

School inspection report

25 to 27 March 2025

Southbank International School (Westminster)

63-65 Portland Place

London

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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 do not ensure that the school's attendance practices adhere to current statutory guidance resulting in unmet Standards.
2. Leaders ensure that the school provides a broad curriculum which promotes a global perspective.
3. Leaders ensure that the physical environment of the school buildings is well maintained. The proprietor and leaders use effective systems, including an annual audit, to maintain their oversight with regards to the promotion of health and safety across the school.
4. Teaching is well planned. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and pupils make good progress. Pupils demonstrate self-motivation, produce high-quality work and show a clear understanding of how to improve their work.
5. Leaders ensure that pupils who have special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) are identified promptly and provided with personalised support plans. Staff are well trained to implement plans with consistency to ensure that pupils' specific needs are appropriately met.
6. Staff engage pupils in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities across sports, music, drama and other areas. Older pupils develop their leadership skills by creating their own societies and supporting younger pupils' activities, effectively developing independence and community engagement skills.
7. Leaders, staff and pupils promote and celebrate diversity within the school community, fostering a culture of respect and inclusivity. Leaders enable pupils to develop a strong moral framework, rooted in British values such as democracy, individual liberty, mutual respect and tolerance. Pupils develop the ability to make informed, respectful decisions when navigating an increasingly complex world.
8. Leaders provide a structured approach to personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education, including relationships and sex education (RSE). However, leaders do not assess pupils' knowledge and understanding in PSHE and RSE in a way which can be used to inform future planning and teaching.
9. Leaders ensure that pupils are taught a well-planned future guidance (careers) programme. Pupils are well informed and thoroughly prepared for their next steps in education or employment.
10. Leaders provide structured opportunities for pupils to share their opinions through the student senate, a democratic forum for discussion and decision-making. Leaders listen to and act upon pupils' ideas. Pupils develop confidence, take responsibility for shaping their community and gain a clear understanding of democratic processes in action.
11. The proprietor and leaders have established sound safeguarding foundations through annual reviews, safer recruitment procedures and safety measures. Staff report safeguarding concerns consistently in line with the school's safeguarding policy.

The extent to which the school meets the Standards

- Standards relating to leadership and management, and governance are not 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 not met.
- Standards relating to pupils' social and economic education and contribution to society are met.
- Standards relating to safeguarding are met.

Areas for action

The proprietor must ensure that:

- the leadership and management demonstrate good skills and knowledge
- fulfil their responsibilities effectively, so that the other standards are consistently met and
- they actively promote the wellbeing of the pupils

so that:

- leaders give due regard to statutory guidance on attendance issued by the Secretary of State and have a clear up-to-date school attendance policy on the website which all leaders, staff, pupils and parents understand
- senior leaders ensure school policy and practice meets up-to-date statutory regulations regarding attendance

Recommended next steps

Leaders should:

- ensure that accurate assessment of pupils' knowledge and understanding in personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education and relationships and sex education (RSE) is used consistently to inform future planning and teaching

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

12. The proprietor and leaders carry out regular self-evaluation through annual reviews and audits. The proprietor and leaders use this information to identify areas of positive practice and areas for development informing the school improvement plan. However, self-evaluation has not identified gaps in leaders' understanding of statutory guidance on attendance. The school does not meet statutory expectations in promoting the benefits of high attendance. The proprietor and leaders do not have the knowledge and skills necessary to ensure that the school's attendance policy and practice reflect current statutory guidance to support pupils' welfare effectively.
13. Leaders and managers ensure the implementation of the school's aims and ethos through purposeful curriculum design. Leaders' decision to adopt the International Baccalaureate (IB) qualification enables pupils to receive an education which fulfils the school's ethos of developing a global perspective.
14. The proprietor and leaders ensure that comprehensive information, including the school's aims, ethos, essential policies and details of academic performance from the past year, is readily accessible on the school's website for current and prospective parents.
15. Leaders implement a structured quality assurance process for teaching and learning. Leaders promote peer observation and have developed a shared definition of high-quality learning. Pupils increasingly experience effective teaching that supports their academic progress and personal development.
16. Leaders ensure a rigorous and efficient risk management process is in place for trips, buildings and operations, fulfilling their responsibilities effectively. Leaders have a comprehensive approach to risk management.
17. Leaders form appropriate connections with external agencies and the local authority. Leaders share information with the local authority with regard to pupils who have education, health and care (EHC) plans, including in relation to the use of funds.
18. Leaders have developed an appropriate complaints process. All required details are clearly outlined in the policy, ensuring transparency and accessibility for parents. Leaders review the complaints process to ensure it meets statutory requirements and supports the school's ethos of open communication and resolution. The complaints process is robust and effective.
19. The proprietor and leaders ensure that they meet their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. There is an appropriate accessibility plan in place which considers access to both school accommodation and the curriculum.

