursery Schools)**

106 Northcote Rd

Battersea

London

SW11 6QW

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. Governors and leaders promote pupils' wellbeing across all areas of school life. Leaders, including in the early years, are well trained to carry out their roles and responsibilities effectively. Governors and leaders regularly review the effectiveness of their strategic vision to ensure the school's continuous development.
2. Leaders communicate the school's aims clearly through assemblies, prayer, periods of personal reflection and class discussions. The aims are widely known and understood. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the school's values and its Christian ethos.
3. The well-planned curriculum is thoughtfully designed and caters for pupils' prior attainment and ongoing learning needs. Leaders prioritise the development of pupils' skills in English and mathematics to help prepare them for the next stage of their education. Teachers display good subject knowledge and set high expectations for pupils. Teachers encourage pupils to consider mistakes as learning opportunities to improve their work. Pupils make good progress throughout the school.
4. Leaders implement a suitable assessment framework to monitor pupils' progress and attainment over time. They use the information from assessments to adapt schemes of work to support pupils' changing needs.
5. Leaders provide a nurturing environment where pupils' voices are heard and any concerns quickly addressed. Pupils have a clear understanding of the school's expectations for behaviour. They are polite, well behaved and considerate of the needs of others. Pupils are focused and diligent learners who express their ideas confidently. They collaborate well with others and listen respectfully to their views.
6. The comprehensive personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) programme is delivered effectively. It provides pupils with clear strategies that help them to increase their self-awareness and understanding and support them to form healthy relationships.
7. Leaders prepare pupils well to be responsible and caring citizens through various leadership roles, fundraising activities and active engagement with the local community. Pupils demonstrate a well-developed sense of responsibility towards others.
8. Economic education is provided through PSHE lessons and a business enterprise project in Year 6. However, there are limited opportunities for pupils to develop a fuller understanding of aspects of finance, such as savings and bank accounts, which are important for their later lives.
9. Leaders implement effective measures to protect pupils from harm. They review these regularly and respond promptly when incidents arise. Leaders seek and act on advice from safeguarding partners, where necessary. Governors, leaders with safeguarding responsibility and staff are well trained and knowledgeable. All the required checks are carried out before any adult starts work at the school.

## 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:

- develop the quality of the economic education curriculum so that it provides pupils with a fuller understanding of key financial concepts, as appropriate to their age.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors and leaders put effective arrangements in place to promote pupils' wellbeing and welfare. Governors visit the school and meet with leaders regularly in order to remain well informed about day-to-day operations and to check that procedures are suitable. They ensure that leaders have appropriate skills and knowledge to fulfil their responsibilities and that the Standards are met consistently.
11. In the early years, leaders meet frequently with staff to discuss children's learning and pastoral needs. They provide specialist training so that staff understand how young children learn and develop. Leaders update parents regularly about matters relating to the early years.
12. Leaders and governors work together closely to create a clear strategic vision in support of the school's continuing development. They routinely evaluate how successfully it reflects the school's ethos. Staff training is regularly updated to complement teachers' specialist knowledge. Leaders reflect on how they can enhance provision. They take appropriate action in response to the priorities they identify.
13. Leaders communicate the school's aims clearly through, for example, a structured assembly programme, daily periods of personal reflection and planned links in lessons. The aims are well understood by pupils, parents and staff. Staff reinforce the values by modelling appropriate behaviour, such as in the way they speak to pupils and other adults.
14. Leaders and governors review the school's policies regularly and systematically. Governors scrutinise policies to assure themselves that they reflect the latest statutory guidance. Leaders share policies appropriately so that they are widely known and understood. Policies are implemented consistently throughout the school.
15. Parents have access to all required information about the school, including contact details, aims and policies, through the school's website or on request. Leaders regularly share information with parents through written reports and meetings, so that they remain updated about their child's academic progress and personal development. The school provides the required information to the local authority in respect of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan). Leaders also inform the local authority, as required, when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
16. Leaders liaise closely with a range of external agencies to seek specialist advice and guidance, when required. This supports leaders' decision-making in response to any situations that arise.
17. Leaders identify, assess and manage risks effectively, including for specialist equipment, pupils' safe use of stairs and educational visits. Detailed arrangements are in place to manage pupils' travel to breaktimes and sports sessions. Risk assessments identify suitable control measures to mitigate the potential risks identified.
18. Leaders implement an appropriate complaints procedure. Any parental concerns are addressed thoroughly and in accordance with timeframes outlined in the policy. Leaders act promptly when concerns are raised and maintain clear communication with parents throughout the process.

19. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 in order to avoid discrimination. The accessibility plan is appropriate and well considered. It details arrangements to enable equality of access for pupils to the school's curriculum, documentation and physical environment.

**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 is appropriate and well structured. It provides pupils with secure foundations in English and mathematics, alongside creative, scientific and technological subjects. Leaders plan schemes of work methodically to support the progression of pupils' skills and introduce challenging content to extend their thinking. Pupils develop the skills and knowledge needed for the next stage of their education and achieve well in their applications to senior schools.
22. Pupils make good progress across the range of subjects, notably so in mathematics. Leaders regularly review subjects to ensure that planning meets pupils' ongoing needs. In mathematics, a recently introduced scheme of work provides increased flexibility around the timings allocated for different topics. This has enabled greater consolidation of pupils' reasoning skills. Pupils' outcomes have improved as a result. In English, a school-wide focus on pupils' engagement and understanding in reading is having an early positive impact. Well-stocked libraries provide access to a breadth of books and newspapers. Comprehension passages from classical texts help to extend pupils' vocabulary range and deduction skills.
23. Leaders utilise an appropriate assessment programme to monitor pupils' progress over time, across the range of subjects. They conduct detailed analysis of assessment data in English and mathematics and hold regular meetings with staff to discuss pupils' progress. Planning throughout the curriculum is adjusted, when needed, to take account of pupils' ongoing learning needs.
24. Teachers plan lessons based on pupils' prior attainment. They deploy additional staff effectively to support pupils' individual needs. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge. This enables them to make effective use of questioning, give clear explanations and teach subject-specific vocabulary in order to deepen pupils' knowledge, skills and understanding. For example, older pupils learn about creative writing techniques, such as oxymoron and pathetic fallacy, and use them in their own writing.
25. Teachers set high expectations for pupils' behaviour, which they respond to well. Pupils are self-motivated, reflective and attentive learners. They recall previous learning accurately and offer well-reasoned responses. Pupils reflect maturely on their teachers' advice. They treat mistakes as valuable learning opportunities.
26. Pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) make good progress. Leaders identify pupils' needs proactively. They use assessment information to arrange in-class, individual and external specialist support sessions to meet pupils' individual needs. Leaders make purposeful use of specialist resources and quiet spaces. Suitable provision is made available for pupils who have an EHC plan and targets are regularly reviewed.
27. Pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL) receive targeted speaking, reading and writing support, when required. Specialist resources, including picture cards, bilingual books, vocabulary lists and role play, help to support pupils' understanding. An emphasis on repetition, clear instructions and gestures ensures that pupils develop confidence in speaking and fluency in writing and make good progress.
28. Staff in the early years set high expectations for children's communication and language development. They use stimulating activities to engage children in conversation, stories and songs. In Reception phonics lessons, children enjoy the challenge of identifying different sounds at speed

and blending them together to form words. Children in Nursery sing responses enthusiastically to a variety of greetings. Staff plan effective opportunities for children to develop and reinforce their mathematical knowledge. Children develop appropriate mathematical knowledge and understanding, such as recognising shapes and identifying numbers. Warm and meaningful relationships offer children reassurance and create a purposeful learning environment. Children make good progress and achieve well as a result.

29. A wide range of extra-curricular activities provides pupils with opportunities to develop their skills and build on their knowledge. For example, older pupils enhance their musical skills and performance techniques in recorder club. Clubs, such as sports, design technology and music, are well matched to pupils' ages and interests.

