

# School inspection report

23 to 25 September 2025

## **Hill House School**

Sixth Avenue

Auckley

Doncaster

DN9 3GG

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 maintain an informed oversight of the school's operations and ensure that leaders fulfil their responsibilities in meeting the regulatory requirements, including those that apply to the early years. Senior leaders and governors prioritise and ensure effective risk management and pupils' welfare is supported well.
2. Senior leaders conduct regular audits and reviews to monitor the school's effectiveness, for example in staff recruitment and safeguarding. They work co-operatively with governors in producing and monitoring long-term strategic plans which have the wellbeing and academic development of the pupils as prime considerations.
3. Leaders support pupils to succeed both academically and personally through the many opportunities available to them. Pupils perform well in relation to their starting points and attain results in line with or above the national averages at both GCSE and A level. Effective teaching strategies support pupils who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). As a result, pupils who have SEND make good progress from their starting points.
4. The extra-curricular provision is extensive and meets the needs and interests of all groups of pupils. It enables a broadening of pupils' knowledge and skills and enhances their experience of school.
5. Staff relate to pupils in an approachable manner and encourage them to feel that help is on hand if they experience problems. This supports pupils in developing positive self-esteem and self-confidence.
6. The school's pastoral welfare arrangements in the senior school centre around an effective house system which enables older pupils to take on responsibility for the mentoring of younger pupils. For example, Year 11 and 13 prefects are attached to younger form groups and act as role models, encouraging a culture of collaboration and mutual respect, whilst helping to actively reinforce cohesiveness across the year groups.
7. The school substantially develops pupils' sense of leadership and responsibility towards others and their sense of agency and ability to influence school life. Leaders actively provide pupils of all age groups with many opportunities to engage with, contribute to and influence change. For example, the school councils and associated pupil-driven sub-committees cover most aspects of school life, allowing pupils to be actively heard and responded to. This development of pupils' leadership skills, coupled with the provision of many avenues for them to act on this, is a significant strength of the school.
8. The school provides typically effective careers education from Year 7 onwards. This guidance advises pupils well about applying to university. However, the advice provided for those who may wish to opt for a non-university route, for example by taking up apprenticeships and vocational courses, is less well developed.
9. Safeguarding arrangements are effective. The safeguarding team respond appropriately to any concerns raised and staff understand how to record and report any concerns that arise.

## 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:

- strengthen careers guidance for pupils who may wish to opt for an alternative pathway to higher education and employment other than direct university entrance.

## Section 1: Leadership and management, and governance

10. Governors monitor the work of leaders systematically through committees, reports and regular visits to the school. They ensure that the school promotes pupils' wellbeing and that leaders apply their knowledge and skills and carry out their responsibilities effectively. As a result, the school meets all of the Standards.
11. Leaders communicate a clear and inclusive vision for pupils' development in line with the school's aims. Leaders carry out effective self-evaluation to ensure that the school's policies and procedures are implemented as desired, taking into account the perspectives of pupils and parents. Leaders act on their findings to address any areas for development that they have identified. For example, recent developments in teaching and learning and the use of the premises have had a positive impact on pupils' school experience and wellbeing.
12. Leaders actively seek the views of pupils through a range of mechanisms, including school councils and sub-committee focus groups, allowing pupils to air their views. Leaders regularly respond to pupils' suggestions such as extending the range of extra-curricular opportunities and by responding to focus groups' requests to have greater input into the curriculum and non-curricular aspects of school life.
13. Leaders take care to assess and manage risk carefully, for example in science, adventure training and in support of UK and overseas trips. Leaders ensure that pupil activities are assessed in line with a common risk matrix which clearly identifies the degree of risk and indicates appropriate mitigating factors. They monitor risk assessments rigorously to ensure that control measures are appropriate, before risk assessments are signed off by senior managers. In addition, leaders provide regular training in order that teachers are clearly informed on how to manage risks in every element of school life.
14. The school fulfils its responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010. Leaders implement a suitable accessibility plan that identifies actions to improve pupils' accessibility to the curriculum and the premises. Leaders ensure that no groups of pupils are discriminated against by any aspects of the provision.
15. Leaders maintain effective links with external agencies, including local safeguarding partners and medical professionals, to help support pupils' welfare. The school provides the local authority with the required information relating to the use of funding for pupils who have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
16. Leaders ensure that there is regular communication to keep parents well informed about their child's progress, including through regular reports, and wider school developments. This supports the partnership between home and school. The school makes all required information, such as about policies and the school's aims and ethos, available to parents.
17. Leaders implement the school's complaints policy effectively in a proportionate and fair manner. They address any complaints professionally and promptly. Senior leaders and governors regularly monitor complaints in order to identify patterns and improve processes as required.