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

20. The standards are not consistently met with regard to attendance.
- 21. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.**

Section 2: Quality of education, training and recreation

22. Leaders and teachers have developed a broad and balanced curriculum which enables pupils to develop critical thinking skills and global awareness, preparing them well for future study and life beyond school. Pupils follow the International Baccalaureate programme. They study a wide range of subjects, including performance and visual arts, a choice of languages and literature alongside links to global contexts and a personal project.
23. Teachers structure lessons well. They plan activities which enable pupils to apply their prior learning to new situations. In mathematics lessons, teachers use problem-solving tasks to prompt pupils to apply their knowledge in novel ways. In science lessons, pupils confidently apply principles to unfamiliar contexts during scientific discussions. Teachers promote the development of pupils' subject-specific vocabulary by embedding its use across subjects systematically. As a result of consistent teaching across subjects, pupils make good progress.
24. Teachers have secure knowledge of the subjects they teach. Appropriate schemes of work are used and reviewed by middle leaders. Teaching is appropriate for the age and aptitude of pupils, equipping pupils well for their future lives, through carefully planned lessons that build progressively on prior knowledge, effective use of assessment to inform planning, and the development of transferable skills such as critical thinking, collaboration and independence.
25. Teachers facilitate positive relationships with pupils, creating classroom environments that enable pupils to contribute confidently and articulately to discussions. Pupils listen attentively to other pupils' views and ideas, understanding that different points of view are helpful in acquiring new knowledge.
26. Teachers promote pupils' understanding of the criteria against which they are being assessed. Teachers provide individualised support to ensure that pupils are clear about what they need to do to improve their knowledge and skills in order to make good progress.
27. Pupils are assessed on entry to the school. This information is used effectively to track progress, identify pupils who need further support and inform teaching approaches. This enables pupils to make good progress and achieve well in their International Baccalaureate examinations.
28. Pupils who have SEND are well supported at the school. Pupils' needs are identified early in their school career allowing appropriate support to be put into place. Pupils' views are central to the plans that are made to support them. Staff use pupils' support plans to plan teaching and provide appropriate adjustments in lessons. Teachers implement these plans with consistency. Pupils who have SEND make good progress.
29. Leaders and staff provide effective support to pupils who speak English as an additional language (EAL). Leaders provide training to staff to enable them to offer individualised support in lessons, so that teaching is responsive to pupils' differing needs and so that pupils are appropriately challenged and supported to make progress.
30. Pupils of all ages participate in a wide variety of extra-curricular activities both at lunchtime and after school. Pupils participate in sports, music, drama and various other clubs such as model united nations (MUN), science club, string ensemble, stocks club and board game club. This broad and enriching range of extra-curricular choices enables pupils to develop diverse interests, further their

skills and work with new people. Older pupils value opportunities to lead their own activities, fostering independence and leadership skills. They are encouraged to support activities with younger pupils fostering a sense of leadership and community.