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

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



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

31. Leaders prioritise pupils' spiritual and emotional wellbeing through daily periods of reflection, prayer and assemblies. Participation in assemblies and other events gives pupils a sense of fulfilment. They sing joyfully and celebrate the performances of others. Pupils are introduced to different world religions as well as Christianity, giving them an understanding of beliefs that may differ from their own.
32. Leaders and staff support pupils to develop self-awareness as individuals and learners. Teachers provide pupils with regular opportunities for purposeful discussion. Pupils reflect thoughtfully on their personal goals and the advice given to them by their teachers. Pupils are taught about the importance of uniqueness and that everyone is deserving of respect.
33. Regular physical education (PE) and sports sessions enable pupils to keep fit and be active. Teachers use clear explanations so that pupils understand how to improve their skills, such as maintaining concentration when dribbling a ball. Teachers design lessons to enhance pupils' confidence, heighten teamworking skills and raise awareness of the health benefits of exercise. Leaders seek pupils' views about PE and respond positively to them. For example, the curriculum now includes dance, parkour and capoeira, to reflect pupils' wider interests.
34. Children in the early years increase their physical development through regular rhythm and movement activities and PE lessons. Staff motivate children by providing stimulating activities that interest them and engage them. These increase children's strength and stamina when climbing and jumping on equipment and balancing on beams. Activities including mark-making, using chalk boards and finding objects in sand trays develop children's finger strength and co-ordination.
35. An appropriate PSHE curriculum helps pupils to grow in self-understanding and confidence. Pupils learn about healthy lifestyles, positive relationships and valuing their own identity. Daily 'relationship time' sessions provide pupils with insight into changing emotions and managing anxiety. Teaching about puberty supports older pupils' understanding of bodily changes, personal hygiene and variations in mood.
36. The behaviour strategy provides pupils with clear guidance. Teachers apply sanctions fairly, when necessary. Pupils respond positively to open and honest conversations when situations arise. Recently introduced 'reflect and reset' sessions encourage pupils to consider the perspectives of others. Pupils are courteous, well behaved and respectful in their interactions. They form effective friendships and show sensitivity to the differences and needs of others. Older pupils use their knowledge of the Bible to guide them to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves. Bullying seldom occurs. When issues do arise, leaders address them swiftly and effectively.
37. Pupils are supervised effectively. Staff are proactive in supporting pupils' needs during lessons, breaktimes and lunchtimes. An appropriate ratio of adults to children in the early years is consistently maintained, including when children are eating.
38. Leaders maintain suitable admission and attendance registers, in line with current guidance. Leaders promote the importance of regular attendance effectively. They monitor patterns in pupils' punctuality and absence closely, taking action as necessary.

39. The school is well maintained and health and safety procedures are robust. Thorough safety checks are routinely carried out and are monitored by governors. Suitable measures, including drills, signage and equipment checks, reduce potential risks to pupils in the event of fire.
40. Pupils' medical and first aid needs are met well. Staff, including in the early years, are suitably trained in the administration of first aid. Medication is stored securely.
41. Staff in the early years form trusting and caring relationships with children. They understand when to support children and when to encourage their independence so that they gain confidence in their own abilities. Through carefully selected stories, staff encourage children to share their feelings. They create a nurturing environment so that children interact confidently with those around them.

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

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

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

43. Leaders introduce pupils to economic education through the PSHE curriculum and other activities. For example, pupils in Year 6 undertake a comprehensive business enterprise project, using profits to support the school's annual charity. Children in the early years practise buying items during shop role play. However, opportunities for pupils to develop a wider understanding of financial concepts, such as savings, bank accounts and the value of money, are not fully developed. As a result, pupils' knowledge and skills in this area are less well developed than they could be.
44. Leaders promote themes that reflect a diverse society, so that pupils understand the importance of harmony, tolerance and respect. This helps pupils to deepen their empathy and understanding of the world. Pupils embrace inclusivity, including during events such as 'neurodiversity week'. Leaders raise pupils' awareness of different cultural traditions and perspectives, including during 'international day'. Children in the early years are provided with appropriate resources, including dolls and story books, which encourage them to understand and celebrate the differences between people.
45. Leaders provide pupils with opportunities to learn about potential future careers, so that they develop an understanding of some of the occupations available to them. For example, leaders arrange talks for pupils, including from cardiologists, athletes and engineers.
46. Effective transition arrangements enable pupils to proceed smoothly on to their next stage of schooling. Pupils create class codes of conduct to help them adjust to new year groups. Teachers prepare older pupils well for their next schools, including providing guidance about entrance examinations alongside a focus on self-care.
47. Leaders develop pupils' sense of right and wrong through PSHE, stories and assemblies. They plan thoughtfully so that pupils appreciate moral principles, including fairness and honesty. For example, they provide practical opportunities for pupils to develop good sportsmanship during game play and to debate philosophical questions such as, 'Can everyone be happy?' This helps pupils to reflect on the impact of their decisions on others.
48. Pupils are given leadership opportunities such as becoming school councillors and captains. Pupils undertake roles such as helping younger children manage their belongings during door duty. These roles help pupils to develop confidence and a sense of responsibility.
49. Pupils understand the positive impact their contributions can make to the lives of others. Leaders arrange opportunities for pupils to engage with their local community, including delivering 'bags of kindness' to a hospice, making Christmas cards for shopkeepers, engaging with elderly residents and taking donations to a foodbank.
50. Pupils learn about different systems and laws that support a fair society, including watching live debates at the Houses of Parliament. Older pupils keep abreast of current affairs by accessing age-appropriate newspapers. Teachers further pupils' understanding of democratic systems through discussions and school elections, such as a school-wide vote to select the choice of annual charity.