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

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

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

19. The design of the curriculum helps encourage pupils to be ambitious, as it offers pupils a wide selection of subject options, supplemented by a range of enrichment courses which further stimulate their academic interests. Pupils follow a curriculum that maintains an effective balance between creative subjects such as drama, music and art, as well as computing and the humanities. For example, pupils can opt to pursue examination studies in physical education (PE), Latin and classical civilisation at GCSE. Additionally, Year 7 and 8 pupils study philosophy, politics and ethics and can go on to follow a religious studies course at GCSE and philosophy at A level. Pupils are also encouraged to follow a broad curriculum, having the opportunity to select twilight GCSE courses in Classical Greek, further mathematics, economics and geology. This enables pupils to experience a challenging curriculum, the content of which, in many cases, goes beyond the age-related expectations of the national curriculum. . This is accomplished in an engaging way by allowing children to lead their learning where possible, supported by enthusiastic teachers who offer support and encouragement in response to children’s interests. This often results in children making effective use of the outside environment to enhance their learning and develop their skills. Early years staff develop children’s vocabulary and language skills well, in particular through the teaching of phonics at an early age through purposeful interaction and play such as listening and responding to story reading.
20. Junior school pupils follow a broad core curriculum which includes a modern foreign language, music, drama and access to information technology and design technology. These subjects enable pupils to experience appropriate language skills whilst enabling them to develop a range of technical and performance skills which provide a broadening experience for the pupils. In addition, there is an effective outdoor education programme, which, where appropriate, makes effective use of the wooded area of the school grounds to enhance the pupils’ learning, particularly in terms of understanding of nature, woodland and conservation skills.
21. The curriculum responds to pupils’ needs in the sixth form by offering a wide range of courses which are suited to both academic and vocational courses of higher-level study beyond the sixth form. Subject choices allow for the study of A level theatre studies, psychology, classical civilisation and physical education as well as the more traditional A-level subjects, allowing the pupils to experience a broad skill base before moving on to higher education.
22. Teachers have a secure subject knowledge and use this to elaborate and draw on a wide range of examples from their experience to produce stimulating lessons. Teachers provide pupils with regular feedback and assessment which carefully identifies and targets areas for pupils to focus on to improve their work. Pupils become aware of their target grades and what they need to do to improve further as a result of this careful monitoring process. Teachers reinforce key learning points so that pupils have a secure understanding of these.
23. In early years and the junior school, teaching and learning is well structured, with effective use of questioning, and purposeful feedback that promotes curiosity and independence. Pupils throughout the school benefit from positive relationships with staff, which fosters supportive and engaging classroom environments, where pupils are encouraged to reflect on their learning and strive for improvement.

24. Teaching enables pupils to make good progress and achieve a high level of success. At GCSE, a high proportion of pupils attain grades 9 to 7, and at A level, just under half of pupils achieve grades A\* to A. Pupils typically move on to a wide range of universities, many of which have demanding entrance requirements.
25. The learning support department provides tailored support for pupils who have SEND. Pupils are assessed at an early age and are given specific targets to work towards, whilst being regularly monitored within lessons. This systematic monitoring of teaching and learning assists these pupils to make good progress. The production of individual pupil education plans further enables teachers to support pupils appropriately, which in turn contributes successfully to pupils' outcomes.
26. Pupils entering the school who speak English as an additional language (EAL) typically have a working command of English. However, a small number of pupils receive individual support provided by specialist teachers if they are at the early stages of English acquisition. This additional help enables them to access the full curriculum and make good progress.
27. The school provides pupils with an extensive range of extra-curricular activities that caters for the interests of all pupils. Pupils can take part in activities such as hockey, football, rugby, horse riding, taekwondo, ballet, and tap dancing, which boost fitness levels and encourage team work. In addition, group club activities such as cubs, brownies and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme allow pupils to experience challenge and develop their leadership skills. A number of academic societies are available to pupils in Year 7 and above, including literary, economics, psychology, mathematics, debating and politics. Older pupils' engagement with such enrichment activities encourages a deeper appreciation of the value of these subjects and allows pupils to develop subject-specific interests.