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

31. All the relevant Standards are met.

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

32. Leaders have not adopted the statutory guidance on attendance to promote pupils' attendance. Leaders have not appointed a dedicated senior leader with overall responsibility for championing and improving attendance.
33. Leaders maintain an appropriate admission register. Leaders ensure that the local authority is informed when pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition points.
34. Leaders and staff consider pupils' physical and mental health and emotional wellbeing carefully. Staff know pupils well and are alert to changes in their wellbeing. Pupils are provided with pastoral support promptly when needed. Pupils develop their self-esteem and self-confidence inside and outside the classroom. This is supported by the positive relationships which are fostered with members of staff.
35. Leaders and staff ensure that the school is an inclusive and welcoming environment. Teachers promote the importance of mutual respect and are supportive of pupils' needs. Pupils are valued and encouraged to engage fully in school life. Pupils are confident in expressing their views and seeking support when needed.
36. Leaders ensure that pupils develop a secure understanding of physical health by providing a varied physical education (PE) curriculum. Sports and activities such as football, basketball, volleyball, ice-skating and table tennis ensure pupils develop physical skills and learn teamwork, discipline and perseverance.
37. The personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) and relationships and sex education (RSE) programmes are well structured. Teachers provide age-appropriate content including topics on mental health, online safety and consent. The teaching of PSHE and RSE equips pupils with essential skills for modern life, promotes fundamental British values and fosters mutual respect and tolerance.
38. Leaders enrich the PSHE curriculum with sessions from external organisations addressing key safety messages and context-specific issues which are identified through pastoral meetings. Pupils benefit from comprehensive online safety training and engaging discussions on contemporary issues like the ethics of artificial intelligence, enhancing their academic and personal development. However, leaders do not use assessment data from PSHE and RSE lessons to inform future planning to ensure that pupils consistently understand the taught content.
39. Pupils typically behave well in and out of lessons. Teachers help pupils to learn to self-regulate their emotions and develop their sense of what appropriate behaviour is.
40. Leaders have implemented comprehensive anti-bullying initiatives including an anti-bullying week. Key messages are reinforced through pupil handbooks and staff training. Pupils understand what constitutes bullying and how to report it. Bullying incidents are rare but when they do happen, they are addressed promptly.

41. Leaders ensure that pupils are appropriately supervised both on school premises and in the surrounding environs during the school day so that pupils have an understanding of, and benefit from, the school's central city setting.
42. Leaders ensure that the school sites are well maintained. Health and safety policies and procedures are reviewed regularly. Fire safety arrangements, including evacuation procedures are appropriate. The school maintains an appropriate first aid policy, with sufficient staff holding updated qualifications available on-site and during trips. First aid rooms are well equipped and first aid boxes are strategically placed around the sites. Systems for recording accidents, illnesses and the administering of medicines are maintained so pupils are safe and well cared for.
43. Leaders ensure opportunities are available for pupil leadership through the student council and student senate, providing pupils with duties and responsibilities such as leading termly town meetings, organising events such as the lower school winter dance, and assisting in pupils' graduation and prom.

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

44. Not all the relevant Standards are met. A schedule of unmet Standards is included in the report.

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

45. Pupils demonstrate respect for democratic processes through their active engagement in the elections for the student senate, where they appoint their own representatives. This democratic engagement fosters a sense of agency and active participation in the school community.
46. Leaders, staff, and pupils ensure that cultural and national differences are recognised and celebrated within the school community. The annual 'international night' allows staff, pupils and families to share and celebrate their cultures, fostering a sense of community and inclusivity. Leaders help pupils to discuss news events and share opinions with sensitivity towards one another's culture and viewpoint.
47. Pupils develop a clear sense of right and wrong. Teachers help pupils to develop their decision-making with regard to increasingly complex issues. Teachers plan lessons carefully and manage discussions with sensitivity. Leaders ensure that British values are promoted across the curriculum.
48. Leaders support pupils to develop a wider sense of societal responsibility. Pupils engage with their teachers both formally and informally to enact change. Pupils successfully requested the expansion of a supervised study programme following a successful trial. In this, and other ways, pupils begin to understand the value in using their voice to better their community.
49. Leaders have restructured the future guidance careers programme, following feedback from pupils. The future guidance programme includes a well-developed scheme of work. Pupils benefit from a variety of in-person and online speakers covering a wide range of career areas, which promote self-awareness and confidence for pupils. Future guidance effectively promotes pupils' economic wellbeing and contribution to society. Pupils are well prepared for their future career choices and life in society beyond school through individualised guidance. Pupils are encouraged to become involved in activities beyond the curriculum, such as essay competitions and virtual university taster days.
50. Leaders at the school effectively integrate the International Baccalaureate 'creativity, activity, service' (CAS) programme into the curriculum, ensuring that pupils engage in creative, activity-based and service-orientated projects that enhance their economic education and practical financial skills.
51. Leaders foster a sense of social responsibility and community engagement amongst pupils. All pupils are involved in volunteering options including as hospital volunteers, listeners providing mental health support and participating in environmental projects to clean the river Thames. Pupils support charitable organisations through practical contributions of their time and effort so that pupils develop empathy, compassion and a deeper understanding of their role in society.