51. In the early years, leaders arrange various opportunities to promote children's social development. Staff act as positive role models, helping children learn how to form successful relationships. They establish clear daily routines for children, including changing into waterproof clothing for breaktime, preparing their own snacks and tidying away resources. This helps children to develop independence and understand behavioural expectations, such as sharing.

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

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

## Safeguarding

53. Governors maintain effective oversight of the school's safeguarding arrangements. They ensure that suitable measures, including for children in the early years, are in place to promote pupils' welfare. Governors use their attendance at staff training sessions, regular visits to the school and conversations with leaders to assure themselves that the safeguarding policy is implemented appropriately.
54. Leaders with responsibility for safeguarding are well trained to carry out their roles. They make referrals promptly, when needed. Leaders liaise effectively with specialist agencies, including children's services and the police, to seek advice. Leaders put detailed arrangements in place to check that visiting speakers are suitable.
55. Adults throughout the school are knowledgeable in respect of the latest statutory guidance. A detailed induction programme introduces new staff to the school's safeguarding expectations. Leaders arrange annual training and regular briefing updates so that staff follow up confidently when concerns arise. Staff follow the school's procedures to report low-level concerns about themselves or other adults.
56. Trusting relationships between pupils and staff ensure that pupils' concerns are listened to and addressed. Leaders and teachers use their detailed knowledge about pupils to identify and respond to any changes in their behaviour.
57. Pupils are taught ways to keep themselves safe online. They understand the importance of protecting personal information and sharing any concerns promptly with adults when using the internet. Pupils have a well-developed understanding of how safeguards, such as restricted access to inappropriate websites, are designed to help them learn safely.
58. Leaders implement suitable internet filtering and monitoring systems. They test the systems regularly and review any breaches thoroughly. Leaders are vigilant about the safe use and storage of electronic devices.
59. All required safer recruitment checks are carried out before an adult starts work at the school. These are recorded accurately in a single central record of appointments.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Dolphin School (incorporating Noah's Ark Nursery Schools)
<b>Department for Education number</b>	212/6387
<b>Registered charity number</b>	1145113
<b>Address</b>	Dolphin School (incorporating Noah's Ark Nursery Schools) 106 Northcote Road Battersea London SW11 6QW
<b>Phone number</b>	020 7924 3472
<b>Email address</b>	receptionist@dolphinschool.org.uk
<b>Website</b>	www.dolphinschool.org.uk
<b>Proprietor</b>	Dolphin School Trust
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Petronella van der Vliet
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mrs Lucy Price
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 11
<b>Number of pupils</b>	137
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	4 to 6 October 2022

## Information about the school

61. Dolphin School (incorporating Noah's Ark Nursery Schools) is a co-educational day school located in Battersea, London. The school consists of two nurseries, a pre-prep and a prep school. One of the nurseries is located on a separate site, approximately a mile from the school. The school operates as a charitable trust overseen by a board of governors. Since the previous inspection, a new chair of governors was appointed in September 2023 and the current headteacher took up her role in September 2024.
62. There are 38 children in the early years, comprising five Nursery classes and a Reception class.
63. The school has identified 23 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan.
64. The school has identified 33 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
65. The school states its aims are to develop confident, joyful and happy children through an emphasis on Christian principles and the core values of love, wisdom and truth. It strives for every child to be known and loved as an individual in a nurturing environment where pupils learn to value themselves and others. The school seeks for pupils to grow in wisdom, empathy and respect for differences by deepening their understanding of the world. It aims for pupils to learn to trust, to be open and to be themselves.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

2 to 4 December 2025

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

67. Inspection activities included:

- observation of lessons, some in conjunction with school leaders
- observation of registration periods
- 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
- discussions with learning support staff
- visits to facilities for physical education and breaktime
- visits to the off-site nursery
- scrutiny of samples of pupils' work
- scrutiny of a range of policies, documentation and records provided by the school.

68. 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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