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

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

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

29. Staff in the early years create an effective learning environment that supports children's social and academic development. Children experience practical and creative activities such as small-world play and dough modelling. Themed lessons and extension clubs, such as the 'busy bees' group, offer creative activities, including arts, crafts, construction and team games to promote fine motor and teamwork skills, such as when building paper models and using playdough.
30. The PE, sports and outdoor education programmes teach pupils from an early age about the impact of physical exercise and mental wellbeing. This enables pupils to learn the value of co-operation and teamwork as well as increasing fitness levels. Through participation in the sports programme, older pupils develop their competitive spirit, teamwork skills and resilience. Teams and individual pupils are successful locally, regionally and nationally in a wide range of sports such as rugby, cricket and hockey.
31. The relationships and sex education (RSE) programme is well designed. The topics are appropriately age related and enable pupils to discuss sensitive issues, such as appropriate relationships and consent. The programme's contents are in line with current statutory guidance. The course also benefits from the input of pupil forum groups which makes content more relevant and of greater interest to pupils. Topics are taught in a reassuring and informative manner fostering both understanding and trust. Children in the early years are taught to focus effectively on the importance of building positive relationships and friendships.
32. The school helps develop pupils' spiritual awareness through the philosophy, politics and economics (PPE) and philosophy and ethics programmes, which engage pupils in moral and philosophical debate as well as developing their factual knowledge of world religions. The programme of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and PPE lessons is supplemented by weekly form and school assemblies, often led by senior pupils. Together these help develop pupils' understanding of the world and promote mutual respect between pupils and their teachers as well as promoting British values.
33. Behaviour management is effective. Leaders and staff communicate clear behavioural expectations which are understood by pupils. Pupils in both the junior and senior school sections are well behaved and take responsibility for their actions. Pupils are polite, respectful and demonstrate a pride in being pupils at the school. Sanctions are rarely needed and staff, supported by trained senior pupils, are effective in mediating between pupils if required. Use of discriminatory language is very rare and dealt with appropriately when it occurs.
34. Leaders and staff make it clear that the school does not tolerate any bullying because of the harm that it can do. Leaders respond swiftly to the rare instances of bullying that do occur.
35. Supervision is effective. Staff are appropriately deployed with regard to the pupils' ages and needs and are always available should pupils require support. Leaders maintain the required staff-to-child ratios at all times in the early years.
36. Schemes of work in PSHE and RSE promote the importance of being trustworthy and demonstrating respect for others, especially for those of different sex, faith or background to one's own. Pupils

explore age-appropriate topics ranging from road safety to features of healthy relationships, toxic behaviours, sexual exploitation and how to protect oneself.

37. There is an appropriately resourced medical room which is staffed by appropriately trained personnel. The recent appointment of a full-time nurse has further increased provision and all staff receive suitable first aid training, including paediatric first aid training for those staff that work in early years. There is also an emotional literacy and support assistant (ELSA) available to provide pupils with additional emotional support when required, including to help them express their feelings and develop coping strategies. Leaders also utilise a school dog to offer a calming presence to pupils when needed.
38. The site and school premises are well managed and maintained to a high standard. All relevant health and safety maintenance and checks, including of fire safety equipment, are carried out methodically. Pupils receive appropriate training in fire and evacuation procedures and take part in regular practice drills which are monitored by senior leaders.
39. Admission and attendance registers are maintained appropriately and staff are vigilant about monitoring pupil absence. Leaders track any patterns of attendance and follow up any absenteeism in a timely manner. The school informs the local authority whenever pupils join or leave the school at non-standard transition times.

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

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

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

41. The school actively promotes British values by providing pupils with first-hand experiences, such as visits from service personnel, learning about the emergency services and the justice system. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility and show initiative through roles such as form and house captains and 'eco warriors', and by leading charity committees. Older pupils, through the effective house system, take responsibility as role models for younger pupils, by supporting and coaching them in curricular and sporting activities, which as a result supports younger pupils' progress and increases community cohesion.
42. Children in the early years learn about social interaction by working collaboratively, sharing resources and undertaking guided tasks and carefully planned stimulating activities, such as bread making. Across the school, pupils demonstrate confidence, social awareness and mutual respect in their interactions during break, lunchtime and house meetings where positive and friendly relations are the norm. Leaders reinforce and reward high standards of behaviour through praise and encouragement, which pupils respond to positively, resulting in a purposeful community atmosphere.
43. Younger pupils develop economic understanding by taking part in events such as a national bank's 'Grow £5' challenge, learning to handle basic financial concepts, such as managing a bank account, whilst older pupils learn about applying for a student loan and budgeting. Older pupils attend lectures from external speakers, including representatives from local banks, and undertake practical activities such as entrepreneurial challenges in investment processes.
44. Lessons in PSHE, PPE and history support pupils understanding of democracy, law and order. Their understanding is also developed through visits to law courts, taking part in mock elections and electing school officials. Pupils develop an appreciation of the importance of rules in promoting equality and social responsibility. Pupils experience democratic processes firsthand through participation in initiatives such as the Doncaster Youth Council, Model United Nations and mock trials in the school's law society and through 'Parliament week'.
45. The school develops pupils' sense of responsibility to the wider community beyond the school. Pupils across the school are involved in much charity work, both locally and internationally including supporting a South African orphanage and a local food bank.
46. Leaders provide structured guidance to support pupils in making informed choices, include tailored preparation for GSCE options based on individual ability and interests. The typically effective careers education is supported by the use of a network of alumni and links with local employers, particularly in the sixth form. The school provides pupils with comprehensive and useful advice about researching, selecting and applying to universities. However, it does not currently provide such detailed advice to pupils considering non-university routes, such as apprenticeships and vocational courses.
47. Pupils learn to respect and value diversity within the school and wider society. This is partly because the effective PSHE programme encourages debate and discussion on such topics, but also because pupils learn about types of discrimination, prejudice and basic human rights. Pupils are tolerant and inclusive in their attitudes, encouraged to be so by the consistent modelling of such behaviour by

staff and prefects, as reflected in the activities of the diversity and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) pupil focus group. Pupils lead a focus group about issues relating to diversity, discussing matters pertaining to race, religion, gender identity and sexuality, and inclusion.