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. The proprietor and leaders regularly review the school's safeguarding policy. The proprietor undertakes annual audits in safeguarding and health and safety, enabling them to maintain an understanding of the school's safeguarding arrangements and ensure that they are effective.
54. Senior leaders are trained in safer recruitment procedures, and appropriate safer recruitment checks are completed for staff, volunteers and governors. A suitable single central record of appointments is appropriately maintained through termly checks.
55. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the school's safeguarding arrangements. Pupils know who the safeguarding leads are, their role and the pastoral support available including that of a school counsellor. Pupils know that they can speak with any of the teaching and support staff for help, if they have a worry or concern.
56. The proprietor and leaders ensure all staff receive regular safeguarding training, appropriate for their role. Safeguarding updates are provided, including staff sessions on child-on-child abuse. Staff understand what constitutes a low-level concern about an adult at the school and how to report these appropriately.
57. Leaders' decision to introduce a new pastoral and safeguarding information management system has improved staff's ability to monitor pupils by centralising records and identifying trends. Staff use the system to record all concerns with vigilance.
58. Pupils are taught about online safety through PSHE lessons and advisory sessions. An appropriate filtering and monitoring system enables leaders to have effective oversight of internet use at the school. Leaders act promptly when alerts indicate inappropriate access or searches. They regularly review the effectiveness of the school's filtering and monitoring systems.

The extent to which the school meets Standards relating to safeguarding

59. All the relevant Standards are met.

Schedule of unmet Standards

Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

The following standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR ¹ Part 8, paragraph 34(1)	The standard about the quality of leadership and management is met if the proprietor ensures that persons with leadership and management responsibilities at the school –
34(1)(a)	demonstrate good skills and knowledge appropriate to their role so that the independent school standards are met consistently
34(1)(b)	fulfil their responsibilities effectively so that the independent school standards are met consistently; and
34(1)(c)	actively promote the wellbeing of pupils.

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

The following Standards in this section of the Framework are not met.

Paragraph number	Standard
ISSR Part 3, Paragraph 7	The standard in this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that—
7 (b)	such arrangements have regard to any guidance issued by the secretary of state.
15	The standard of this paragraph is met if the proprietor ensures that an admissions and attendance register is maintained in accordance with the School Attendance (Pupil Registration) (England) Regulations 2024

¹ The Education (Independent School Standards) Regulations 2014 ('ISSR')

School details

School	Southbank International School Westminster
Department for Education number	213/6003
Address	Southbank International School Westminster 63-65 Portland Place London W1B 1QR
Phone number	020 7436 9699
Email address	westminster@southbank.org
Website	https://www.southbank.org
Proprietor	Cognita Schools Ltd
Chair	Sarah Reynolds
Principal	Angela Liu
Age range	11 to 18
Number of pupils	493
Date of previous inspection	22 to 25 February 2022

Information about the school

60. Southbank International School Westminster is an independent co-educational day school. It is one of a family of three Southbank International Schools, the other two being Kensington and Hampstead, which are for pupils aged 2 to 11. The school is situated on three sites close to each other in central London and is owned and governed by the Cognita schools group. The school is divided into two sections, lower and upper school, and follows the International Baccalaureate (IB) Middle Years and Diploma programmes. Since the previous inspection a new principal was appointed in January 2023 and a new chair of governors was appointed in September 2024.
61. The school has identified 127 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities. A very small number of pupils in the school have an education, health and care (EHC) plan.
62. The school has identified 24 pupils as speaking English as an additional language.
63. The school states that its aims are for pupils to be challenged academically and to establish a liberal ethos within the values of the International Baccalaureate. The school strives to deliver a broad curriculum. The diverse community fosters a global outlook and it teaches the importance of being open-minded and reflective. The school aims to develop a culture of responsibility, service to others and accountability.

Inspection details

Inspection dates

25 to 27 March 2025

64. A team of five inspectors visited the school for two and a half days. The on-site inspection was quality assured by a monitor.

65. 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 of governors
- discussions with the principal, 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.

66. 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**.

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For more information, please visit isi.net