48. Pupils develop a substantial sense of leadership and responsibility towards others and a deep sense of their own ability to act on behalf of others and influence school life. Leaders enable and encourage pupils of all ages to express their views on matters which are important to the school community, especially evident through the junior and senior school councils and wide range of pupil sub-committees. Leaders encourage pupils to set up a wide range of mostly pupil-run forum groups that cover many aspects of school life, in order to suggest actions designed to benefit others in the school. Leaders have carefully considered the impact of these pupil-led initiatives to ensure that inclusivity is a priority and that no pupils are disadvantaged by the way that such groups are organised or make decisions. The overall impact of this is that pupils feel they have a substantial voice in the school and are very confident to express their opinions and influence change.

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

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

## Safeguarding

50. Leaders ensure that there is an effective safeguarding culture throughout the school and that staff understand their safeguarding responsibilities. The safeguarding policy and procedures reflect current statutory guidance.
51. Governors conduct a thorough annual review of safeguarding and monitor procedures carefully. They ensure that productive reviews are conducted should any incidents occur and any learning points from these are reflected in both policies and in training for staff.
52. The safeguarding team responds to any concerns appropriately and in line with local and national requirements. When appropriate, concerns are referred to the relevant agencies, such as children's services, the local authority or the police, in a timely manner. Leaders maintain suitable and thorough records of safeguarding concerns and how the pupils affected are supported.
53. Staff receive suitable and up-to-date safeguarding training, including during their induction to the school, so that they know what to do if they have any concerns about pupils or about the behaviour of any adults working with pupils. Members of the safeguarding team receive enhanced training to equip them to manage the school's safeguarding work.
54. Leaders maintain awareness of particular potential safeguarding risks to pupils affected by safeguarding concerns. They implement suitable risk assessments to support the welfare of these pupils. Staff recognise the vulnerabilities of any pupils who have SEND.
55. Leaders and staff encourage pupils to feel able and confident to share any worries that they might have. The school provides pupils with a range of methods to raise concerns, including through the provision of an ELSA service.
56. The school develops pupils' understanding of how to stay safe, including when online. Leaders implement a robust internet filtering and monitoring system which inhibits pupils' access to inappropriate content or harmful social media.
57. Senior staff and governors are trained in safer recruitment procedures. They ensure that all the required recruitment checks are carried out on staff, volunteers and governors before they commence working at the school. The school maintains an appropriate single central record of appointments which leaders and nominated governors regularly check for accuracy.

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

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

## School details

<b>School</b>	Hill House School
<b>Department for Education number</b>	371/6000
<b>Registered charity number</b>	529420
<b>Address</b>	Hill House School Sixth Avenue Auckley Doncaster DN9 3GG
<b>Phone number</b>	01302 776300
<b>Email address</b>	office@thehillhouseschool.com
<b>Website</b>	www.thehillhouseschool.com
<b>Proprietor</b>	Hill House School Ltd
<b>Chair</b>	Mrs Joan Fearn
<b>Headteacher</b>	Mr David Holland
<b>Age range</b>	2 to 19
<b>Number of pupils</b>	935
<b>Date of previous inspection</b>	13 to 15 September 2022

## Information about the school

59. Hill House School is a co-educational independent day school located in Doncaster. The school, which was originally founded as a preparatory school for boys, first admitted girls in 2002 and moved to its present site in 2008. The school is managed by a charitable trust operated by a board of governors.
60. There are 72 children in the early years, comprising two Nursery and two Reception classes.
61. The school has identified 133 pupils as having special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). A very small proportion of pupils in the school have an education, health and care plan (EHC plan).
62. The school has identified 59 pupils as speaking English as an additional language (EAL).
63. The school states its aims are to provide pupils with full and enriching opportunities, and to instil in pupils a lifelong love of learning, ambition and resilience in facing the challenges they will meet. It intends to encourage pupils to be confident, capable and compassionate people who will develop into adults with independent minds, with a real sense of values, service and responsibility.

## Inspection details

### Inspection dates

23 to 25 September 2025

64. A team of seven inspectors visited the school for two and a half days.

65. 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.

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](http://www.isi.net)**.

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